

General Assembly 1

The question of restoring refugees to their post-conflict region



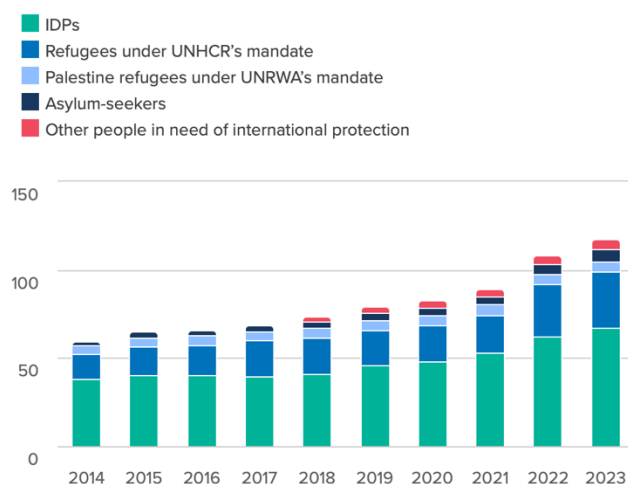
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Student Officer:	Mirthe Visser
Position:	Deputy Chair

Introduction

After conflicts are resolved, it can seem like the largest issues have been overcome, but in reality, nations face multiple long-term consequences, including displacement and the return of refugees. In 2023, the UNHCR estimated 117.3 million people to be forcibly displaced due to conflict, violence, and human rights violations. To put it into perspective, that is more than 1 in every 69 people on earth. This number has continued to grow over the last few years.

Ideally, these people return to their homes once a conflict is resolved, but this is often not possible due to lingering tensions, legal security, or loss of contact with family. Not only the situation in their home country, but also the circumstances in their host country play an important role in a refugee's decision to return.

Due to rising tensions and new conflicts, displacement has become more common. The conflict in Sudan is described as the largest humanitarian and displacement crisis, with more than 14 million people displaced. Other nations with a large number of refugees are Myanmar and the State of Palestine.



Of the 43.4 million refugees, only 1.1 million returned in 2023. This shows that returning to a refugee's home country is often not as simple as imagined.

Definition of Key Terms

Displacement

The movement of people who have been forced to flee from their homes, often in the context of conflict and violence. There are two categories of displacement. Internally displaced people (IDP), who are displaced within their country and externally displaced people, who are displaced outside of their country.

Refugee

A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

A United Nations body that exists to help refugees with seeking asylum, fleeing from conflict or disasters, and returning home.

Housing land and property (HLP) rights

HLP rights entitle displaced people to have a safe home to prevent the fear of forced convictions.

Post-conflict region

An area in which there has been a conflict that is now solved. Usually, these areas are demolished by violence and need to be rebuilt.

General Overview

When trying to restore refugees to post conflict zones, there are multiple factors and angles to be considered. For example, the area needs to be inspected to see if it can house the returning refugees. Another factor could be external aid. In that case it needs to be decided who will provide the necessary help and how that will be done. The most pressing issues are explained below.

Physical security

Security is a critical factor in a refugee's decision to return. After a resolution, conflict and violence often still linger, and refugees might still be in danger after their return. Studies have shown that the impact of security on return is nonlinear. Only when a substantial amount of safety is promised do refugees return. Physical safety also seems to be the most deciding factor. Economic security and infrastructure are only taken into consideration after.

An example of insecurity after conflicts is the differences between those who fled and those who stayed in conflict zones. New social divisions might arise, or refugees might have trouble reclaiming their property without the right documentation, which can lead to local violence.

This happened in Burundi when refugees were said to be pressured to leave Tanzania in 2020. Upon arrival in Burundi, many were allegedly arrested, killed, or tortured due to suspicion of opposing the government. In this kind of situation, refugees are forced to return to an insecure situation while the government deems it safe. The reality of conflict is that it more often than not lingers and causes local violence, tensions and even the threat of returning to war. The transition from war to peace is not as straightforward as it sometimes seems and the situation in post-conflict zones is not always monitored as well as it should be. Post-conflict zones often haven't fully gained stability and a just law enforcement system. This makes them vulnerable to disorder and hostility and not a preferable place for refugees to return to.

Legal security

A less noticeable factor is legal security. When fleeing from their homes, refugees might lose their identity cards or birth certificates. In some countries, this is a temporary issue that can be fixed by replacing those documents. However, in less industrialized nations, there might not be a way to replace them. For example, the destruction of or the lack of national archives may cause problems like being unable to vote, find a job, or gain access to credit. It can also put them at risk of arrest or harassment and cause them other legal issues.

More extreme is losing citizenship. In Myanmar, the Rohingya have suffered discrimination and violence for a long time. In 2017, many Rohingya were forced to flee to Bangladesh, and many were displaced. They were denied citizenship even before that, in 1982, and are one of the largest stateless populations in the world. This means that they legally have no rights and are unable to get an education, apply for jobs, or get access to healthcare.

Another key factor is ownership of housing land and property (HLP). This can give refugees access to water, food, shelter, health and work, all important human rights, and it plays a large role in rebuilding a refugee's life. This can be taken away due to loss of property rights, destruction of the land, or its being used for another purpose. HLP issues can be triggers or effects of violence and conflict. Humanitarian aid is often required in this kind of situation so that refugees have shelter and food before they can get back on their feet.

Transport

Although transport is one of the simpler issues, it is still not always organized well. Often, when refugees flee, they have to undertake a dangerous journey and face natural obstacles. Without the money for a plane ticket, it can be almost impossible to return safely.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the main party that helps refugees return home and monitors their treatment. They do this by organizing voluntary and safe returns, helping refugees make an informed decision, and assisting in reintegration and rebuilding. When refugees decide to return by themselves in so-called "self-organized returns," they do not have access to this help, including in integration. Refugees may not want to wait or don't have the information about the UNHCR's programs.

Integration

An often-overlooked aspect of returning is the integration. The first step is giving humanitarian support in the form of water, food, shelter, and other necessities. This ensures that the returnees have the chance to settle into their new lives in peace. The UNHCR often sets up camps so that returnees can build their new lives with a strong foundation.

Moreover, employment opportunities are important to building a sustainable life and give the country as a whole an economic boost. Without a way to earn money, a returnee does not have access to food, water, or a home. The issue is that returnees can be denied access to education and skills training or can simply have a lack of opportunities.

The loss of contact with family or friends can also hinder integration. When refugees flee, they may lose their loved ones in the chaos of violence and conflict. This causes uncertainty and

suffering. There are some organizations dedicated to helping families reconnect, like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), but this is still a difficult and uncertain process. The ICRC has developed new technologies and tools to do this most efficiently. The UNHCR has also developed a global infrastructure with the help of smaller organizations that is called the Global Family Reunification Network (FRUN).

Major Parties Involved

Colombia

Colombia is facing one of the largest internal displacement crises, with almost 7 million IDPs. In 1960, guerrilla groups arose in Colombia and caused insecurity and later armed conflict. This was the beginning of a more than 40-year-long conflict and source of violence that forcibly displaced many Colombians. Even after the signing of the 2016 Peace Agreement, 1.4 million new displacements have been registered. The government is still working on a framework to return all the IDPs to their home and give them the resources to rebuild their life.

Global Family Reunification Network (FRUN)

FRUN is the first global network that exists to reconnect refugees to their families after loss of contact. It was established in December 2020 and consists of multiple smaller organizations like RefugePoint, UNHCR, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Some of their objectives are creating new technology and tools to reunify families, collecting evidence and data to improve our idea of reunification, and advocating for better standards and procedures on a global level.

Islamic Republic of Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the countries that hosts the most refugees, according to estimates, 3.8 million. This group consists mostly of refugees from Afghanistan. Most of them live in urban areas, and only around 4% reside in refugee settlements. In Iran, registered refugees have access to temporary work permits, healthcare, education, and freedom of movement. However, due to the increase in arriving refugees, the Iranian government deemed it necessary to return the Afghan refugees to their home country in September 2024. Since then, many refugees returned to Afghanistan, but upon arrival, they faced food insecurities and many other limitations.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The UNHCR has been working since 1950 to aid refugees and establish their rights. They work on frameworks for asylum and return, as well as lend their help in refugee camps by providing food and other basic human rights.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
February 1863	Establishment of the Red Cross
3 October 1946	Establishment of the International Refugee Organisation (IRO)
1948	The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 which addressed persons displaced due to World War II
14 December 1950	Establishment of the UNHCR
1982	The Rohingya people lost their citizenship
2017	An increase in Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar
2020	Refugees from Burundi returned from Tanzania by force

UN Involvement and Other Treaties

- Refugees and displaced persons, 3 October 1946, (E/RES/18)
- Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees, and displaced persons and humanitarian questions, 17 December 2024, (A/RES/79/156)

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Restoring refugees to post conflict zones has been an issue for a long time. Many resolutions, treaties and conferences have been aimed at finding a solution, yet this problem is far from solved.

One of the ways that the UN has tried to aid (returning) refugees is establishing the UNHCR, which aids refugees including helping with their return. However, the framework that is in place is not perfect. The UNHCR works in cooperation with the responsible state to reduce internally displaced persons and return refugees, but this doesn't always happen flawlessly.

A resolution on refugees and displaced persons (see UN involvement and other treaties) established the International Refugee Organisation (IRO). This resolution aimed to help refugees seek asylum and protect them legally and politically. Although asylum was the main purpose, it also mentioned assisting in every way possible the early return to their country of nationality or former habitual residence.

The UNHCR has written many reports on refugees, one of them being the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees, and displaced persons and humanitarian questions. In this report the UNHCR expresses their concern about refugees, returnees and displaced persons and their relation to broader humanitarian crises. One of the purposes was reminding the States of their responsibility of prevention and reduction of statelessness.

Furthermore, there have been less significant resolutions that improve refugee aid. However, the return of refugees is mentioned less than asylum and the reason for fleeing.

Possible Solutions

The formation of a framework dedicated to the integration of refugees is key in solving this issue. That, first of all, includes temporary shelter, food and water. This could be provided by the UNHCR or other humanitarian organizations. After that comes the rebuilding. If the land is destroyed by conflict, houses and facilities like schools and hospitals need to be rebuilt. This is an excellent chance to create jobs and encourage employment. The last step is to make sure that the returnees are self-reliant and ready to continue their life. This includes making sure that they have their financial records in order. It will probably require help from the government to regain any lost documents, so it could be helpful if the government offered their services in any local townhouses or other government buildings.

However, all of this is still not possible if the post conflict zone is not safe for return. This means that certain organizations must keep track of the situation in these regions. The post conflict zones could for example be declared safe for return by the United Nations so that host countries can not force refugees to return when that is not possible yet.

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Appendix

The following sources could be quite helpful while researching this issue. Furthermore, the deputy president would recommend looking at UNHCR resources.

“Understanding Refugee Return: Key Findings, Gaps, and Future Research|JDC.” *Jointdatacenter.org*, 2024, www.jointdatacenter.org/understanding-return-key-findings-gaps-and-future-research/.

“UNHCR. 4. Return and Reintegration.” <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/3eb78b3e4.pdf>