Research Report

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Strengthening international cooperation in the reception and protection of asylum seekers

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Introduction

An asylum seeker is a person who has fled their own country to ask another country for protection, but whose request to be a refugee there has not yet been accepted. Refugees have a right to seek protection from other countries according to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which forbids UN members from returning refugees to a country where they risk death, persecution or other terrible things. More than 100 million people are currently displaced around the world, but not all of them are treated equally. Most of the time, the refugees have been taken in by countries that are close to the conflict zone, and there is no such thing as a system to divide the refugees. This MUNO debate is going to look at how the UN member states work together to make the reception and protection of asylum seekers better and more equal.

General Overview

The Refugee Convention explains who counts as a refugee and which rights they have. However, it does not say which country should handle refugees or how they can share costs. In 2018, there was the Global Compact on Refugees, which encouraged countries to share the responsibility, but it is not legally binding. So countries only participate voluntarily. This means that protection is more based on political/geographical components rather than on international law.

Around 70% of all refugees live in low- and middle-income countries, which are also often right next to the country they have fled. Richer countries mostly help with money, but that is often not enough.

The non-profit UNHCR often has to limit their help because donations fall short, which affects schools, housing and healthcare for refugees.

Some countries also try to keep asylum seekers out of their own borders; for example, the British plan to send people to Rwanda, which was later cancelled. Human rights organisations say that deals like this are making sure that procedures are not fair at all and that the conditions are not safe. There are sometimes countries that don't let asylum seekers in, which is against international law, but countries are almost never held responsible for this.

There are a few ways to get to safety legally, but there should be more, because a lot of people still need to take dangerous journeys to flee. For example, the route through the Mediterranean, which takes thousands of lives every year and gives smugglers more business.

Major Parties Involved

- Turkey. Turkey has one of the largest refugee populations in the world, which are mostly Syrians. In 2016, Turkey promised to take back people who had crossed the border to Greece illegally and in return they got billions of dollars from the EU for refugee aid.

- UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency (created 1950) was created to protect refugees and to oversee the Refugee Convention. It provides Emergency help, advises governments on asylum, and it leads the Global Compact. It sustains almost completely on donations.

- Uganda. Uganda is known for its open policy, which gives refugees land and the right to work. This shows that this approach is also possible for other countries, but Uganda also needs funding from other countries to keep it going.

- Lebanon. Lebanon hosts the most refugees in comparison to its population while they also have an economic crisis. They are the perfect example of why countries should share resources for refugees.

- IOM. The International Organisation for Migration helps with resettlement and return (if possible/safe again)

- NGO's. NGO's such as Amnesty International, Médecins Sans Frontières, and the International Rescue Committee give aid, carry out rescue operations at sea and report human rights violations.

Possible Solutions

Fairer responsibility-sharing. Countries could agree on a global system that sets a fair share for each country. This would be based on factors such as population, wealth and the number of refugees it already has. Countries could meet their share by relocating people to their own land or giving money for support, as long as everything is covered.

More safe and legal routes. Countries could increase family reunifications and set up programmes to sponsor the journey, which would make journeys safer and take away business from smugglers.

Shared minimum standards and accountability. The countries can agree to provide normal conditions and fair asylum procedures. Independent monitoring at borders and regular reporting to UN human rights organisations would make it easier to hold countries responsible for not letting asylum seekers in.

Support for host countries. For example: Uganda, the community can support policies where the asylum seekers are able to work and study, which also boosts the economy of the host country.