

Forum: General Assembly 4 (GA4)

Issue: *A framework for international cooperation and coordination in the sheltering and treatment of refugees and displaced persons*

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Introduction

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 70.8 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, or violence at the end of 2018. These people whose lives are threatened are called refugees, with those who are still awaiting their refugee status called displaced persons. With border conflicts, climate change, and political issues becoming increasingly prevalent in certain areas, the number of people seeking asylum is expected to increase in the following years. Hence, providing protection to these people is a significant global issue that still persists today.

As established in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), every human being is entitled to enjoy basic rights and fundamental freedoms. Adding on to that, the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol are the backbones of international refugee protection. However, if countries have responsibilities to ensure human rights for all, why are refugees more often regarded as a threat rather than as people who are threatened? The reason behind why the refugee crisis still carries on today is due to other countries' concerns about their own citizens' rights and safety. With a lack of international enforcement, some countries refuse to comply to the international agreements as they believe their population and economy to be threatened. Providing shelter for refugees in their own countries meant an influx of population, which has a possibility of threatening job employment and economic stability within a country. Although every country is responsible for protecting the rights of its citizens, some governments are unable to fulfill their citizens' basic necessities, threatening people to flee their country in search of somewhere more peaceful and safe. In the American continents, for example, the situation in Venezuela and the agricultural disasters and gang violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras has been the major impetus driving refugees to apply for asylum in neighboring countries such as Mexico, Panama, and the United States.

As every country accepts a different number of refugees, some even rejecting all of them, this has led to 3.5 million refugees still awaiting a decision on their application for asylum by the end of 2018. As the displaced population continues to grow, nations are finding it more and more difficult to accept the influx of refugees from their neighboring countries. When this happens, other countries have a responsibility to provide these refugees with basic assistance in order to ensure that none of the human rights are violated. Moreover, this issue has also inflicted upon conflicts between nations that have not yet reached a general consensus regarding how refugees should be sheltered and treated, severely threatening global peace and the overall well-being of displaced persons.

Definition of Key Terms

Asylum

Asylum for refugees are usually called refugee camps, temporarily established to provide shelter for refugees fleeing from their countries. Today, many UN organizations, particularly UNHCR, provide basic necessities such as food, sanitation, health, medicine, and education to ensure that refugees can live under a safer and healthier environment.

Asylum-seeker

Based on the UNHCR, an asylum-seeker is referring to someone who is seeking international protection. In some countries, an asylum-seeker is also referring to someone who has applied for refugee status but has not yet received a final decision from governments. In addition, an asylum-seeker should not be sent back to his or her country of origin until the asylum claim has been examined in a fair procedure. To sum this up, every refugee started off as an asylum-seeker, but not every asylum-seeker will eventually be identified as a refugee.

Host Country

Host countries are states that host significant numbers of refugees, usually from their neighboring countries. When a significant number of refugees arrive in the host country, this flow might incur costs in terms of security, political tensions, and economic status. Even though countries have the responsibility to ensure human rights for all, the costs stated above are holding many countries back from providing shelter for refugees.

Internally Displaced Person

An internally displaced person (IDP) is a person who has been forced to flee his or her home for the same reason as a refugee. However, IDPs remain in his or her own country without crossing any international borders. Unlike refugees, IDPs are not protected by international law or eligible to receive many types of aid. For example, a humanitarian crisis in South Sudan and the situation in Yemen has caused more than 2.5 million people being displaced by ongoing violence.

Migrant

Migrants must not be used interchangeably with refugees or asylum-seekers. A migrant is simply identified as someone who chooses to move from an area to another. They are provided with a choice to move or not since their lives and freedoms are not directly threatened. The major factor behind migration is usually the will to find work, education, family reunion, or other reasons. Unlike refugees, migrants do not have a fear of persecution or serious harm in their home countries. Today, however, there are many cases where migrants are using up resources provided by international organizations that should have been allocated to refugees instead seeing as migrants have the ability to enjoy the protection of their own governments and they can choose to return to their country of origin as well.

Refugee

According to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, a refugee is someone “who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”. Note, however, that a refugee is not the same as an asylum seeker or a migrant. A refugee is closely related to displaced persons, yet these terms are not completely alike either (see definition of “Internally Displaced Person”).

Background Information

The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol

The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol are the main documents that clarify the rights of refugees and the obligations of the 148 countries that signed one or both of these documents. After World War I, governments responded to the millions of displaced persons by establishing a set of international agreements to provide legal travel documents. In 1921, the League of Nations has already taken to approach to hold a conference in Geneva. With a dramatic increase of refugee numbers during World War II, a set of guidelines, laws, and conventions began to take shape in order to ensure that all refugees are treated adequately with human rights. With a desire to create a legal framework for

protecting refugees, a conference in Geneva officially adopted the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, also known as the 1951 Convention. This document was later amended by the 1967 Protocol to expand its scope seeing as the issue of displacement has spread around the world.

Refugee Crises

Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Syria refugee crisis first started with the conflict between the Syrian government and anti-government forces. Due to various social problems such as unemployment, the widening economic gap, and the dictatorship of the government, Syrians became more inclined towards a democratic society. This revolt instigated the anger and complaints from the minorities in society, quickly escalating into the Syrian Civil War. Because of this, millions of Syrians have been displaced as their houses are often in undesirable states after violent turmoils. As Syrians have lost their living space, many are forced to find shelter beyond their borders. These Syrian refugees usually seek refuge in neighboring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt. This is where the problem enters. Initially, these countries were open for Syrian refugees to seek refuge in their country. However, as time passed, these countries became no longer capable of providing refuge to such a large number of refugees since their economic state was not able to accommodate for the shelters. Because of this, some Syrian refugees chose to migrate to other countries such as Germany, Australia, UK, France, Italy, Greece, and Sweden. Again, due to a large number of refugees, some countries were reluctant to accept them along with economic and societal concerns; this issue continues to persist today.

Afghan Refugee Crisis

In 1979, the Soviet War in Afghanistan caused the displacement of over six million people. Even though the Soviet Union withdrew its troops in 1989, the civil war continued. Even after the 9/11 terrorist attack, the military action in Afghanistan against groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban has still called the displacement of Afghans. Around the world today, there are 2.6 million Afghans identified as refugees, while a majority reside in Pakistan and Iran – there are 1.3 million refugees in Pakistan while there are over a million refugees in Iran. This has caused a crisis in the Middle East, where the host countries are gradually becoming unable to provide basic necessities to the refugees due to economic concerns.

Venezuelan Refugee Crisis

Since 2015, four million Venezuelans have left the country due to the corruption of the government and lack of economic growth. Notably, the sharp decline in oil prices between 2013

and 2016 placed a huge toll on the income of the country. However, despite being the second-largest refugee crisis in terms of magnitude, the Venezuelan crisis has not received global attention and funding. Furthermore, the international community still views the Venezuela Crisis as a regional conflict. The UNHCR established a “Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan,” which calls for 738 million of funding to assist the host countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2019. However, only 23.9% of the 738 million was raised.

The main reason behind the Venezuelan crisis not receiving enough attention or funding from the global funding is its property of having a mixed group of people moving out of Venezuela; some of the Venezuelans do not fit into the category of refugees. Despite so, it is still undeniable that Venezuelans are fleeing a profound economic and political crisis in their country, suffering from hardships that are threatening their fundamental rights. As a result, the UNHCR has continuously called upon the global community to admit Venezuelans as a group of refugees instead of migrants. Because of this effort, the majority of Latin American states have signed this declaration to recognize Venezuelans as refugees, which extended protection to more Venezuelan refugees.

Key Issues

Concerns in Host Countries

As mentioned, being a host country to refugees can incur important costs in terms of their finance, security, and their relationship with other nations. When an influx of refugees enter a country’s borders, these refugees are often in a destitute situation while they might not share the same ethnic and cultural values with the host country. As a result, this may lead to tensions, conflicts, and even violence in society.

Financial costs

Firstly, countries that host refugees can suffer from considerable financial costs. These costs include the payment of salaries and the expenses for providing needed services to refugees. In addition, constructing buildings and purchasing vehicles are also important expenses that a host country will need to contribute. Today, the United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations often recruit and train locals from the government or private sectors to assist with the placement of refugees.

This financial burden that host countries have to bear is increasing in recent years. Germany, one of the countries that accepts a large number of Syrian refugees, had to spend 21 billion euros to support refugees, which is equivalent to 0.7% of their GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Greece, approximately equally as accepting towards refugees, also received severe damage on their economy. Adding on to this, the terrorist attacks in Europe and Turkey is altering the images of refugees negatively, making it more and more difficult for the host countries to receive financial aid.

However, accepting refugees is not as harmful as many countries may believe. In fact, accepting refugees can lead to economic benefits in the long term. Since most accepted refugees are between 20-30 years old, an influx of youth can increase the working population and eventually contribute to the economy. As a result, many countries are still open to the arrival of refugees, providing security that may not be available to the refugees in their previous country. Furthermore, some developing/middle-income countries have also allowed refugees to become legal citizens in their countries.

Ongoing hostilities

Before accepting refugees, a country must ensure that its political state is stable enough to accommodate this large influx of population. If a post-conflict government chooses to accept refugees, they will not be able to provide refugees with sufficient security given that they will be preoccupied with more urgent issues in their country. In addition, governmental corruption will also hamper a country from providing shelter to refugees. Not only can governmental corruption cause economic crises to arise, but it will also cause the country to be more vulnerable to attacks.

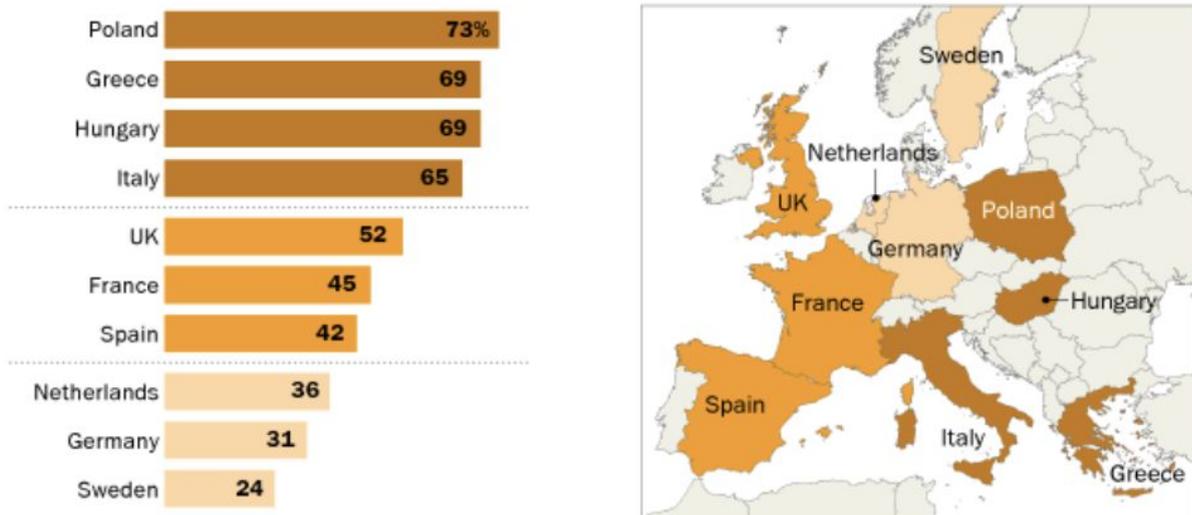
Negative views in society

Accepting refugees can increase a country's diversity. Moreover, it is especially beneficial to countries that are lacking an able group of youth. Given the many benefits of accepting refugees, why are some able countries still refraining themselves from providing assistance and refuge to those who escaped from neighboring countries? Another main factor is the negative views of society. According to the Pew Research Center, how society views refugees plays a large role in how a country responds to a refugee crisis. In eight of the ten European Union (EU) countries surveyed by the research center, the majority of countries display a higher percentage of the population who view refugees negatively. Notably in Poland, 72% of the population agree that refugees come from Iraq or Syria are considered a major threat, compared with only 31% in

Germany.

Many Europeans see refugees from Syria and Iraq as a major threat

% saying large number of refugees leaving Iraq and Syria is a major threat to their country



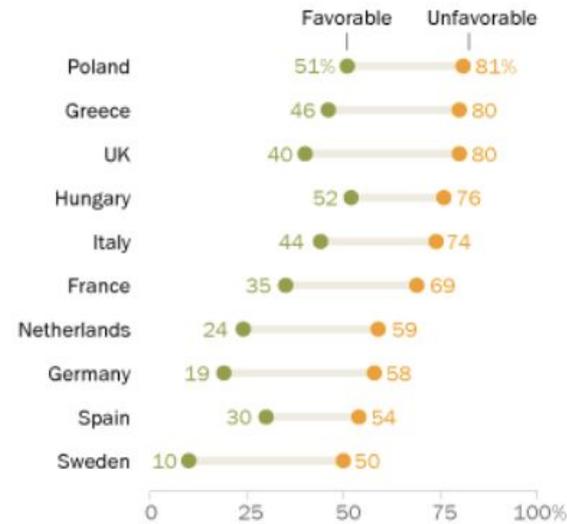
Source: Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey.

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The statistics shown above are due to the fact that the negative view of refugees is tied to the negative views of Muslims. According to the same research center, the majority of countries in the EU display a less favorable attitude towards Muslims, most likely due to the warfare in the Middle East. However, the public opinion that all Muslims are dangerous is not true. However, even though humanity advocates that all religions should be respected by all people, the prejudice in society against Muslims has never been eradicated. Seeing as most refugees in Europe come from nations that are predominantly Muslim, 80% of the UK population have an unfavorable opinion of Muslims, claiming that refugees leaving Iraq and Syria are a major threat to their country.

Perceived refugee threat higher among those with negative view of Muslims

Among those with a ___ view of Muslims in their country, % saying large number of refugees leaving Iraq and Syria is a major threat



Note: Differences shown are statistically significant.
Source: Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey.

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Human Rights Violations

As stated in the introduction, every host country has the responsibility for the protection of refugees that are present on its territory. Nevertheless, despite the fact that many countries are taking in refugees, not all countries that accept refugees provide them with basic necessities to lead a healthy and safe life. Refugee camps are built to provide temporary asylum for people until they are able to return back to society where they can sustain themselves. However, many refugees today are unable to do so and end up staying in refugee camps for years while suffering from the lack of work, lack of freedom of movement, and physical abuse.

The Climate Crisis

Apart from war refugees, climate refugees are also becoming increasingly popular in recent years due to the climate crisis. In fact, the World Bank has projected that three densely populated regions will have around 140 million people displaced within their nations' borders due to climate change by 2050. However, the term "climate refugee" does not officially exist in international law, thus governments cannot provide the protection that climate refugees need due to the fact that the term has not been properly defined in international frameworks. Tying this to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the narrow

definition of refugees is disabling climate refugees from receiving proper aid. With a lack of legal status for people displaced by climate change, these “refugees” are unable to receive support from international organizations. The gap due to a lack of these policies is referred to as a “protection gap” since there is essentially a “gap” within international law regarding the protection of these groups. If the protection gap remains in the near future, then these climate refugees will continue to be one of the most at-risk and overlooked refugee groups in the international community.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Canada

According to the BBC, Canada resettled more refugees than any other country in 2018. Offering refuge to over 28,100 refugees, Canada has long been highly regarded as a world leader in refugee resettlement. Interestingly, 2018 was the first time since 1980 the United States had not accepted the most migrants, which is most likely due to the Trump Administration. During the refugee crisis in Syria, Canada was known for being accepting towards all refugees that are seeking asylum in this country. According to theconversation.com, “Canadians from coast to coast demonstrated their support for the initiative by raising funds and personally sponsoring refugee families.” From this, it is evident that Canadians have been extremely welcoming to Syrian refugees. Furthermore, the overall outcomes of the Syrian refugees’ resettlement experiences in Canada four years later are positive, demonstrating these upward trends in terms of their adjustment to life in Canada and employment in society. Canada’s success in the refugee crisis can be attributed to its culture of making sure that the public is constantly informed of the refugee crisis. As the Canadian government was successful in sharing information with the public, the general public reacted more positively to refugees.

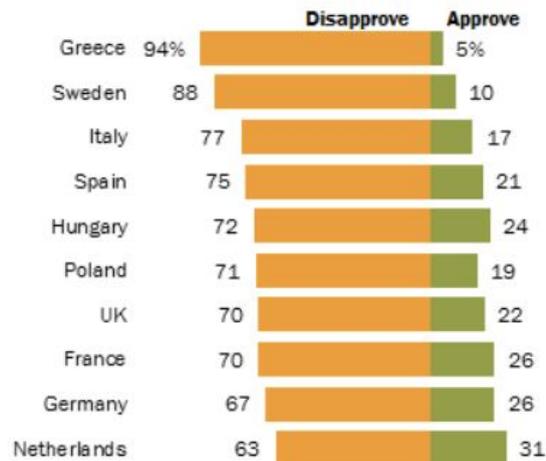
European Union (EU)

Due to the ongoing Syrian Civil War, many European countries in the EU have become a popular place for Syrian refugees and displaced persons to seek refuge and new opportunities. While some countries such as Germany have opened doors to welcome refugees, there are also some countries that do not open their doors to most refugees due to economic and political concerns. On the other hand, an overwhelming majority of Europeans believe that the EU is doing a poor job of handling the refugee crisis. Again according to the Pew Research Center, the majority in every country disapprove of how the European Union is handling refugees. Especially for anti-immigrant parties in Britain (UK Independence

Party), Germany (Alternative for Germany) and the Netherlands (Party for Freedom), the disapproval is notably high in these areas.

Overwhelming majorities in Europe unhappy with EU's handling of refugees

Do you ___ of the way the European Union is dealing with the refugee issue?



Source: Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey.

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Germany

Germany is amongst one of the European countries that accepts the most refugees from the Middle East. Angela Merkel, the current chancellor of Germany, has opened Germany's borders to refugees in order to boost their economic growth. Her welcoming attitude to refugees did not receive praise from all parties; however, her unwavering decision is proven to be beneficial to Germany's demography. Seeing as about 60 percent of the refugees were 25 or younger, the refugees were able to make up for the wavering youth population in Germany.

United States of America

Since the Trump administration, the world has begun to see a decrease in the number of refugees that the U.S. plans to accept. In October 2019, the U.S. planned to admit a maximum of 18,000 refugees in 2020, which is the lowest number of refugees resettled by the U.S. in one year since 1980. During Donald Trump's presidency, refugee resettlement has already decreased before the administration made the announcement. Furthermore, an interesting statistic points out that the U.S. has admitted far more Christmas refugees than Muslim refugees in recent years. In 2019, Christian refugees take up 79% of refugees who moved to the U.S. With Americans being divided in recent years over

whether the U.S. should accept more refugees, this shows how religious status can greatly affect a country's perspective on accepting refugees.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is globally known as one of the most active UN organizations that are working on the current refugee crisis. Its efforts on providing shelter to refugees and displaced persons due to warfare on country borders are often featured on news media. However, the UNHCR still has a role to play in the protection of refugees forced from their homes due to climate change. Today, climate change has become a major individual factor that can cause the movement of refugees/migrants. As the UNHCR is less experienced with the climate crisis, the UNHCR acknowledges that there remain knowledge and data gaps in how climate change affects people and how international law serves to protect those who are affected by this issue. Currently, the UNHCR is focusing on collecting data to better understand the issue of displacement due to climate change, as to help future attempts to create an international legal framework for the protection of the climate refugees.



A displaced Iraqi woman sits outside a tent where she is taking shelter in a camp for internally displaced people.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Description of event
1891	Congress created the Bureau of Immigration to oversee the admission of immigrants, including refugees.

1917	The Immigration Act of 1917 required all immigrants aged 16 years and older to demonstrate that they could read before entering America. This literacy requirement filtered out many immigrants who couldn't read.
1939-1945	The persecution of Jews in WWII in the 1930s created a massive global refugee crisis. This is the first major global refugee crisis in modern history.
1948	The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 was established, aiming to address nearly 7 million displaced persons in Europe as a result of WWII. This act allowed refugees to enter the United States under a quota provided by the U.S. government.
1951	Due to the refugee crisis in WWII, the United Nations established the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This organization is also known as the UN Refugee Agency. The UNHCR has defined the legal protections for refugees, broadening the opportunities for refugees to receive protection from governments.
1951	The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention, is established to make clear of the rights of those who are granted asylum and the responsibilities of nations that grant asylum.
1967	The 1967 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Refugee Protocol removed the "geographical and temporal limits" of the 1951 Convention relating to refugee status, allowing the Convention to be used universally.
May 2011	The Syrian Civil War unfolds as the first refugee camps open in Turkey due to the Syrian Civil War.
Early 2016	More than one million internally displaced persons in Pakistan returned to Afghanistan due to the political tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan. These IDPs are not provided with their basic necessities such as shelter and food resulting in many deaths.
March 2017	The number of people fleeing the Syrian War exceeds five million
May 20, 2018	The Venezuelan president Maduro is re-elected, much to the public's dismay. The Venezuelan Refugee crisis unfolds due to the economic crisis caused by government corruption.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 28 July 1951
- Declaration of the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, 21 January 2014 **(A/RES/68/4)**
- New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, 3 October 2016 **(A/RES/71/1)**
- Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues, 6 December 2016 **(A/RES/71/94)**
- Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia, 1 June 2017 **(A/RES/71/290)**
- Assistance to Palestine refugees, 7 December 2018 **(A/RES/73/92)**
- Operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 7 December 2018 **(A/RES/73/94)**
- Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa, 17 December 2018 **(A/RES/73/150)**

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The Nansen Initiative

Established in 2012 by Switzerland and Norway, the Nansen Initiative is a response of the international community that aims to address the forced displacement due to natural disasters and climate change. As mentioned, “climate refugees” currently do not exist in international law. It is to many’s dismay that those driven from their homes due to natural disasters or climate change are unable to have legal status. Because of this, the Nansen Initiative was formed to protect those displaced by the changing climate, decreasing the protection gap that displaced people due to climate currently suffer from. Their framework includes the three following elements: 1) Preparedness before displacement; 2) Protection and assistance during displacement; 3) Transition to solutions in the aftermath of the natural disaster. Despite the strong motivations of this attempt, the Nansen Initiative was not widely supported internationally seeing as it is funded only by Switzerland and Norway. As a result, it wasn’t able to make an enormous impact on the wellbeing of climate refugees due to its lack of funds and power in the international community. Even though it is considered ineffective, the Nansen Initiative was a living proof of increased awareness regarding this issue.

The Nansen Initiative

Besides local organizations that aim to protect refugees, there are also many countries that open their doors to welcome war refugees, most notably Germany. As stated earlier, Germany is one of the European countries that accept a large number of refugees, providing them with language courses and

plenty of job opportunities. However, the Refugee Agency has stated that Germany's attempt to accept refugees is only curing the "mere symptoms, not root causes." Furthermore, some other countries have even gone as far as accepting refugees that surpass their quota, instigating economic crises in their country.

Possible Solutions

Economic support for host countries

One possible solution is to provide more economic support for host countries. Many host countries such as Turkey constantly accept refugees that are exceeding their quota, which will undermine their governmental structure and economy in the long-term. Consequently, international organizations will have to provide additional support to countries as such. In order to mitigate this issue, countries should also come together and discuss how economic resources will be distributed. In order to prevent a host country from having too many displaced persons at its border, countries can also consider establishing legal routes to prevent refugees from being evacuated to the same places.

Holding informed public debates, education, and social media

One of the reasons why Canada was able to successfully host a horde of refugees without bearing much economic burden is due to its informed public. By weakening the populist rhetoric and negative views towards refugees, Canada successfully recorded and shared public debate footage with the general public to ensure that the public's view on refugees is balanced and informed. If all host countries can also maintain an informed public, prejudice to refugees might be eradicated, of course not completely, through measures such as public debates, education, and social media.

International Cooperation on Policies

As mentioned many times earlier, not all displaced people officially exist under international law, depriving these people of their right to be protected and guaranteed human rights. Specifically for climate refugees, they need a legal status under international law in order for countries to provide them with proper assistance. As a result, another solution would be for countries to come together to review international laws to establish guidelines and policies that deal with climate refugees. These frameworks should aim to protect the refugees, provide aid, and assist them in returning to their origin if needed. In order to do this, it is essential to determine an inclusive definition of climate refugees in order to ensure

that economic resources are not wasted or put into use. In order to tackle this issue, countries must also discuss how these policies can be incorporated into international law.

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Appendices

- I. https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2017-09/Global_Advisor_Immigration.pdf
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