

General Assembly 3

Improving attitudes towards immigrants and refugees

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Forum	General Assembly 3
Issue:	Improving attitudes towards immigrants and refugees
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Introduction

Improving attitudes towards immigrants and refugees is an essential component of solving any refugee crisis. Refugees have often already had traumatic experiences, just to be met with hate and xenophobia when they finally arrive on safe grounds. Due to this, migrants are secluded from the rest of society. This separation results in immigrants not being able to participate in society. This has great consequences such as poverty, social inequality, and polarisation.

Migration is of vital importance to the advancement of humanity. Even though the world's history is characterized by migration, today's discussions on tackling the issue have failed repeatedly. In the 21st century, the number of migrants and especially refugees has seen an all-time high. Numerous factors have led to this increase. Hostile political climates, famine and extreme weather are just a few examples of such factors. The underlying issues that impel inhabitants to flee the country have remained mostly unsolved, resulting in the suffering of millions of migrants as they seek to escape their hostile environment (Schumacher).

The attitude of the broader public towards immigration has become a major issue for not only the inhabitants of a nation, but also for those that are seeking asylum in those countries. The amount of support or hatred immigrants are faced with, severely differs per country. In western Europe for example, attitudes towards refugees are often negative. In other nations such as Canada or New Zealand, the public seems very supportive. Lastly, there are countries, such as Norway or The Netherlands, in which there is a deep internal division (Verkuyten).



Definition of Key Terms

Migration

“The movement of people to a new country or area in order to find work or better living conditions” (“Migration.”)

Xenophobia

“a strong feeling of dislike or fear of people from other countries” (“Xenophobia.”)

Refugee

“a person who has been forced to leave their country or home, because there is a war or for political, religious or social reasons” (“Refugee.”)

Immigrant

“a person who has come to live permanently in a different Country from the one they were born in” (“Immigrant.”)



General Overview

Current refugee crises in the world

Ukraine

The refugee crisis in Ukraine is the fastest developing and most notable crisis in the current world. As of 16 June 2022, there have been nearly five million Ukrainian refugees recorded in only a few months (Operational Data Portal). Due to this immense number of refugees in such a brief period, there have been numerous issues in sheltering all these refugees.

Syria

As of 2021, there have been 6,7 million refugees from Syria. These refugees have primarily sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey. (“The largest refugee crises in 2022”)

Afghanistan

With over 2,6 million refugees registered in primarily Pakistan, Afghanistan continues to be one of the worst crises globally. 40 years of conflict, natural disasters, poverty, and food insecurity have been the cause of tremendous amounts of refugees fleeing their home nation.



Public Perception of Immigrants

Countless studies have shown that the public attitude differs based on the characteristics of immigrants. People tend to especially favour recognised refugees, but seem to have a much more negative opinion towards those that are still seeking asylum and other immigrants. The negative feelings seem to be stemming from the narrative that many of the refugees entering a nation do not have a legitimate asylum claim. In 2016 according to data by Ipsos MORI, more than half of the respondents to a survey agreed that the majority of the foreigners who wanted to enter their country are not legitimate refugees and that they are just looking to take advantage of the nation's welfare services. This narrative continues to persist even though the vast majority of new arrivals in Turkey and Mediterranean Sea arrivals into Europe are refugees from active conflict areas (Helen Dempster and Karen Hargrave 10). Media in Slovenia even made use of the term "fake refugees" when referring to economically driven migrants (Lamis Abdelaaty and Liza Steele).

Furthermore, there is a clear preference in favour of immigrants that enter the country via legal means as opposed to illegal means. Those that used official routes to get into a nation are far more likely to be accepted by a population than those that did not have the correct paperwork to cross the border (Helen Dempster and Karen Hargrave 10).

Lastly, the public highly values two other factors when asked whether immigrants are desirable. The first being the qualifications of the immigrants. Immigrants with a higher level of education, or with outstanding performance in a profession were seen as more desirable than low-skilled or uneducated workers. The second important criteria were ethnicity and religion. Roma immigrants were seen as exceptionally unwelcome across multiple studies. Muslims took second place. It must be mentioned, however, that there were significant differences per country (Helen Dempster and Karen Hargrave 10).



Government's views on immigrants

The 2015 refugee crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis have been the main events in which we have seen governmental action related to refugees. In the 2015 crisis, we have seen major investments in the EU organisation Frontex. This organisation was created in 2004 to defend the European borders. The tasks presented to Frontex were characteristic of the approach to the migration crisis. Governments repeatedly failed to reach the goals they set out for refugee sheltering and many refugees ended up in camps in Greece or Turkey. In general, it could be stated that during the 2015 migration crisis governments followed a policy in which they tried to take in as few refugees as possible. This resulted in many fatalities in the Mediterranean Sea.

In the Ukrainian refugee crisis, however, we have seen a vastly different approach. Ukrainian refugees were allowed to freely travel into the EU. From this, it can be concluded that the origin of refugees plays a key part in whether or not they are faced with negative stereotypes.

Recently, there has been a rise in extremist right-wing political parties. Due to this increase, some national policies are already starting to become more xenophobic. These extremist parties are often fuelled by a polarised (online) debate about migrants and nationalism.

Issues faced by immigrants

With increasing migration, there has been an increase in violence and discrimination against migrants. Many current refugees and migrants are confronted with this reality on a daily basis. The aforementioned discrimination and violence are mainly caused by extremist groups (International Migration Racism 9-10).

Ojeaku Nwabuzo and Lisa Schaefer state: "Support for far-right parties and groups in several countries is growing, setting the tone of the debate on immigration, particularly related to Muslim migrants. ENAR finds that this is resulting in anti-migrant discourses and policies being seen as acceptable across the political spectrum. With terrorist attacks in France and Belgium in 2015 and 2016, criminality and terrorism are increasingly racialised. The introduction of new border policies and counter-terrorism measures in some Member States led to ethnic profiling, discriminatory policing of migrants, as well as racist attacks against migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and their accommodation in the EU Member States,"



There has been an increasing number of incidents revolving around anti-migrant racism and violence. This violence has been present verbally, but also physically with more and more crimes being committed against migrants. Migrants are still negatively portrayed by politicians and some media, leading to an increase in hate speech and even instances of institutional racism. Migrants often receive unequal rights in labour market participation, democratic participation, access to public services, etc (European Network Against Racism).

More concretely it has been observed that immigrants face disturbing levels of discrimination when accessing employment. Studies found that one-third of all advertised job vacancies are practically closed to ethnic minorities (“Migrants face significant job discrimination”). This is another example of the significant issues immigrants face. It furthermore serves as a great explanation for the still, on average, lower socio-economic status of immigrants.

Major Parties Involved

UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

The UNHCR is the main UN body concerned with everything involving refugees. It strives to save lives and protect the rights of refugees, forcibly displaced people, and stateless people worldwide (“UNHCR”). The UNHCR was established in 1950 to help the millions of Europeans who had lost their homes during the Second World War. Nowadays the UNHCR has over 18.000 personnel working all across the globe. The budget assigned to the UNHCR grew from 300.000 US dollars in 1950 to US\$8.6 billion in 2019 (“History of the UNHCR”).

Turkey

Turkey hosts the most refugees of any country in the world. Of the nearly four million refugees in total, approximately 3,6 million are from Syria (refugees in Turkey). Recently there has been a shift in the destination of immigrants travelling to Turkey. Where they would previously be on the lookout to travel to other nations, mainly the European Union, there now is a growing number of people that wishes to stay in Turkey itself. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stated that fighting racism and embracing the diversity of cultures and religions is of significant importance (Turkey on irregular migration).



Poland

Poland is the second biggest host of Ukrainian refugees. With 1,2 million refugees having been recorded as of 15 June 2022 (Operational Data Portal). The Polish people and especially the Polish have historically had very negative views of immigrants (Marek Troszyński and Magdalena El-Ghamari, section 7). However, with the recent crisis in Ukraine, the views have changed. In a recent study, 58% of the respondents said that Ukrainian refugees should be welcomed in Poland, and 35% answered that only those that are at risk the most should be let in. Only 1% of the respondents did not want to let Ukrainian refugees enter nor give them any form of support (“The majority of Poles welcomes Ukrainian refugees”).

Russian Federation

The Russian Federation has freely let Ukrainian citizens enter. As of 16 June 2022, it is approximated that over 1,2 million people have entered the Russian Federation after fleeing Ukraine. These numbers are however UN estimates since no precise numbers are being released by the government of the Russian Federation (Operational Data Portal).

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
June 20 th 2001	First World Refugee Day (“UNHCR”)
September 11 th 2001	Terrorist attacks in the USA
September 2015	Height of the European Refugee Crisis (“Spindler”)



UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 22 April 1954 (2198 (XXI))
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 21 December 1965 (UN General Assembly Resolution 2106 (XX))
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Member of their Families, 18 December 1990 (General Assembly Resolution 45/158)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

There have been multiple instances of prominent political figures or social media influencers being convicted for violations of the law. Although this generated major media attention and help to eliminate the most influential carriers of damaging sentiments it fails to address the supporters of the figure. It is simply not feasible to sue every individual supporter.

More recently we have seen that individuals who violated companies' terms of service by making use of hate speech against migrants have been banned from social media platforms. Although this is an effective way to shield the general public from these hateful views, it solves one problem by creating another. This is because when users are banned from one medium, they will seek another medium to find like-minded individuals. This leads to the generation of echo chambers in which people with similar beliefs reinforce each other and, in some cases, even radicalise. Due to this issue, the aforementioned solution is not optimal, but it still is effective at containing the spread of hateful beliefs.

Possible Solutions

There is no simple solution to this issue. Solving it would require changing the minds of many. Therefore, any approach to solving the issue should always be on all levels. Any campaign against these prejudices must be well-coordinated and would preferably be international. One part of this campaign could be altering the curriculum of education to prevent the newer generations from growing up with these old views. Another part could be to run an advertising campaign to spread awareness among a broader public.



One factor that should however always be kept in mind is that there must be a sufficient legal framework to combat racism and xenophobic hate speech. Without such a framework, offences will be hard to punish. When hate speech is tolerated due to lacking laws these offences will be seen as normal and will persist.

To combat employment inequality towards migrants it has been posed that quota should be implemented. Such a quorum would mean that larger companies are forced to have a percentage of their employees have a migration background. Although, in theory, this seems like a great solution there are many caveats to it. It might increase the harassment immigrants face at their workplace due to workers believing that they were only hired due to the quorum and not because they were the most qualified. Besides that, it could also pose issues in branches that do not see many foreign workers. Businesses could be forced to employ under- or overqualified workers just to be able to meet the requirements set out by the quorum. Lastly, the quorum could lead to companies trying to lure workers from other nations to meet the quorum. This could lead to unemployment and with that, even worse attitudes towards foreign workers.

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