

Forum: United Nations High Commissioners for Refugees (UNHCR)

Issue #2: Impact of Covid-19 on Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced people

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Introduction

The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) was first reported on December 31 of 2019 and soon became a global pandemic on March 11. It has affected everyone around the world including refugees, migrants, and internally displaced people. During the age of Covid-19, 79.5 million people have been displaced, due to conflict, persecution, and more, while also having to deal with a global pandemic.

This virus has affected the number of resources that can be provided to, and the overall health and sanitation of refugee camps, and has caused fear for nations allowing refugees and migrants across their borders. Causing refugees, migrants, and internally displaced people to not have the ability to have a safe refuge, and at higher risk of health issues, due to the lack of resources.

Many of the individuals had departed their native country because of war or poor economic situations, only to be confronted with COVID-19's extra obstacles. Many people have been stuck or forced to stay in small, improvised shelters or detention centers due to travel limitations such as border closures, suspension of resettlement travel, and last-minute deportation. Many migrants

cited a lack of access to health services or concern of seeking them out in these unpredictable, hazardous circumstances, even if they were exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms.



Image of the Bab Al-Nour internally displaced persons camp in Syria being sanitized

Image: REUTERS/Khalil Ashawi - RC2TRF9PRG3F

Definition of Key Terms

Refugees

People who have crossed an international boundary to seek safety in another country after fleeing war, violence, conflict, or persecution.

Migrants

A person who relocates from one location to another, usually in search of better employment or living conditions.

Internally displaced people (IDPs)

People that have not crossed a border in search of safety. They are on the run in their own country, unlike refugees.

Refuge

A place that provides shelter or protection.

Pandemic

An epidemic of a disease that spreads across a large geographic area (such as several countries or continents) and affects a large proportion of the population: A pandemic is a disease outbreak that affects a large number of people at the same time. Alternatively, an outbreak or the result of a quick spread, growth, or development.

Sanitation

Factors affecting public health, including the availability of safe drinking water and proper waste disposal.

General Overview

United Nations High Commissioners for Refugees (UNHCR)

The UNHCR was founded on December 14, 1950, after the second world war. It was created at that time to help millions of Europeans who had fled and/or lost their homes. Since then the UNHCR has helped out during many crises including the Hungarian Revolution, in 1956, and in the 1960s during the decolonization of

Africa, which produced numerous refugees. During the start of the 21st century, UNHCR helped with a major crisis in other areas such as Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, specifically also helping internally displaced people. Over the past 70 years, the UNHCR has helped over 50 million refugees. ("History of UNHCR") The UNHCR's role is to assist and protect refugees everywhere, to safeguard their rights and wellbeing. In this circumstance, the UNHCR is working to provide comprehensive protection and assistance response to people forced to flee who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The UNHCR is striving to meet their expanding needs in schooling, mental health, and psychosocial support, advocating for their inclusion in vaccination plans, child protection and prevention, and response to sexual and gender-based violence.

Access to Education

If no immediate effort is made to address the pandemic's consequences on refugee schooling, the future of millions of young refugees living in vulnerable and marginalized areas is jeopardized. Girls who are refugees are particularly vulnerable. As a result of the pandemic, the Malala Fund anticipates that half of all refugee girls in secondary school will not return when schools reopen at the start of the 2020 school year. In many parts of the world, refugee children already endure educational inequality. COVID19 has forced many countries to close schools and reduce the number of students in classrooms. When governments respond to the requirements of schoolchildren during the epidemic, such as by giving remote schooling, refugees should not be neglected, but sadly are. All students must be able to return to school when it reopens if schools close. This entails assisting families so that parents are never

forced to choose between sending their children to school or sending them to work in order to keep their families fed.

Physical and Mental Health

The following recommended risk reduction techniques have proven difficult for refugee communities:

- Physical separation is difficult for many migrants who reside in poor metropolitan settings (60 percent of refugees live in cities) or heavily populated camps with inadequate health infrastructure.
- COVID-19 is made more dangerous by the unavailability of face masks, protective clothing, clean water, and soap.
- Public health services are in short supply for refugees. Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, for example, are unable to access health services without presenting identification credentials, which is a common problem given that the majority of refugees in Lebanon are unregistered.
- If infected with the virus, refugee populations frequently lack the financial means to receive effective treatment.

Refugees and others who have been displaced are already traumatized by fleeing conflict, violence, persecution, and prejudice. The stress and anxiety of getting COVID-19 or losing their jobs, as well as the isolation and loneliness, felt during lockdowns, have aggravated mental health problems.

Refugee Camps

The lack of humanitarian groups in the camps due to COVID-19 restrictions has resulted in an increase in child labor, sexual and gender-based abuse, and the risk of people trafficking in the last year. Furthermore, since the outbreak of the epidemic, there has been an upsurge in underage marriages, which are typically considered as a substitute for schooling or labor. It has also been hard for organizations/countries to control the spread of COVID-19 throughout refugee camps, many of which have had to close down, leaving no space/home/refuge for refugees, migrants, and/or internally displaced people.

Asylum seekers

Asylum seeking is a human right, but it has come under fire as countries try to restrict the virus. At the height of COVID-19, 168 nations had blocked their borders completely or partially, with roughly 100 of them making no exceptions for asylum seekers. Individuals have been forced to return to danger and persecution in some circumstances. According to the UNHCR, governments can protect their nations from the epidemic while also maintaining equal asylum access.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Jordan

Jordan, a Middle Eastern country, was the first to begin giving vaccinations to refugees as early as the week of January 10th, 2021. Because Jordan has the world's biggest number of refugees, the country's decision to vaccinate this population will hasten the country's viral protection timeline.

Lebanon

Lebanon is a Middle Eastern country with a population of approximately 6.8 million people, 1.5 million of whom are refugees. The Lebanese government declared in February 2021 that refugees would also receive immunizations, and by February 13th of that year, the country had received its first 28,500 doses of the Pfizer vaccine from Brussels. Later, the Minister of Public Health announced that the vaccine will be available to anybody living on Lebanese soil. Over 500,000 people have signed up for the vaccine so far. Over 11,000 Syrian and Palestinian refugees, two of the country's main asylum groups, have registered out of the 500,000.

Germany

With about 1.1 million refugees, Germany is the most populous country in Europe. Starting in the second round of qualifying groups, Germany formally labeled asylum seekers - eligible for the vaccine in December 2020. In February 2021, a COVID-19 outbreak hit a Cologne refugee camp, making this critical. - Nearly a third of the population was infected, demonstrating how quickly infection can spread in small spaces.

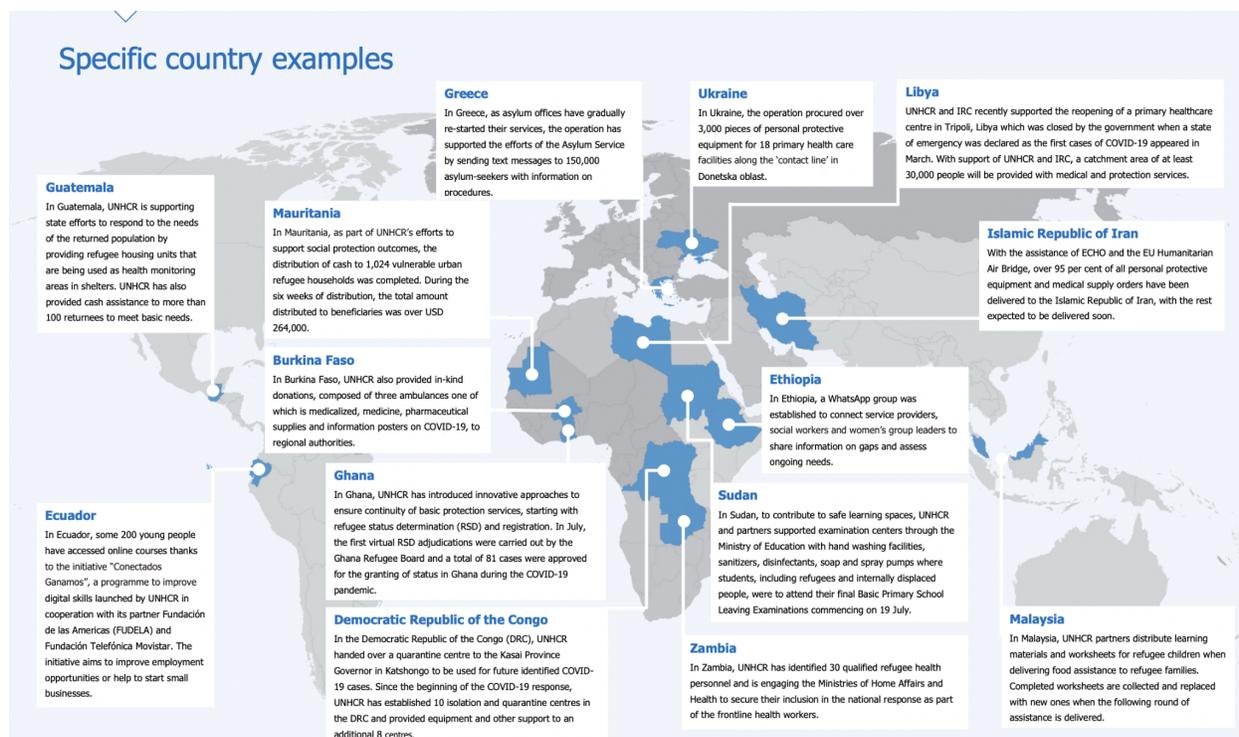
United Kingdom

In comparison to other European countries, the UK welcomes roughly 133,000 refugees. On February 8, 2021, the UK's National Health Service announced that recipients of the COVID-19 vaccine will not be required to establish their identity or residency status in order to be vaccinated. COVID-19 has caused around 4.3

million illnesses and 126,000 fatalities in the United Kingdom as of April 2021. With such a large number of people, the vaccine campaign must include the most vulnerable, such as refugees. The UK's strategy of making the vaccination available to everybody was a novel way of saving lives and safeguarding more people from the global pandemic.

South Africa

Undocumented migrants in South Africa have been subjected to xenophobic attacks by security authorities, who have harassed them and arrested them for minor charges before being detained in overcrowded detention centers. Migrants have reportedly endured assault, forced isolation, limited legal aid, and congestion, making it impossible to prevent the virus from spreading and posing serious health hazards. Due to school and training center closures, the epidemic has had a substantial impact on refugee children and young people's access to education. Kenya, the Central African Republic, Niger, and Mali are all examples of this type of situation.



https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/28072020_UNHCR%20Global%20COVID-19%20Emergency%20Response.pdf

Timeline of Events

<u>Date</u>	<u>Description of event</u>
1945	The UN was formed
1950	The UNHCR was formed
December 2019	The first case of COVID-19
February 2020	The Secretary-General of the United Nations was asked to activate the UN crisis management policy, which met for the first time on February 11th.
March 2020	COVID-19 is now considered a global pandemic
September 2020	The Moria Refugee Camp was shut down due to Covid-19 and

asylum-seekers set fire to the camp and destroyed it, permanently closing it.

December 2020

Cox Bazar (the world's largest refugee camp) in Bangladesh - Covid-19 spread.

June 2021

Around 91 countries started providing vaccinations to refugees
Uses a global platform to raise awareness about the number of

July 2021

people displaced - Olympic Refugee Athletes during Opening Ceremony

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released a Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 in March 2019, describing the responsibilities and tasks of many organizations in addressing the pandemic's humanitarian, health, and economic impacts. The goal of this approach is to deliver COVID-19 help to 250 million people.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

With such a critical issue that continues to exist around the world and has garnered so much attention, the UN has made numerous efforts to tackle it. The UN has put in place protection and control mechanisms, improved protection monitoring, safeguarded earnings and livelihoods, prevented and responded to gender-based violence, promoted mental health and psychological well-being, and restored schooling.

In terms of:

- Implemented protection monitoring: To minimize the spread of the disease and help vulnerable refugee families fulfill basic requirements through cash support interventions, boosted the delivery of relief commodities like soap, clean water, hygiene kits, and shelter materials.
- Strengthened protection monitoring: working collaboratively with governments to ensure the rights and protection of persons who have been forcefully displaced, particularly the ability to seek refuge notwithstanding border closures.
- Protected incomes and livelihoods: With economic aid to low-income households and agricultural investments, food security can be improved.
- Prevented and responded to gender-based violence: Strengthening the capability and accessibility of gender-based violence protection actions and programs.
- Promoted mental health and psychosocial well-being: Developing novel field methods and activities to preserve refugees' psychosocial well-being and to prevent or treat mental health disorders.
- Restored education: Investing in online and offline distance learning, as well as assisting in the safe reopening of schools in compliance with health guidelines.

Possible Solutions

COVID-19 has affected everyone around the world, sadly refugees, migrants, and internally displaced people are sometimes not the main focus, but they need help. Taking action to find viable solutions to this issue is extremely important. It is important to consider the mental health effects on refugees, migrants, and internally displaced people. Along with the effects on refugee camps and how to control/prevent the spread of COVID-19, the effects on access to education, jobs/earning, pregnant mothers, along with sexual and gender-based violence. It can also help to take a look at what the United Nations is trying to do and improve those fields and create solutions that we can use in case of another virus outbreak in the future or a similar situation.

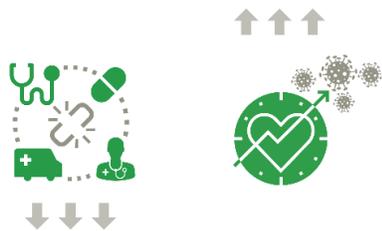
Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

Goal 3 is essential for the issue of the impact of COVID-19 on Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced People. According to the UN, the goal is to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.” (United Nations) Due to COVID-19, there is an extensive impact of COVID-19 on the health and well-being of Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).



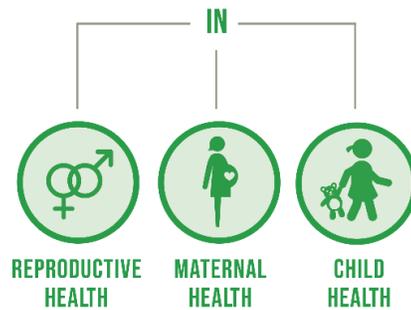
ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

THE PANDEMIC
HAS HALTED OR REVERSED PROGRESS
 IN HEALTH AND **SHORTENED LIFE EXPECTANCY**



90% OF COUNTRIES ARE STILL REPORTING ONE OR MORE DISRUPTIONS TO ESSENTIAL HEALTH SERVICES

A DECADE OF PROGRESS



COULD BE STALLED OR REVERSED BY COVID-19

A LACK OF DATA
HINDERS UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRUE IMPACT OF COVID-19



COUNTRIES WITH DEATH REGISTRATION SYSTEM
 AT LEAST 75% COMPLETE



HEALTH WORKERS

— IN SHORT SUPPLY IN MANY REGIONS —
 HAVE BEEN STRETCHED TO THEIR LIMITS
 BY THE PANDEMIC



NURSES AND MIDWIVES



SCALING UP INVESTMENT IN UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE IS ESSENTIAL

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Helpful Resources

1. <https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/sites/internet/files/2021-06/9789240028906-eng.pdf>
 - a. This resource provides great, trustable information regarding trends of public health and migration policies and practices regarding refugees and migrants that are impacted by COVID-19.
2. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/coronavirus-covid-19.html>
 - a. This resource provides a general overview of what the UNHCR is trying to do in order to help refugees, migrants, and internally displaced people impacted by COVID-19. It is a good resource for understanding general information such as more about COVID-19, refugees in general, and possible solutions and solutions that have already been implemented.
3. https://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/impact_of_covid_on_refugees_and_asylum_seekers.pdf
 - a. This resource is great for understanding more about the impact on asylum seekers specifically along with refugees, it gives a quick overview and is easy to understand.
4. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-impact-of-coronavirus-covid-19-on-forcibly-displaced-persons-in-developing-countries-88ad26de/>
 - a. This resource helps understand more about the impact of COVID-19 specifically towards forcibly displaced persons in various countries.
5. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-pandemic-could-devastate-refugee-migrant-and-internally-displaced>

- a. This resource is great to understand what is being done in the UN to help solve this issue.
6. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/refugee-populations.html>
 - a. This resource provides information regarding the guidelines and precautions that have been set forth by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to protect Refugees. It is great for understanding and creating possible solutions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 amongst migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people.