The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established by the UN General Assembly in 1950 directly after the Second World War. Its decree was to provide assistance to the millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes. It was initially given a three-year mandate to find solutions for the 1 million European people displaced by the World War II, but today it remains to a pivotal institution in recognizing, granting, and protecting the rights of displaced persons all over the world. The mission of the UNHCR is threefold: saving lives, promoting self-sustainability, and facilitating return to home. While these displaced persons continue to live in exile from their homes, the UNHCR continues to provide protection and assistance until permanent political and social solutions are found to the conflict. Such programs include assisting foreign governments to receive refugees, defending asylum-seekers and refugees from deportation, managing refugee camps, and determining refugee status. Finally, the High Commission’s ultimate goal is always ideally repatriation (helping refugees return to their original home countries), but this is often impossible for various political, social, or environmental reasons. In those cases, the UNHCR faces two options: local integration in the initial country of asylum, or resettlement to a third country.

I. Combatting Barriers to Education for Child Refugees

Statement of the Issue

Currently, 230 million children live in countries affected by armed conflict, and children make up half of refugee populations. The 1951 Refugee Convention stated that signatory states “shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education.” UNHCR often enters partnerships with other agencies to improve

capacity for refugee education. For example, in 1994 the UNHCR entered an agreement with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), where the NRC agreed to provide short-term education officers to UNHCR. However, it is worrying that the UNHCR recently published that more than half of the 6 million school-age children under its mandate have no school to go to.⁴

Ensuring that education is accessible to refugees, especially children, not only benefits individuals and their families, but entire societies. With strong associations to poverty reduction, reliable and high-quality education lays the foundation for meaningful employment opportunities later in life and develops refugees into productive and self-sustainable members of society. When refugees receive education that they can understand, are motivated to learn, and feel comfortable in their environments, they become assets, not deficits, to the societies which harbor them. Especially in times of emergency, education provides space for stable development: the psychosocial needs of adolescents affected by trauma and displacement, the needs to protect them from harm, and the need to maintain and develop study skills are prime reasons to ensure educational opportunities for children. However, the educational process of many refugee children is frequently disrupted and is limited, leaving many behind their age-appropriate grade level.⁵ Moreover, language barriers often hinder students’ participation and understanding of classroom lessons and norms.

Opportunities for refugees to obtain education are limited and uneven across various regions, particularly for girls and at secondary levels. Globally, refugee enrollment from primary school to secondary levels drops from 76% to a stunning 36%.⁶ In Eastern and Southern Africa, only 5 girls are enrolled for every 10 boys.⁷ Unfortunately, refugee education is also generally very low quality: typical teacher-pupil ratios equal about 1:70, and instructors do not receive standardized or extensive training. Access to education has varied spanning across countries and historical periods. Success depends on the governance styles and asylum policies of host countries. For example, refugee children in Tanzania from Burundi, Rwanda, and Zaire were integrated into the national education system, but were later relocated into refugee camps.⁸

History

Numerous political conflicts have had global consequences when internal violence

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⁸ Ibid.
unsettled millions of local populations who fled to countries around the world. The precedent of schools for children created in time of emergency dates back to before World War II, and was established by organizations such as Save the Children. However, this became a much more urgent focus after the War: the horrors of World War I and II strengthened convictions for the necessity of education and galvanized activism for promoting access to education. The oversight of refugee education was initially allocated to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) when it was created in 1951, but the organization’s focus on national-level policy hindered it from being able to make significant change at the field-level. Thus, with some expertise and technical support from UNESCO, UNCHR, with its field education officer positions, now holds the mandate for these services. In 1966, post-secondary scholarships funded by UNHCR and other actors were introduced for refugee students, although this trend shifted when the Revised Guidelines for Educational Assistance to Refugees in 1995 advocated for education systems over scholarships at primary and secondary levels. 1989 then saw the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) affirm the right to education for all children, including refugees. This commitment initiated a period of rights-based policy and programming in refugee education.

The Iraqi Refugee Crisis

Refugees have been a humanitarian issue for Iraq since the 1980s. The country’s war with Iran resulted in its biggest increase in refugees in history: the UN estimates that 4.7 million Iraqis fled their country over time to escape the extreme sectarian violence. 9 Most settled in neighboring Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Iraqis values the importance of education highly and may refugee parents considered education to be their number one priority. However, close to 80% of Syrian refugee children were not in school. The UN agencies worked with the Ministry of Education in Lebanon to increase the enrollment percentage of Syrian refugees. In Jordan, UNICEF, UNESCO, and partner organization provided teachers training sessions in which they were taught strategies to deal with refugees with stress disorders, language issues, and other emergencies.

The Rwandan Genocide

The 1994 civil war between the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda was sparked by a Hutu uprising against their Tutsi rulers. Hundreds of Tutsis were killed, and thousands more fled for safety to neighboring countries. The crisis, combined with its recent predecessors in Afghanistan, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and parts of the former Soviet Union, led to a focus on education’s role in both exacerbating and mitigating conflict in times of crisis, as well as an emphasis on inter-agency coordination. This period of conflict ushered in a shift in the

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field towards a systematic approach to education that served populations instead of individuals.

Current Situation

Education is often referred to as the “fourth pillar” of humanitarian response alongside nourishment, shelter, and health services. Children are perhaps the most heavily affected demographic of refugee populations, as they are vulnerable to the trauma and stresses that constant migration can inflict. With their dependence on stable environments, nurturance, and family support, their long-term social and academic development is at stake. The UNHCR’s current estimates are that only 67% of the world’s school-aged refugee children have access to primary and secondary school education.\(^\text{10}\)

The mandate to provide refugee children with stable school systems has inspired the UN to sign many diverse policy commitments on the matter. A Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has been appointed to ensure that “children are provided with educational materials and opportunities...with especial attention to displaced children, adolescents, girls, disabled children, former child soldiers, and victims of sexual violence.”\(^\text{11}\) Education serves as an avenue of common interest among divergent sectors, stakeholders, and beneficiaries. It is a way to reach out to communities otherwise marginalized and disadvantaged in their migrant situations. Particular consideration must indeed be paid to the diversity of children suffering, because education cannot follow a “one-size-fits-all” approach.

Integration Problems

There are social, political and linguistic barriers to the ability of refugee children to assimilate to their asylum country schools. A widespread culture of prejudice, fear, and resentment often permeates the refugees’ host countries and targets them as outsiders. At school, refugees are often bullied, threatened, or even attacked based on these biases and stereotypes, reflecting a low attendance in school. These fears are compounded by the fact that classes are taught in unfamiliar languages and there is insufficient language support.\(^\text{12}\) 30 percent of refugees under 18 years old living in the U.S. fall under the Limited English Proficient (LEP) level, though this proportion varies according to country of origin and socioeconomic


\(^{11}\) Sarah Dryden-Peterson, “Refugee Education: A Global Review” (see footnote 6).

status. The UNHCR previously condoned academic instruction in the origin country’s language, based on the belief that refugees would soon be repatriated. However, as this solution has become more unattainable, the UNHCR official policy has shifted to support refugee access to national educational systems, thus encouraging refugees to learn the host country’s language. Organizations like Teach for All help refugee children to break the language barrier in various countries. The majority of refugees coming to the US are from eight countries, two of which have English as official language of the country.

Parental Participation

One obstacle to child refugee education is parental awareness. The culture of local schools is often different than that of their home societies, and it is difficult for parents to adjust to the new norms and expectations. Teachers also often communicate in a different language from the parents, making it difficult for parents to understand their children’s progress in school. Adults are facing struggles of their own, including finding employment, attending classes of their own, and learning a new language, which complicate their ability to be a support system for their children.

Analysis

The refugee crisis has a direct impact on women and children refugees in particular, but the rising gap in education for younger refugee must be addressed. For the period of 2004-2008, UNHCR’s budget for Education peaked in 2008 with an Approved Budget (AB) of 36.8 million USD with an additional 43.2 million USD for special appeals and earmarked funding. The global education budget represented 8% of the total UNHCR budget. In 2010, however, the Comprehensive Needs Assessment predicts that a total of 146 million USD will be required to provide for all needs. To meet this goal, a multisector fundraising approach has been suggested which bridges County Offices, Bureaus, the Division of Resource Management (DDRM), and Private Sector Fundraising (PSFR).

Dismantling the current obstacles that bar refugee children from enjoying equal access and opportunity in education systems will be a protracted and comprehensive process. The UNHCR has three main objectives for bettering education opportunities: increase access and enrollment, improve quality, and enhance protection. Previously, the UNHCR has launched

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13 Sarah Dryden-Peterson, “The Educational Experiences of Refugee Children...” (see footnote 4).
16 “2012-2016 Education Strategy” (see footnote 14).
projects that identify the positive and negative aspects of regional educational programs. This helps solve the problems many refugees face such as a lack of catch-up classes, insufficient teaching and learning materials, and lack of specialized resources essential for integration. Still, the professional capabilities of the UNHCR itself are still lacking in some ways, with an absence of permanent Education Officer posts and having to instead rely on short-term staffs. Accordingly, the organization has encouraged every country to create policies and practices that will help refugees integrate into their educational system.

One of the major challenges is access and enrollment in schools in terms of emergency education. It is important to consider the location of the refugee children. Over 80% of refugees reside in urban settlement instead of formal camps. Therefore it is important to consider educational problems in the camp and in urban settings. UNESCO defines an educational emergency as “a crisis situation created by conflicts or disasters which have destabilized, disorganized, or destroyed the education system, and which require an integrated process of crisis and post-crisis response.”

It is crucial to maintain and uphold organized structures such as education during times of crisis because these stable foundations protect children from the harm of psychosocial trauma and displacement. Moreover, this stability also gives children better options than participating in violence, joining gangs or militias, substance abuse, or other self-destructive activities. These “soft” benefits of ensuring education for young refugees cannot be neglected in the face of its other explicit advantages.

The UNHCR aims to achieve universal primary education for all children. We must work to increase access and enrollment in secondary schools in refugee camps and urban locations. Spreading schools out to diverse geographies will make it easier for children of all backgrounds to attend school. The UNHCR should also prioritize countries with large refugee population through technical support.

Conclusion

It is apparent that addressing and dissolving the barriers that currently hinder young refugees from taking advantage of high-quality and dependable school systems must do so through a multisector and broad-reaching lens. Current global crises demand our timely and effective action as more children every day suffer emotional, psychological, and mental trauma. Lessening these losses while it is still early is the most ideal option to address these issues. In terms of improving education opportunities, the foci must center on improving the quality of schools, widening children’s accessibility, and ensuring that these school systems are appropriate and understandable. Every one of the member nations convening today have

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valuable insight and experiences to bring to creating a solution that will fit the broad swath of problems facing today’s world.

Questions to Consider

- How can the UNHCR encourage school attendance in refugee children?
- What structural changes can be made in the school systems of host countries to make them more accessible for refugees?
- Who are the parties that must be addressed by training and informative programs?
- How can the gender gap in school attendance be addressed? Socioeconomic gap? Linguistic gap?
- Where should funding for the global education budget come from?
- Which departments should these mandates fall under?
- What should education systems look like in times of emergency when resources are scant?
- Should education be decided by local communities, or by national or multinational agreements?
- What are potential partners (NGOs, offices, etc.) that can aid in this endeavor?

II. Expanding Opportunities for Refugee Employment

Statement of the Issue

The primary goal for assimilating refugees into their new communities is ensuring their ability to be self-sustainable. By integrating these individuals into the local workforce and having them contribute to the local economy, enormous economic gains stand to be made. It is apparent that finding employment for refugees benefits both them and their families as well as the local economy.

One pressing concern that must be addressed is how to transfer the educational and professional credentials that refugees have gained in their home countries to a standard that is useable by their new countries. Currently, there are 7.2 million immigrants and refugees who have been certified abroad, but 1.6 million remain underemployed.¹⁸ The ideal solution is to place these individuals into the same fields that they were in before their emigration, but when this is not possible, alternatives must be considered. Refugees may enter the same field and use similar skillsets with different positions and roles, or may have to settle for more tangentially

related fields that may not demand such advanced skills.

The biggest barriers to smooth economic integration are cost, language, difficulty navigating the system, and the problem of dignity.\textsuperscript{19} Finding employment may require extensive planning and budgeting, not to mention accrued costs of transportation or applications. Knowledge of relevant language requires both social and technical expertise, either of which or both may be lacking for refugees. To solve this, often returning to school and taking exams again is necessary. Moreover, the structure of different countries’ workforces may be confusing and difficult to navigate for someone who is unfamiliar, which necessitates the presence of programs which can help them gain the right tools and knowledge to find employment. Finally, it is hard for refugees who are extremely technically skilled to feel dignified in having to restart their job searches after being so financially and professionally established at home but having to start anew somewhere else.

\textit{History}

The Aftermath of the Second World War saw one of the largest refugee crisis in the Western world to date with millions of people across the European continent leaving their homes to escape persecution or, often times, being expelled by governments.\textsuperscript{20} At the same time the UN was in its infancy and with the adoption of the \textit{Universal Declaration of Human Rights} in 1948 and the establishment of the High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1950, began taking serious steps towards resettling the millions of displaced Europeans.

However, one of the primary considerations for many countries when it came to taking in refugees was the effect on the national economy. Many nations could not bear the burden of an influx of refugees on their fledgling post-war economies. Fortunately, nations such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Brazil were in need of workers in industries like mining and manufacturing, and subsequently absorbed several thousand displaced peoples.\textsuperscript{21}

A program was established by the United States that allowed refugees to be sponsored with housing and a job (one that did not take a job from an American) which helped companies and refugees alike and helped assuage fears that refugees would take people's jobs.\textsuperscript{22} The European refugee crisis ended in the resettlement of nearly 2,000,000 documented refugees and countless others being resettled in more informal ways.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} “The EU and the Refugee Crisis,” \textit{European Commission}, July 2016,
But European refugees in Europe are much different that foreign refugees, and subsequent refugee crisis have seen many countries, the UK among them, grow more reluctant to take in asylum seekers. In the 90’s the UK accepted only about 2% of Sri Lankan refugees who were trying to escape their countries’ civil war. Meanwhile France and Canada were accepting over 70% of applicants. As globalization becomes more and more a fact of life, things have only gotten worse. With fewer low-skill jobs available in post-industrialized nations, it takes more time and effort to get refugees the necessary skills to get jobs in developed countries like language training. Many view refugees as an unnecessary burden on the economy, making the government’s job to provide for its people even harder, especially when this is already a demanding task in many developing or economically struggling nations. When even the nation’s own constituents vie for diminishing and less rewarding jobs in an ever competitive market, refugees are often made the scapegoat and excluded from labor markets and civil society.

**Current Situation**

Currently, refugees face extreme challenges finding jobs. While registered refugees who have asylum status have very limited job opportunities, unregistered refugees are not granted the right to work. For registered refugees, the chance of finding a job depends on their language skills, education, and records. On the other hand, many unregistered refugees are forced into working illegally in dangerous underground jobs where they are underpaid and risk injury or prosecution. Unemployment of refugees is an alarming issue that many developed countries are trying to resolve by creating organizations that support refugees and assist in their employment searches. Organizations like the World Education Services in the U.S. evaluate diplomas and other professional certifications from other countries and transcribe them to U.S. degree equivalents. Efforts like these aim to minimize the burden of transitioning between foreign workforces.

In the last year, Germany, and Turkey created more than 50 organizations to respond to lack of jobs for refugees. According to UNHCR, approximately 30,000 refugees in Germany found jobs with the help of Federal Employment Agency of Germany, while at least 13,000 are still unemployed. Refugees in developed countries such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, France, Spain, Australia, and Canada often have very limited access into the labor market, and find jobs in sectors where there is a lack of suitable applicants. Nongovernmental


organizations such as Refugee Council of USA, CARE, Partnership for Refugees, Rizk, and the PARI Project help refugees secure a job in their designated area. These organizations provide job search, resume reviews, basic training sessions, counseling, and networking opportunities for free of charge. It has been proven that NGOs in this field has been very successful in securing jobs for refugees especially when they collaborate with governmental organizations such as the Federal Employment Agencies, and National Refugee Agencies. Organizations like the World Education Services evaluate refugees’ overseas qualifications to translate them into American standards.  

Since the Syrian civil war erupted in 2011, Europe has begun working on processing the enormous number of asylum requests they’ve received, with Germany and Sweden dealing with the bulk of the refugees. Germany has taken in the largest number of refugees so far by a large margin, but the majority of them are still left in camps in Turkey and Greece. Until they have been fully processed and completed a series of “integration courses,” they are unable to work. Even those who do complete these courses often cannot find a job. Many even lack the skills necessary for the majority of jobs, as the demand for untrained labor is diminishing in the post-industrialized economies of European nations like Germany. Language proficiency is also a standard for employment that many refugees struggle to fulfill. 

However, significant progress has been made in developing programs that employ refugees in any way possible. Germany’s proposal for “one-euro jobs” is one such project, though it has attracted controversies of its own. In this program, refugees can work for about one euro an hour. Though this pay is barely living wage and the work is often menial, many see it as a springboard into the host economy. The program gives refugees opportunities to learn the host country’s language and activities to occupy them instead of sitting in camps or engaging in dangerous activities. There have also been preliminary efforts undertaken by host countries to have their militaries train refugees in basic skills such as construction and welding. Not only does this give them strong and marketable skills, this also increases their self-sustainability, giving them the option to build their homes or similar endeavors. 

Currently, the European Parliament is working on a more universal solution to provide employment opportunities to refugees in Europe, while the UNHCR focuses on ensuring the safety and health of refugees around the world. UNHCR data shows that Jordan, Iran, and Ethiopia are the top three countries that host the biggest number of refugees. However, all

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28 “Germany puts refugees to work ... for one euro,” The Local, May 16, 2016, http://www.thelocal.de/jobs/article/germany-puts-refugees-to-work-for-one-euro
29 “World at War: UNHCR Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2014,” UNHCR, 2015,
three of these abovementioned countries have very high unemployment rates, and are considered to be developing, or underdeveloped. Most refugees in Ethiopia live below the poverty line, and are forced into illegal forms of work such as prostitution, drug dealing, and terrorism. In Jordan and Iran, it is very difficult for refugees to obtain temporary work permits. However, factors like the temporary waiving of fees for work permits and the acceptance of UNHCR-issued asylum-seeker cards relieves refugees of significant financial and logistical burdens. Moreover, the World Bank has supported refugee receiving countries like Jordan with better access to development funds and low interest loans.

**Analysis**

In order to solve this dire problem, several areas must be addressed. Refugees need assistance finding relevant experience or college/local equivalency, and building their social capital. Connecting with the local community and relevant professionals in their fields will be instrumental in facilitating the transitions of refugees as they gain professional connections. In order to truly solve this increasingly urgent problem, the roots of the issue must be addressed. The focus must be broader than fiscal concerns alone, as pressing as they are. A complete solution needs to also take into account the cultural impact of the massive influx of displaced persons in new economies and communities.

While stop-gap measures like those being employed in Germany are possible solutions for the short term, a one-euro job is simply not enough to sustain the multiple and complex costs of human life. The quest to produce and find jobs for refugees is complicated by the fact that citizens of the host country are often struggling to find employment themselves. As more and more low skill jobs are outsourced or phased out in favor of machines, creating new jobs is no simple matter. With nations like the UK and France only taking in relatively small numbers of refugees and nations like Hungary showing hostility towards refugees, one must ask how noncommittal countries can be encouraged and incentivized to welcome refugees. The previously mentioned role of the World Bank could be one such answer.

Finally, developed countries have quandaries of their own in the sense that influx of huge numbers of peoples leverages an even greater burden on their economies and governments. Nations like Turkey deal with considerably more refugees – reaching nearly 3 million – yet have considerably fewer resources to work with than many EU nation-states. Solutions that work in the developed world, therefore, are unlikely to have the same effect in less-developed nations.


Conclusion

When refugees are seen and treated as potential productive members of their receiving country’s economy, drastic benefits befall both them and the local economy. Limiting the individuals’ dependence on state assistance and funds and instead developing their abilities to support themselves, their families, and their communities will create a self-propelling cycle that reaps financial, political, and economic rewards for all parties involved. Creative solutions must be brainstormed to fit the context of different states and different economies. Because of differences in natural resources, labor demands, and size of imports/exports, each state’s preparedness to integrate refugees varies. The solutions to refugee crises have never been simple. They are complex problems with many implications both in the short-term and the long-term and no one solution will work perfectly for every nation. It is however an issue that needs to be addressed, and sooner is much better than later. A continued lack of action will only spread fear and uncertainty to both refugees and citizens of all nations.

Questions to Consider

- How can/should a nation prepare refugees to integrate into their work force?
- What jobs are available or can be created for under-educated refugees in modern post-industrialized nations?
- What are the best strategies to help educated and qualified refugees find meaningful work?
- Should governments require businesses to employ refugees?
- Are stop-gap measures like Germany’s one-euro jobs beneficial to refugees?
- How should developed vs. developing nations deal with integrating refugees into their economies and labor markets?
- What is the minimum wage a refugee needs to sustain him/herself and a family?
- What other steps can nations take to deal with large numbers of refugees who depend on financial resources but struggle to produce their own?