

The Role of the International Community in Providing Relief to Host Countries and Refugees - and the Case of Egypt

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Introduction

The issue of asylum is one of the most important issues facing society today, given the armed conflicts or internal struggles that many countries are experiencing. These conflicts stem from multiple causes, whether based on race, language, religion, gender, or political affiliation. This leads to the violation of the rights of these groups, the most important of which is the right to live in a safe society where they can thrive. Consequently, these individuals seek, or more precisely, flee, to other countries with safe havens, seeking asylum in a safer environment.

Over the past century, the international community has witnessed fierce wars in which the most sophisticated means of evil, harm, destruction, and devastation have been employed. The world has witnessed significant transformations that have posed serious threats to states' ability to respond to sudden, large-scale human influxes. The increase in violence and systematic human rights violations around the world have led to the emergence of increasingly difficult-to-solve refugee and displacement situations. Therefore, the rights of refugees must be respected, whether before, during, or after they have been granted asylum, while taking into account compliance with all laws governing host countries and providing these countries with all forms of support.

The Concept of Refugee in International Law and International Conventions

Definition of Refugee in the 1951 Refugee Convention

The 1951 UN Refugee Convention defines the concept of refugee in Article 1, paragraph 2, as follows: "Every person who, as a result of events occurring on 1 January 1951 and owing to 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; and every person, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to fear, is unwilling to return to that country."

It is noteworthy that this definition places a time limit on the date of asylum, which implies that refugees after 1 December are not covered by the provisions of the Convention and therefore do not include all migrants and refugees, particularly those in developing countries. This necessitated the issuance of a special refugee protocol issued by the United Nations. The United Nations adopted the Convention in 1967, making the term "refugee" applicable to anyone who meets the other conditions, without specifying a specific period of time. The definition remained unchanged.

The concept of a refugee according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Refugees are legally defined as persons who are outside their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, and who are unable or, owing to that fear, are unwilling to return to their country of origin.

Definition of Refugee in International Humanitarian Law

In international humanitarian law, a refugee refers to victims fleeing the dangers posed by armed conflict to places and organizations where they are afforded protection. The first place to which victims resort is the International Committee of the Red Cross, as it is authorized by the Geneva Convention to protect the most vulnerable individuals.

A refugee is considered a person with a threatened status. An individual is a refugee either on an individual basis, by fleeing alone or with his or her family from the country where he or she is subject to persecution to a country of asylum, or as part of a mass exodus as a result of political, religious, military, or other circumstances that expose him or her to the risk of persecution.

Therefore, to be granted refugee status, the following conditions must be met:

1. The person must have a well-founded fear of persecution on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political affiliation or opinion.
2. The person must be outside the country of his or her nationality or habitual residence, if the person is stateless.
3. The person is unable or unwilling to seek the protection of his or her country of origin or habitual residence, if the person is stateless.

Reasons for asylum under the 1951 Refugee Convention

Fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Reasons for Asylum Outside the Convention: "Statutory or De facto Refugees"

- 1- Wars and Armed Conflicts
- 2- Civil Wars and Wars of Secession
- 3- Military Coups and Political Crises
- 4- Colonial Practices and Racist Regimes (Particularly in Third World Countries and the Phenomenon of Settlement Colonialism in Palestine)
- 5- Natural Disasters (Drought, Famine, Earthquakes, Floods)
- 6- Asylum Due to Border Disputes
- 7- Religious and Ethnic Persecution

Rights and Duties of Refugees under International Law

Refugees have several distinct rights stipulated in the 1951 Refugee Convention, including general rights, specific rights, and exceptional rights. These are briefly explained below:

First: General Rights

- 1- The Right to Housing
- 2- The Right of Movement
- 3- The Right to Work
- 4- The Right to Public Education
- 5- The Right to Relief
- 6- The Right to Join Associations
- 7- The Right to Practice Religious Rituals
- 8- The Right to Social Security

Second: Special Rights

These are specific rights. The refugee enjoys these rights, given his legal status, which is different from that of the country's nationals. These rights are as follows:

1. Family rights and related rights
2. The right to ownership of movable and immovable property
3. The right to literary and industrial property

Third: Customary rights

1. Non-refoulement: This includes not rejecting or returning a refugee at the border, as well as not returning him after being permitted to enter a country where he may be subjected to persecution.

2. The principle of non-refoulement: This is one of the fundamental principles of human rights.

Fourth: Exceptional Rights of Refugees

1. Exemption from Reciprocity.
2. Temporary Protection. "Some countries adopt a limited definition of the term refugee, which does not include persons fleeing armed conflict but who are protected under other regional agreements."

Refugee Duties under International Law

1. Adherence to the laws and regulations of the country of asylum
2. Refraining from engaging in hostile political or military activity against any country

Implications of the Influx of Refugees in Host Communities

The phenomenon of seeking asylum can have benefits and advantages in some cases. Reports indicate that European countries, particularly Germany, benefit from refugees, as refugees arriving on European shores, particularly from Syria, are typically young, educated, and skilled members of society. As for the Arab countries hosting refugees, they suffer from political, economic, and social problems, making it difficult for them to receive more refugees for fear of exacerbating these problems. Other Arab countries that have not received large numbers of refugees, like foreign countries, fear exposing themselves to social pressures and movements, especially since a large percentage of their populations are foreigners.

The most prominent internal and regional repercussions of the refugee crisis:

1) Internal Repercussions

There is a strong relationship between refugee flows and internal conflicts, which manifests itself in several forms. Among these are the facilitation of the proliferation of weapons by refugees, as well as ideologies and political orientations that may differ from the foreign policies of the host countries. For example, some Palestinian refugees in Jordan oppose the Israeli government's policies toward Israel.

Refugees compete with the local population for resources, leading to negative economic and security impacts. An example of this is the influx of large numbers of Syrian refugees into Jordan, which has exacerbated the unemployment and housing crisis, increased competition for job and housing opportunities, and overcrowded schools and healthcare centers.

Refugees may have gathered in the host country as internal groups belonging to a similar ethnicity or political faction, with similar support and resources. The presence of Palestinian

refugees in Lebanon has had a significant impact on the involvement of Palestinian parties in the Palestinian-Lebanese conflict.

2) Regional Implications

Several regional impacts of cross-border refugee movements can be identified, the most important of which are:

- Recruitment of some refugees by extremist groups
- Changing the sectarian and ethnic landscape
- Deterioration of bilateral relations between refugee-sending and receiving countries

Pressing challenges facing refugees in Arab countries

The general policy currently followed by Arab governments regarding refugees is to provide refugees with temporary housing until two permanent solutions are reached - resettlement and repatriation.

The most pressing challenges facing refugees in Arab countries can be classified into each of the following categories:

- Influenced by political events in host countries.
- Labor market problems: "Arab governments place reservations on refugees' right to work. In Egypt, for example, refugees of Arab nationality are treated as any other foreigner with regard to employment, as they are subject to Law No. 137 of 1981, and refugees are required to obtain a work permit."
- Inadequate medical services.
- Refugees and housing: "Refugees face exploitation by some landlords, which is evident in the continuous increase in property rents."
- Refugees and education.

Countries Hosting the Largest Number of Refugees

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued its annual report for 2022, which stated that the country with the largest refugee population was Syria, with approximately 7 million refugees, while Turkey ranked first among the host countries:

- Turkey (3.7) million refugees, most of them Syrians
- Colombia (2.5) million refugees and asylum seekers
- Germany (2.2) million
- Pakistan (1.5) million
- Uganda (1.5) million

The Role of International Organizations in Protecting Refugees

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The primary reason for the international community's failure to resolve the refugee problem during the period following World War I and after World War II was the lack of a unified policy addressing the refugee issue prior to the establishment of the UNHCR. It is a subsidiary organ of the United Nations General Assembly tasked with protecting and assisting refugees and seeking durable solutions to their problems under the supervision and guidance of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme.

The main functions of the High Commissioner:

1. Providing protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees.
2. Finding durable solutions to refugee problems.

These durable solutions include:

1. Working toward voluntary repatriation to the country of origin.
2. Integration in the country of asylum.
3. Resettlement in a third country.

There are a set of standards that the UNHCR must apply to refugees, such as:

- Refraining from punishing them or subjecting them to any inappropriate treatment on the grounds that their presence in the country is considered illegal.
- Preserving their basic civil rights.
- Providing necessary assistance and providing them with the basic necessities of life, such as food, shelter, and basic facilities.
- Not subjecting them to any cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. 5- Providing them with protection without discrimination.

The most prominent challenges facing the Commission in its work:

- The Commission is facing a serious decline in funding for its humanitarian operations.
- The refugee problem has become a threat to international peace and security, negatively impacting the Commission's performance. It has also become a global problem affecting a large number of countries around the world.
- The illegal use of the concept of asylum by migrants.

UNHCR announced in a report issued in June 2021 that the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide exceeded 82.4 million by the end of 2020, as a result of persecution, war, and conflict. Of these, 26.4 million were refugees, nearly half of whom were under the age of 18.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established in 1949, and the UN General Assembly mandated it to provide basic services such as education, health, relief, and social services. There are 5 million Palestinian refugees eligible for UNRWA services in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

The Egyptian Case in Providing Support to Refugees

The Egyptian state has adopted successful policies and a vision in dealing with the refugee issue, in light of its commitment to adhering to international conventions. It has succeeded in halting illegal immigration flows, strengthening land and sea border control, and establishing a national legislative framework to combat migrant smuggling. Furthermore, Egypt hosts 6 million refugees and migrants of various nationalities, treating them without discrimination and integrating them into Egyptian society, providing them with access to all basic and social services, on a par with Egyptian citizens. Furthermore, it guarantees their freedom of movement and prevents their isolation in camps or shelters.

The following details the monitoring of refugee support and their consideration as an essential part of Egypt's comprehensive vision for human rights.

- Refugees enjoy basic services on a par with Egyptian citizens, despite Egypt being one of the countries receiving the lowest levels of funding to cover the needs of refugees.
- The executive regulations of Law No. 2 of 2018 on Comprehensive Health Insurance include the inclusion of foreigners residing in Egypt and refugees in the comprehensive health insurance system.
- Expanding the scope of numerous health campaigns to include refugees and asylum seekers.
- Children from Arab countries, numbering more than 65,000 students, benefit from educational services and the right to enroll in public schools without discrimination between them and Egyptian citizens.
- Providing Syrian refugees with the right to full and free access to the same public services, such as healthcare, higher education, and basic education.
- Submitting implementable proposals to the African Union on the situation of refugees at the First Global Refugee Forum and the Aswan International Forum for Peace and Development.

In this regard, during the World Youth Forum 2019, President Abdel fattah El-Sisi expressed his rejection of the use of the term "refugees," emphasizing that Egypt uses the term "guests of Egypt" instead of the term "refugees," stressing that they are treated with the highest

standard of care, and that it is unacceptable or permissible to treat them negatively, as they furthermore contribute to the economy and social fabric of Egypt's society, with some owning businesses in Egypt.

Nationalities and Numbers of Refugees in Egypt in 2022

According to the Egyptian government, the country hosts approximately 6 million migrants, as previously explained. Other bodies, most notably the United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM), believe this estimate has recently increased to approximately 9 million, according to the organization's latest statistics issued in August 2022.

The refugee population is ranked as follows:

Country of Origin	Number of Refugees
Sudan	4,000,000
Syria	1,500,000
Libya	1,000,000
Saudi Arabia	6,000,000
South Sudan	3,000,000
Somalia	2,000,000
Iraq	150,000
Palestine	135,932
Ethiopia	17,000
Yemen	1,000,000
Other Nationalities (132 Nationalities)	109,650

Accordingly, the total number is: **9,012,582.**

Functions of the Egyptian Red Crescent

The Egyptian Red Crescent Society is an aid agency for government authorities in times of peace and war. It is a member of the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) and Red Crescent Societies and works in five areas: relief and disaster response, health development, social development, capacity building of the Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC), and strengthening cooperation with the international community.