Ukrainian Refugee Crisis Background Paper

"The people of Ukraine and beyond need peace and they need peace now,"
-*United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres*

Introduction

Refugee crises have become a global issue in which no part of the world is untouched. All countries play a part in either producing, receiving, or providing passage for refugees. The volume of refugees worldwide has had a profound effect on developed and developing nations with 83% of refugees in 2021 being hosted in low- and middle-income countries.[1] The 1951 Refugee Convention, in Article 1, recognizes that refugees are protected by international law[2] and defines a refugee as someone who "'…owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themself] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence … is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.'"[3] The Convention and its 1967 Protocol have the support of over 130 countries for either one or both documents.

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[1] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Global Trends Report 2021," UNHCR, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021.
[2] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "What Is a Refugee?," UNHCR, accessed August 28, 2022, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/what-is-a-refugee.html#:~:text=%E2%80%9Csomeone%20who%20is%20unable%20or.
[3] "UNHCR Master Glossary," UNHCR, accessed August 28, 2022, https://www.unhcr.org/glossary/#r.

Additionally, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognizes that forcibly displaced people (FDPs) includes internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, asylum seekers, and more. The UNHCR's Global Trends Report 2021 states that the common factors of displacement were due to persecution, conflict, and human rights violations.[4] The 2016 New York Declaration also includes natural disasters or other environmental factors.[5] These factors are involved in the "worrying decade-long rising trend"[6] which highlights the toll the influx of refugees takes on existing systems.

For Ukraine's refugees, the concerns have become apparent as the war has passed its 100th day and the number of refugees has not slowed. European countries face the external concerns of the constant increase in numbers and housing and resources shortages. Furthermore, they face the internal concerns from citizens who worry about the lack of resources for themselves after so much has been invested into helping refugees.[7] These pressures, in addition to finding longer-term solutions to handle the sudden influx, indicate a necessary revision of existing systems in order to provide equal care for everyone.

Background & History

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Ukraine (a former Soviet republic) had one of the largest nuclear arsenals in the world. Shortly after, Ukraine agreed to become a non-nuclear state through the 1994 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In exchange, the United States of America, Russia, and Britain respected "the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine"[8] with the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances which

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[4] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Global Trends Report 2021," UNHCR, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021.

[5] "OHCHR | the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants," OHCHR, accessed August 28, 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/en/migration/new-york-declaration-refugees-and-migrants#:~:text=The%20New%20York%20Declaration%20included.

[6] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Global Trends Report 2021," UNHCR, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021.

[7] Tara Soneshine, "Europe's Refugee Crisis Is Going to Get Worse," Time, July 2, 2022, https://time.com/6192422/europe-ukrainian-refugees/.

[8] Steven Pifer, "Why Care about Ukraine and the Budapest Memorandum," Brookings (Brookings, December 5, 2019), https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/12/05/why-care-about-ukraine-and-the-budapest-memorandum/.

included several other countries. At the same time, several former Soviet bloc countries joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization(NATO) due to security threats from Russia. Ukraine and Russia have continued to be intertwined due to shared histories.

Due to various events such as Ukrainian President Yanukovych choosing closer ties to Russia and Eurasia as opposed to Europe and the subsequent Euromaidan (also known as the Maiden Uprising) as well as Russia's annexation of Crimea, conflicts between Russia and Ukraine in Eastern Ukraine have persisted for years. In response, the 2014 Minsk Protocol and 2015 Minsk II were made but were unsuccessful in stopping fighting in the Donbas region.

After several months of buildup and despite efforts by the United States and the European Union to peacefully resolve the issue, Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. President Vladimir Putin's intent was "demilitarizing and de-Nazifying Ukraine."[9] and comes nearly a year after Russia's initial deployment of thousands of troops positioned at the Ukrainian border under the guise of "training exercises."[10] The invasion was an escalation of the aforementioned conflict that began in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and has continued in the Donbas region until today. Although the outcome of the invasion remains unclear, the invasion has already yielded a humanitarian and refugee crisis. In the 2021 Global Trend Report, the United Nations has called this "fastest growing refugee crisis in Europe since World War II."[11]

Current Situation

As of July 4th, 2022, the United Nation estimates that "at least 12 million have fled their homes" with "more than 5 million"[12] leaving for Poland, Hungary, Moldova,

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[9] Paul Kirby, "Why Has Russia Invaded Ukraine and What Does Putin Want?," BBC News, May 9, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56720589.
[10] Reuters, "Ukraine's Turbulent History since Independence in 1991," Reuters, February 21, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraines-turbulent-history-since-independence-1991-2022-01-31/.
[11] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Global Trends Report 2021," UNHCR, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021.
[12] BBC, "Ukraine Crisis: How Many Refugees and Where Might They Go?," BBC News, May 26, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60555472.

Slovakia, and several other countries.[13] As of August 25th, 2022, the UNHCR reports almost 7 million refugees across Europe.[14]

While Ukrainians have been welcomed with open arms in European countries and "eligible refugee protection for up to three years"[15] their experiences stand in stark contrast to non-white Ukrainians. The double standards are evident when Bulgaria's Prime Minister, Kiril Petkov, states that "these people are intelligent; they are educated people " back in March[16] as opposed to other refugees who are considered supposedly foreign and unknown. Poland's Prime Minister, Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, has also stated the country's willingness to accept "anyone who needs it"[17] but continues to deny entry to non-white Ukrainians refugees and asylum seekers who tend to be Iraqi, Syrian, and Afghans. This is not limited to neighboring countries either; this behavior is present across Europe.

The blunt racism present in newscasts, newspapers, and press statements is horrifying but unsurprising to foreign refugees. Europe, historically, developed a way of thought that considered Europeans superior and other peoples, Africans specifically, as inherently flawed and consequently subhuman.[18] These deeply entrenched beliefs, formed as a justification for the colonization of the Americas, Africa, and Asia, are the explanation behind Europe's selective acceptance of refugees today.[19] As the crisis goes on, non-European refugees will face these beliefs hidden behind the words, thoughts, and actions of Europeans.

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[13] Miriam Berger, "368,000 Ukrainians Flee to European Countries, Including Some That Previously Spurned Refugees," Washington Post, February 26, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/26/europe-welcomes-refugees-ukraine-russia/.

[14] UNHCR, "Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation," data.unhcr.org, 2022, https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine.

[15] Emmanuel Achiri and Hrishabh Sandilya, "What's next for African and Asian War Refugees?," www.ips-journal.eu, August 4, 2022, https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/democracy-and-society/whats-next-for-african-and-asian-student-refugees-fleeing-the-war-in-ukraine-5870/.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Patrick Gathara, "Covering Ukraine: A Mean Streak of Racist Exceptionalism," www.aljazeera.com, March 1, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/3/1/covering-ukraine-a-mean-streak-of-racist-exceptionalism.

[18] Bryan Chan Yen Johnson, Kevin Ah-Sen, and Philip S. S. Howard, "Ukraine Refugee Crisis Exposes Racism and Contradictions in the Definition of Human," The Conversation, March 21, 2022, https://theconversation.com/ukraine-refugee-crisis-exposes-racism-and-contradictions-in-the-definition-of-human-179150.

[19] Ibid.

The Problem

In the eyes of many, this crisis is not a crisis at all. Besides the standard burdens a group numbering more than 6 million refugees brings to countries, the world rallied fairly quickly to respond in comparison to previous crises. In fact, the European Union previously approved "The Temporary Protective Directive" which allows Ukrainians the ability to work and live in the EU for up to three years.[20] Under the Directive there are plans for emergency measures which aim to effectively process Ukrainian arrivals.

Instead of an effective system for *all* refugees, there are reports of mistreatment. African students recount stories of not being equally prioritized compared to Ukrainains[21] and are forced to wait until all Ukrainians board buses before being told to walk several miles in the cold, unsure if their requests will be denied. Indian students report incidents of Indian students being completely denied at checkpoints.[22] Additionally, guards only allow for only women or only specific nationalities to leave. Despite the myriad of issues such as these, the EU governments overshadow them with calls for their own citizens to favor helping fellow Europeans.

News reports continue to frame the crisis as vulnerable. The hardships Ukrainians face are unfortunate indeed, but it cannot be denied that there is a more human touch to these words compared to when other refugee crises are being discussed (such as the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict). All of these actions accumulate in the form of outrage from other nations to the point where other representatives must speak out to be considered deserving of humane treatment - this was the case for several nations of Africa.[23]

Now this crisis presents an opportunity to revise the current system to establish an effective system where instances of racism and discrimination are dealt with effectively.

[20] Laurel Wamsley, "Race, Culture and Politics Underpin How — or If — Refugees Are Welcomed in Europe," NPR, March 3, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/03/03/1084201542/ukraine-refugees-racism.
[21] Stephanie Busari et al., "Foreign Students Fleeing Ukraine Say They Face Segregation, Racism at Border," CNN, March 4, 2022, https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/28/europe/students-allege-racism-ukraine-cmd-intl/index.html.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Laura Ly and Nimi Princewill, "African Nations Condemn Reports of Racism against Students at Ukrainian Border," CNN, March 1, 2022, https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/01/africa/africa-condemns-racism-ukraine-intl/index.html.

Relevant Documents

1. [1994 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)](#)
2. [1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assistances](#)
3. [1951 Refugee Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees](#)
4. [2014 Minsk Protocol](#)
5. [2015 Packages of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements (Minsk II)](#)
6. [2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#)

Bloc Positions

Countries who host refugees

Generally includes many European countries, the United States of America, and Canada. These two areas of the world include several MEDCs (More Economically Developed Countries) and are generally faced with less instability - politically, economically, and socially. These countries have become hotspots for refugees fleeing from African and Middle East conflicts (for Europe) and fleeing from South American conflicts (the United States of America and Canada).

Countries who provide support/resources

Although this can include the countries mentioned above, this bloc considers countries that solely provide aid due to reasons such as being unable to host refugees due to geographical distance or due to ongoing conflict. Aid from these countries often comes in the form of monetary aid or other resources. Countries here include many East, South, and Southeast Asian countries and South American countries.

Countries of conflict

Countries here include Asian countries west of China and India, remaining countries from the Middle East not included in the previous group, various African countries, and various countries of South America. These countries face severe economic instability and are often characterized by constant violence and inefficient government.

Committee Mission

Delegates should consider revising existing policies that encourage discriminatory behaviors. Additionally, delegates should seek to form a temporary solution in the case that major systemic changes are made. Delegates should also work to create a resolution that eliminates the nuances of refugee treatment and expand on existing documents. Consider means of eliminating xenophobic or racist perceptions.

The main goal of this committee is to acknowledge these experiences and understand that these should not be permitted under international supervision. Aim to create change to ensure that these instances, should they occur, are properly addressed and all parties properly considered.

Questions to Consider

1. How can improvements be made to existing systems or agreements in order to effectively address the current issues non–white Ukrainian refugees face today?
2. What actions should be taken, by governments or otherwise, to protect refugees from racism and discrimination?
3. Should a new, universal system be considered in place of each country having its own rules? How should this be conducted?

Sources for Further Research

1. [UNHCR chief condemns 'discrimination, violence and racism' against some fleeing Ukraine](#)
2. Perceptions of Ukrainian Refugees: [Six months into the Russia-Ukraine war, how can we measure the loss of life?](#)
3. Anti-European Refugee Sentiments: [Ukrainian Refugees Are Welcomed with Open Arms – Not So with People Fleeing Other War-Torn Countries](#)