

What Happens When UN & NGOs Encounter Refugees?

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Abstract: UN and NGOs are often criticized of being inertia for failing to solve or even relieve the refugee problem. However, refugee problem is dynamic and overintricate. This article reviewed the transmutation of the refugee problem, and achievements that UN and NGOs have done.

Keywords: Global Policy, Refugee, UN, NGO, Global Collaboration

1. Introduction

Through the history, every single war created a great number of refugees. There is a famous adage in China that talks about this: “It’s better to be a dog in peaceful time than be a man in a chaotic period.” Those people who lost their houses and property become extremely impoverished, and they can hardly find enough food and water. For those refugees’ kids, they don’t have chance to get education, and this can cause further problems. So there are some UN and NGOs that try to solve the refugee issue, and their work alleviate this issue efficiently though there are still some shortages they need to work on.

Since 1950, after the Second World War, the office of the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR) was established to solve a short-term problem - there was a war between Soviet Union and Hungary, and it created a great refugee flow. And in 1951, the Status of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was enacted, which is a cornerstone of the guide of global refugee assistance and legalized the UNHCR.

Since 80s’ in 20th century, under the world situation that became more and more complex, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) started cooperating with United Nation frequently. As third-party organizations, NGOs can act as a more acceptable way to solve problems among countries, which the United Nation may sometimes face some difficulties since the problems are always happening among its own members.

In general, there are two different aspects of the cooperation between the United Nation and NGO. First, the NGOs work as assistances to provide consulting, monitoring, and decision influencing. For instance, local NGOs may provide useful information to help the UN officer to know more about the local situation, and furthermore, make better decisions. The second aspect of the cooperation between UN and NGO is when these two are focusing on doing the same kind of thing. As an official organization, UN can get more support from the government; and NGO as organizations that always don’t have limitations compare to those organizations that controlled by sovereign states. Furthermore, in general, NGOs are not pursuing profits. So

that they can work more flexible when they solve problems. The ethnic conflicts and political struggles always are great obstacles that hinder the cooperation among countries, but the NGO don't need to worry about these, and can promote not only the cooperation between society and government, but also the cooperation among different countries easier.

In this paper, I'll talk about these three aspects: 1 where do refugees come from; 2 effective things that UN and NGOs did; and 3 Limitations that UN and NGOs have.

2. Where do refugees come from?

In recent years, Middle East has become the hotspot in the world. There were about 60 millions refugees in the world in 2014, and 16 million of them were from Middle East.

Table1: UNHCR, (2015). Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2014.

UNHCR-Bureaux											
- Central Africa-Great Lakes	1,105,743	1,462	1,107,205	938,693	121,137	32,686	3,274,071	1,171,976	-	295,221	6,002,296
- East and Horn of Africa	2,830,873	72,582	2,903,455	2,401,112	217,329	16,464	4,971,222	214,486	-	216,337	8,539,293
- Southern Africa	35,784	-	35,784	3,809	52,026	14,354	-	-	-	64,326	166,490
- Western Africa	363,524	36,418	399,942	288,273	114,133	33,351	1,311,834	155,006	-	71,546	2,085,812
Total Africa	4,335,924	110,462	4,446,386	3,631,887	504,625	96,855	9,557,127	1,541,468	-	647,430	16,793,891
Asia and Pacific	3,980,834	280,132	4,260,966	3,039,079	355,124	18,345	2,731,090	174,901	-	282,330	7,822,756
Middle East and North Africa	4,499,740	43,865	4,543,605	3,972,520	236,432	10,913	11,926,016	105,772	-	8,689	16,831,427
Europe	537,101	316	537,417	43,136	158,546	699	2,016,235	450	-	68,585	2,781,932
Americas	209,738	258,148	467,886	105,761	104,845	11	6,044,151	-	-	29,383	6,646,276
Various/Stateless	127,492	1,564	129,056	2,114	444,893	-	-	-	3,492,263	16,350	4,082,562
Total	13,690,829	694,487	14,385,316	10,794,497	1,804,465	126,823	32,274,619	1,822,591	3,492,263	1,052,767	54,958,844

In the Middle East, after the Arab Spring in 2010, people overthrown some dictators but were unable to build new governments in a short time. As a result, religious force, government force, rebel groups, and so many other forces started fighting against each other, which threw so many countries in the Middle East area into chaos. Some countries stabilized their situation due to government's' concession in very short time, while others still haven't finished their anarchic condition today. (Cetti, Fran. "Border")

In particular, Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, Iraq, Bahrain Island, Libya, and Syria have constant riots. Iraq, Libya, and Syria are in the worst situation among these countries; civil wars are still going on in these three countries. In the constant chaos, peoples' houses got destroyed, they can neither go to work nor go to school, and their lives are under serious threat. So Middle East, especially Iraq, Libya, and Syria, become the major source countries of refugees for these years. In 2014, there are 3,865,720 refugees from Syria. Geographically, Europe is next to Middle East, and Europe is one of the richest areas in the world with perfect refugee assistance system. As a result, a great number of refugees go to Europe. There are 283,532 refugees and migrants entered Europe illegally, and 220,194 of them went through the Mediterranean Sea and entered European Union's maritime borders. European Union received 626,715 asylum claims, more than 120,000 people from Syria, and Afghanistan, Kosovo, Eritrea, and Serbia sent more than 30,000 refugees separately, and there are more than 20,000 refugees from Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, and Russia separately. (UNHCR, "Global")

A previous peak in people crossing to Europe occurred in 2011 as a result of the Libyan civil conflict, when 141,051 people were registered in the Frontex database as entering Europe in an irregular manner via land and sea borders. Nearly half (46%) of the persons detected on land and sea routes in 2011 travelled on the Central Mediterranean route.

This material shows that in 2011, before the EU strengthens the Frontex in 2012, there were more refugees and migrants chose land routes than sea routes to enter Europe. But after this, refugees and migrants tend to choose the sea routes to enter Europe:

In 2013, numbers on the Central Mediterranean route rose to above 45,000, then jumped again by 277% in 2014.

Compare to the refugees that went to Europe, refugees who cannot afford to go abroad and have to stay in their country are the majority part. In 2014, among about 4 million Syrian refugees, only about 90,000 went to Europe. To get a ship ticket to go to Europe can cost hundreds dollars, and so only few middle-class Syrian can afford it. Lots of refugees who stay in Syria joined the war, or became volunteers for certain force. It's very dangerous, since they have air attack almost every day. And fighting had never stopped for these years.

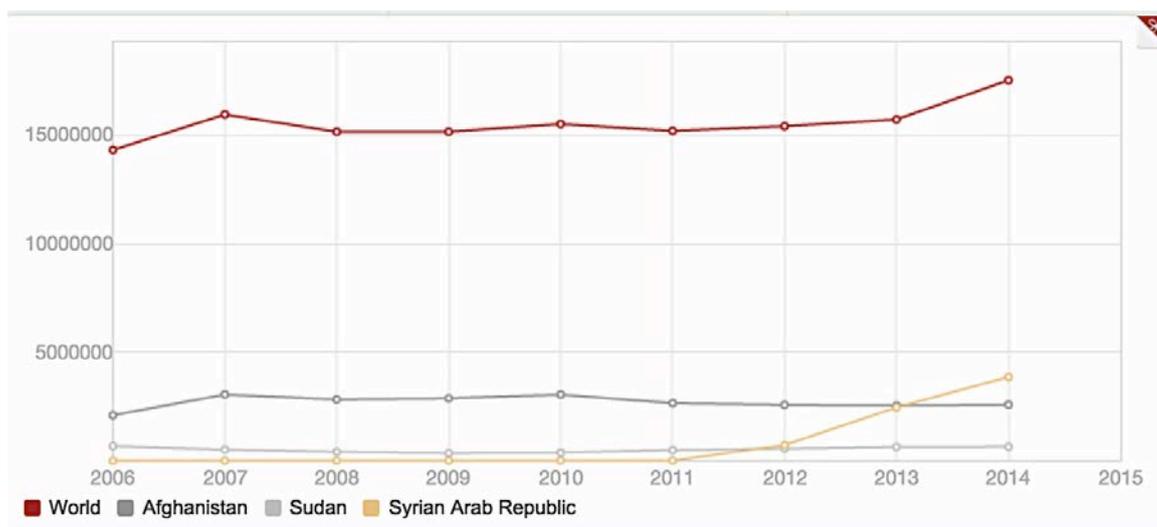


Figure1:Data.worldbank.org, Refugee population by country or territory of origin.

There is a huge difference between economic migrants and refugees. Refugees are those people whose lives get threat under violence or political persecution in their hometown, and the economic migrants are those who want to pursue a better job. Refugees can get assistance and help from the UN and other countries while economic migrants cannot. But it is really difficult to identify whether someone is refugee or not. Those economic migrants can get a real Syrian passport from some illegal merchants, which cost only 2,000 dollars, and economic migrants and refugees are always mix together.

In all refugees that the UN recorded, more than half of them are children. It means these little refugees cannot bring any labor force to host country, and the host country need to spent more on taking care of them. But for those people who come from Syria, 65% of them are young male that want to find jobs. It may cause of the refugees don't want to bring their family members to take the risk with them, and so there are so many male refugees apply for family reunion for their family members after they get job and settle down in Europe, so their family members can go to Europe legally if the application get accepted.

3. Effective things that UN & NGOs did

In general, UNHCR are working on these things: Advocacy, Alternatives to Camps, Assistance, Asylum and Migration, Capacity Building, Durable Solutions, Emergency Response, Environment and Climate Change, Fund-Raising, and Protection. In Syria and Iraq, UNHCR are mainly focusing on supporting them with core relief items and advocating other countries, organizations, and international society to help them. Instead of these short-term aids, UNHCR are trying to build some durable programs, too. For instance, their long-term goal includes

“strengthen its partnerships with states, governmental and non-governmental organizations and civil society, ... , in particular will continue to widen and deepen its relations with key actors in countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.”

Since governments and other powers do not control most of NGOs, every NGO is different. Except the most common one that provides core relieves to refugees. There are four things that NGOs always do to help refugees: First, they help refugees to communicate with government, UNHCR, and other NGOs, and provides information to these organizations. Secondly, they change the hosting countries' and media's' stereotype of refugees. Third, they provide legality suggestion, education, and training plan. And lastly, they monitor the human right condition in refugees' sources countries and hosting countries. For example, Action Against Hunger is a NGO that focus on helping people get the food they need. In its official website, there is a page talks about the refugees' situation, and appealing people to donate 45 dollars, since 45 dollars can save a kid's life.

The Mesnaa intervention, coordinated with the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR, supplements our work in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley; we're helping more than 30,000 displaced Syrians with basic sanitation and hygiene there. We're also working in southern Lebanon, prioritizing food distribution to the most vulnerable.

- Staggering and Sobering: Syrian Refugee Total Tops Two Million

Human Service Charities of America (HSCA) is another NGO, and its focus is charity. Compare to the one I mentioned before, the Action Against Hunger, this one provides people more choices to help Syrian refugees. In its official website, it shows four different things that people can do to help Syrian refugees; it creates a movie to engage Syrian refugee children, evangelizes Syrian refugees, donates core relief to refugees, donates clean waters, medical facilities, and food. (Actionagainsthunger.org, “Staggering”)

These two NGOs are examples of NGOs that provide services to help refugees. To give more details to illustrate their work, a NGO worker's report will be giving as follow. In Liberia, this worker was sent to an area under the control of a warlord who's famous for his atrocious. But the worker didn't give up, he got the permission from the warlord to go into the area to serve water and food to those people who were under refugee-like situation and reported their situation to the warlord weekly. And after several weeks, the warlord asked the worker to go into villages with him and started knowing and caring about those poor people's situation. This example perfectly shows the flexibility and effectively of NGOs' work. In this report, the worker helped to build a bridge between the warlord and refugees. The worker took all actions independently and informally while he has made changes in this area. The UN and other governments did not take effective actions, which shows that the NGOs can work as an additional way to improve refugees living environment. Though the utility is not ensured, NGOs can provide various methods to helping refugees.

Besides working independently, NGOs always cooperate with UNHCR to provide their help. The organizations that keep closest relationships with UNHCR are International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), and the Voluntary Organizations in Cooperation in Emergencies (VOICE). These organizations contain more than 500 different NGOs, and the cooperation between NGOs and UNHCR have greatly promoted the efficiency of refugee assistance.

Firstly, these organizations provide the information-sharing network, which enable NGOs and other organizations to announce things they need and what they can provide. For instance, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles has a database that offers asylum information to lawyers and legal counselors in the Pan-Europe area, which enable lawyers and legal counselors to participate in helping refugees.

Secondly, these organizations and UNHCR may work together to reach the same goal. For example, in 2004, the EU passed a “Safe Third Country” (STC) agreement. This agreement prohibits refugees from applying for asylums in a country that does not allow them a safe passage. The UNHCR and the ECRE started working together to express their concerns about the STC, since they believe that some STCs are ill-equipped to handle asylum applications.

4. Limitations that UN and NGOs have

The main problem UN and NGOs are facing is that other countries don't want to accept refugees. For other countries, accepting refugees can bring so many issues. Refugees may have different culture that can disturb their own citizens, and when refugees enter the local market, they will occupy some jobs and increase the local unemployment rate. Hence, economic migrants always make up their identifications as refugees, and accept refugees and offer refugee assistance can cost tons of money. (Lanham, “Hungary's”) Finally, terrorists may hide in refugee group. (Wright, “Smugglers”)

According to UNHCR's statistics, there were about 60 million refugees in 2014, but only 10 million refugees/people in refugee like situation had UNHCR's assistance, and only 35 million IDPs/people in IDP like situation had UNHCR's assistance (IDP stands for Internally Displaced Person). For those countries or area that around those refugee sources countries, like Saudi Arabia and Eurozone, they accepted about 0.5 million and 0.2 million refugees separately in 2014. For these countries, these refugees become heavy burdens. In Germany, every refugee can cost about 13,000 Euros, and in 2015, Germany will spend about ten billion Euros on refugee assistance.

Furthermore, crime and illegal migrants is another big problem that can come with the refugee ships.

Basit Haroun, who claimed to be a Libyan government adviser, told the BBC that the Islamic State was exploiting the boats to send personnel to Europe, since "the European police don't know who is from [the Islamic State] and who is a normal refugee or not". In addition, he claimed that interviews with smugglers indicated that the Islamic State permitted organised crime groups operating the maritime route to continue their activities in exchange for 50% of the profits.

- Wright, Joanna. "Smugglers Exploit Security Situation in Libya."

In this material, Haroun's claim has confirmed European people's worry about how terrorists can be smuggled into Europe. And in the Paris' terrorist attack, it was already verified that three of the criminals has recognized by the government as refugees and used this status to stay in France.

For NGOs, their size is not big enough to influence governments' policy making when their advocacy is against countries' profit. They don't have enough money and workers to help countries build enough refugee camps.

Furthermore, the military is a useful institution that can cooperate with NGOs. The peacekeeping force is a component of the military that always cooperates with NGOs. Compare to those warlords in fighting area, the peacekeeping force is more likely and willing to offer help to NGOs to help refugees. Depends on its power and deterrence, military is the most credible one to ensure transportations and the safety of NGO workers in disorder areas. But the communication between NGOs and military is always a problem.

First, NGO's superiority is its flexibility, while military depends on its strict rule and structure. As a result, NGOs can hardly communicate with military efficiently since NGOs are adaptable and resilient. Yet the military needs time to mobilize. So when NGOs need help, the military may not be able to take action immediately. (Szczygiel, “WHAT”)

Another main problem that always occurs in the relationship between NGOs and military is the difficulty to remain neutral. While any country shouldn't control NGOs theoretically, there

are still a number of voices criticizing that United States and its allies are using the NGOs and UNHCR as their instruments to affect the war.

The third problem is actually happening not only between NGOs and military, but also in NGOs and peacekeeping force internally. Since the UN constitutes the peacekeeping group, a number of countries are contributing personnel to this force, and people from different countries speak different languages. (Godin, "The Impact") Meanwhile, NGOs are coming from different country and speak different languages, too. So the language is a great barrier among people who use different languages, which also can affect the effectiveness of communications.

5. Conclusion

Refugee crisis is not a problem that UNHCR and NGOs can solve by themselves without the assistance from the whole world. Although these organizations are trying hard to provide assistance to refugees and are doing well, the only thing they can do is relieve this problem but not solve it utterly.

Since the war is the origin cause of refugees, the only way to solve this issue is to finish the war and reconstruct the Middle East to enable refugees to return to their hometown. Yet since the conflict of religious is so complex that can be hardly solved, and the contend for power and profit is a necessary process for building a country, so it's easy to expect that the war will lasting for a long time period. To conclude, there's not much we can do to solve the refugee crises for now.

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