

**“Refugees in a Globalized World, ‘Not a Liability but Opportunity’”***Sonali Soni**Ajeenkya D. Y. Patil University***Abstract:**

Globalization is a well-known process. It has many benefits which come with certain detriments especially for some vulnerable groups like refugees. Refugees have left their country out of distress and they come to the neighbouring host country with new hope to resettle their life. Sometimes they succeed by getting the asylum status if luck favours at their end. Mostly, they keep waiting for years in order to receive the asylum status. The waiting years are extremely difficult for them when they have to live there in uncertainty. Even if they get the status, the host country normally considers them as burden rather than opportunity. What they look for is shelter and protection which is not easy either. There are many barriers on their path to start their new life. Today when the whole world is on-going the distress and crisis of COVID-19, refugees are most vulnerable and neglected. They are left unattended in the filthy living conditions with no hygiene or proper health facility. When we are advised to wash hands as saviour from virus, refugees can hardly adopt such practices as they lack clean water. The above issues are serious but not impossible to be resolved, together we can resolve this and make their life less miserable.

**Keywords:** Refugees, World, Host Country, Asylum, COVID-19, Wait Period, Opportunity

**Introduction**

“No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.”

— Warsan Shire

Refugee is never by choice. Refugees are those who are forced to flee his or her own country. There are many reasons behind the same as like war, violence or prosecution. They are always in fear of race, religion, nationality etc. due to enormous reasons. As already they run away from their country, it is quite obvious they would never return to their own nationality. In a globalized world, 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of all refugees come from Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia.<sup>1</sup>

As they have lost their home, village and even country, their stories are heart wrenching and mostly they live their life out of fear and again with lots of courage to start from scratch. Sometimes they are successful and at times they lose the battle of life of themselves or their family. Life is never same for them in most of the cases. The world has witnessed Rohingya refugee crisis where the people have faced decades of systematic discrimination, statelessness and targeted violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar. It was terrible situation for the families as like entire villages being burned into ashes, many families were separated and killed. Many girls and women went through gang rape. Though many could escape but could never forget

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>

the unspeakable atrocities. At that time, many moved to Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh which is shelter to many today. Still several of them have not moved completely from the deadly, fearful nights and have never slept peacefully like the day before the incidence. Several International Organization are trying to stabilize them to start fresh.<sup>2</sup> Described by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as "one of, if not the, most discriminated people in the world", the Rohingya are one of Myanmar's many ethnic minorities.<sup>3</sup> Those who could not escape are still living under risk that any day or night genocide can reoccur. Similarly Syrian Refugees have undergone much suffering since 2011 and today the only need they want to be addressed is protection and shelter. Most of them are in distress due to the horrifying incidences they have undergone.<sup>4</sup>

World needs to be more humanitarian towards human without any discrimination so that such horrified atrocities are never repeated ever. It was, is and will always be a scar on mankind.

### **Refugees: Life on hold: Time period to get status**

“No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.”

— Warsan Shire

Refugees never live a peaceful life. Initially they undergo the challenge within their own nation; fear forces them to move to other nations. But the fear and uncertainty does not stop there; hold on, they have to undergo another trial, the trial of long waiting time to get the status of asylum. It brings with itself uncertainty, anxiety, and pain of what next in plate if refused the status of asylum. Many times, this silent suffering goes unnoticed and underreported. Although they never catch headlines but have lasting effects. As they are backlog of applications, many times, the refugees' fate is decided on acceptance or rejection of application.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes the waiting time can be as long as 5 years, one can foresee how they live the life with no rights to work and also many support are withdrawn due to long waiting time. They suffer physically, emotionally as well as mentally. Uncertainty and isolation takes a toll. Globally this issue can be resolved by finding out solutions. If the waiting period is reduced, and they are granted asylum, they will get employment and which in turn will support the local economy. This seems more profitable and sustainable at both ends. Of course there are further many issues once the status of asylum is granted to them, but this can be the 1<sup>st</sup> integration step towards refugees.

Every coin has two sides, sometimes, the host countries can have multiple valid reasons for rejecting the application but ultimately the refugee has to suffer a lot. In a globalized world, if the country can provide shelter to the refugee, let us remember that refugees will enrich their society too. There have been many examples of Today's world leaders as in like President Karzai in Afghanistan who was a refugee at a point of time. They have set examples and have

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>, Retrieved on August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>, Retrieved on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>, Retrieved on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020

<sup>5</sup> <https://immigrationlab.org/project/lives-on-hold-how-asylum-wait-times-impact-employment/>

been asset for the nation in the long run. Thus, it is important to come forward and bring constructive ways to accept refugees wholeheartedly. Once accepted, it is important to infuse confidence in them so that in the long run, they can contribute to the nation. One has to understand that the circumstances have forced them to be marginalized else they could have been as like us in their nation sustaining life of pride. If accepted they could become valuable citizen and not a burden or risk to the nation. The countries need to understand this and recognize the same. Many countries refugee in the fear of terrorism or they foresee refugee bringing criminality to their nation, past incidences or experience can't be denied. At same point, we need to understand that there can be a genuine case if his application is rejected; somewhere injustice is done to him. It is well said, "A hungry man is an angry man", many a time's circumstances forces a person to commit crime, may be to feed family, bring medicine to ailing child, but of course criminal activity should never be supported. If there is good governance in place for them, may 99/100 will choose a wise path.

Asylum seekers are trapped along a path of hopelessness: 1<sup>st</sup> they flee horrifying circumstances at home, then they undertake painful deadly journey ahead and again they meet with confrontation and rejection in the resettlement process. Normally this brings hatred if not that's of course not a positive vibe among them. It is important to integrate refugees. Many a times they wait for a longer time may be years and at the end, their status is denied. They are left broken but to their saviour sometimes they get temporary refugee status and thus they are protected from deporting to their own country. They are provided temporary legal residency in the host country. This temporary legal residency marks a crucial step in their life as they are officially regarded by the host country as protected refugees. But when still they don't get status, their mind enters into uncertainty, hopeless and despair.<sup>6</sup> The loss in waiting time is not only in context of employment but at many other aspects like children lose education, there are many expecting or pregnant mothers who may require constant medical needs for themselves or the infants, senior citizens may be facing extreme health situations. Thus the suffering is wider to each and every individual in the waiting time. This problem can't be resolved until and unless the gravity of the situation is felt.

Today in a globalized world, if all nations especially the developed and developing could join hands can bring drastic change in the prevailing circumstances of refugees and will bring certainty and peace in their life; in return it will bring security to the nation.<sup>7</sup>

### **Refugees are not burden but opportunity**

It was since Second World War that the world has witnessed biggest refugee crisis. War and persecution has forced almost 22million people to leave their country without their will. These displaced people move to nearby host countries with a hope to get shelter and protection. Given the act of picking up and moving to another country is a big risk taking brave act and decision at their end and it should no surprise that refugees have repeatedly

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4972466/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/admin/hcspeeches/3d2ea6764/refugees-globalized-world-ditchley-foundation-annual-lecture-mr-ruud-lubbers.html> , Rudd Lubbers, Retrieved on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2002

been found to be more entrepreneurial than locals.<sup>8</sup> They need to be welcomed by countries which is humanitarian and legal obligation, the host countries can also keep in mind that they can yield them substantial economic dividend in future. It is important to bring this thought of thinking refugees from economic side. The country that give them warm welcome can in return have workers, innovators, entrepreneurs, taxpayers, consumers and of course investors. Once nurtured carefully, they can provide sustainable financial gain to the host country. Refugees come from different strata, once settled, some work as wage earners, some join as salaried persons, some provide services thus the initial investment of settling those gives dividend. Normally whatever work is assigned to the refugees have much legal constraints due as the host country has fear of harm that can be caused by the refugee. In past history at times, due 1-2 refugee bad practices, somewhere they have gained bad reputation. If host country and refugees can together work over this insecurity and allow them equal participation in work, the refugees will feel secure and it will build trust in host country and it will automatically reflect in their job. Once there is breakdown of walls between people and inclusive environment is created, the collaborative approach will bring mutually beneficial results. Normally refugees are entrepreneurs they want to restart fresh and succeed by all means to overlap their past experiences. They are more likely to start businesses than the locals of the host country. They are hungry to succeed and to win in their game. As once life has already gambled with them. Unfortunately they are always seen as burden and not blessing. Syrian refugees have proven themselves to contribute to the economy, also to the culture and bring diversity to the host nation. They have done too good by working on obstacles like learning local language, honing their skills and searching a job for themselves where it was observed that they has given good performance as compared to the locals. Although it is always easy to say than to believe, it is not stress-free at the end of host country to do huge expenses for the complete strangers that is refugees. But if they see it on brighter side in pessimistic approach they will succeed in it. Many a times the host country is a win-win situation when they receive refugees who are highly educated and are best professional in their field, they bring immense benefits to the host nation if their application is accepted. They are blessing in disguise. There are many well-known refugees in a globalized world that made difference. Albright Madeleine Korb, Allende Isabel, Bartok Bela and Formas Milos are few to be named who once accepted by the host country left a mark to the world. Refugees' ability to contribute to the economy will depend on their characteristics, skills, educations and certain other necessary factors but it will also be determined by policies and institutions of the host country. Some of countries who tackled them properly were at gain while many who failed were at loss. It will be surprising to know that in US the refugees are earning well than locals and are employed more in numbers, many countries can take it as learning. Countries should immediately focus on settling the refugees to work once they have been provided protection and shelter. In that case, they will not be burden but an opportunity. Required handholding can be done post identification of their skills. Once they have arrived, in initial stages only their education level and skills should be assessed and identified. Language training, literacy training can be provided. Government should impost non-

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<sup>8</sup><https://ahmadsb.com/refugees-not-burden-opportunity/>, Retrieved on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017

discrimination policy and open opportunities to them as per their availability and thus it is not the country who will feed them instead they will earn and contribute to the countries' economy at small or big scale which may multiply in future once they gain confidence in the nation.<sup>9</sup>

The barriers to employment can be resolved through integrated approach:<sup>10</sup>

- Language: Lack of English language skills is one of the most significant obstacles. Skill development of the language can be done to resolve it.
- Gaps on CV: Due to prolong asylum process and suffering their country, there is wider gap in their CV, host country can ignore the fact and provide them opportunity.
- Work Experience: Many refugees have good work experience but no documentation, some have irreverent work experience, and many don't have experience in host country. This brings unemployment. Host country can work together on this.
- Social Networks: As they are displaced, in the host country they are new baby with no networked and thus they lack references. Trust is built with time; employer can have confidence in them in beginning.
- Job Market: They are new to the job market, their educational qualifications may not match, and thus necessary training can be provided so that they can be placed soon.
- Social Stigma: Acceptance is not easy. There can be many incidences of racism and negative stereotyping. Cross-cultural misunderstanding can contribute to misplaced suspicion and hospitality. Senior management can work on this so that such occurrences never occur.

Of course many funds are needs or you can say aid is required by the host country to settle the refugees. Even after getting aid, the implementation part can still be tricky when the citizens may get offended of providing job and opportunity to outsiders, which in return can risk political career by losing election as they may decide not to vote. This is long term investment which can't be done a day when there is risk of life, security and many other factors of how common citizens are going to accept. Despite all odds, government, Policy makers and practitioners should stop their discussion of treating them as burden instead they should be taken as opportunity. The country taking prudent steps can yield substantial economic dividend. Of course the problem is much deeper and complicated, all stakeholders across the globe needs to join to resolve this.

### **Corona – Biggest Crisis for Refugees till date, are they an easy prey?**

Pandemic fight for refugee is extremely tough. This virus could ravage the most vulnerable people around globe. At one hand when for the countries, it is difficult to protect its' own citizens, refugee are left unattended and are vulnerable. Most of the refugees' stay in camp is in cramped situations or they stay in makeshift congested shelters. Corona has one rule to protect that is social distancing which is not possible for refugees in above mentioned

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/employment/refugees-are-not-a-burden-but-an-opportunity.htm> , Philippe Legrain

<sup>10</sup> <https://breaking-barriers.co.uk/the-cause/refugee-employment-crisis/>

situations. Thus making them extremely exposed to the virus and an easy prey. Most countries are facing extreme situation to protect their own citizens and thus have ignored or avoided protecting the refugees. Some of the countries are claiming that the risk and cases are low in camps, but God forbid it is quite possible that there is lack of testing, thus cases are not identified. If by any way it spreads, it will have world's worst mortality rate and will eat whole camp as monster. This is deeply concerning to even imagine such a scenario. It is important for the world to come together and overcome this crisis. It is important to protect women and children from global pandemic, including stigmatization, abuse and gender-based violence. They have put barriers/barricades across places where refugees stay so that their citizens are safe. Although countries are trying to mitigate the spread of Covid-19, the health of displaced persons/refugees cannot be overlooked. Most of the countries who gave shelter to refugees were themselves financially weak and thus they as they are exposed to the virus due to unavoidable reasons they are avoiding refugees help. Myanmar has been in news for the same. An estimated 350,000 displaced people across Myanmar are "sitting in the path of public health catastrophe", says rights group Human Rights Watch (HRW).<sup>11</sup> "Malaysia shouldn't use coronavirus as an excuse to reject Rohingya refugees", said Thomas Daniel.<sup>12</sup>

Many camps are having poor infrastructure thus placing millions of refugees in dangerous situation. Most of refugees have weak immunity as they are from low or idle income nations, they pose more risk. Normally there are placed in congested dwellings and are poorly resourced. Even in the best of times, they have been ignored in the countries preparedness, reaching them now will be a challenge. It is important on humanitarian grounds to assist them in a non-discriminatory way and treat them as humans first. This time is tough for one and all and thus it is important to stop stigma or blame and protect the, with open arms. The negative approach may lead to hiding the symptoms which can be more devastating than preventing the spread of virus.<sup>13</sup> Travel bans, sealed borders and filthy living conditions in camps all amplify the risks to migrants.

Reasons behind exposure of risk to refugees:

- Poor infrastructure in camps
- Bad sanitary places
- Densely populated
- Proper hygiene is not maintained
- Health facility are hardly available
- Their immunity is weak as they lack proper nutritional diet
- Their health is not ideal physically, mentally as well as emotionally thus are always at risk

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-52115969>, Retrieved on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3081225/malaysia-shouldnt-use-coronavirus-excuse-reject-rohingya-refugees>, Thomas Daniel, Retrieved on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, 4pm.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nrc.no/news/2020/march/10-things-you-should-know-about-coronavirus-and-refugees>, Retrieved on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020



The story does not end here, even if there COVID outbreak in their camps, they will not be left untouched, political blame game will initiate that they brought the virus. Ideally it is important that countries should work towards preventing the outbreak not only because it is the right things to do, however to prevent the outbreak of disease for larger good of humanity. The practice of washing hands for 20 seconds is being advocated a lot in COVID situation but for refugee camps it is impractical as they hardly have access to clean water. There is little or we can say no time left to bridge the gap between haves and have-nots, or else unseen volcano can erupt in form of CORONA from one of these camps. It is important that governments around the globe start treating them equal in this scenario and provide equal health facilities. There was refugee who had hardly settled in their new life from the traumatized past life and many could earn a good life through employment in host country and suddenly this virus has shattered their life and have left them back to streets. They are again hit by economic loss. Some had taken loan to initiate business and had kept everything at stake; they have no hope left for future. In many of host countries like Egypt, Iraq and Jordan, they have lost their main source of income. Refugees have proven to be an asset to the world in the situation of pandemic. Many refugees who are doctors, nurses, sanitation workers, singers, chef, painters and many who could provide essential services have come forward as warriors to support the world in the fight of Corona. Whatever way possible they are contributing their part to overcome the fight of COVID-19. Similarly it is our duty to stand together in this fight and protect refugees as well. Government needs to come forward with facilities of testing and provide quality treatment to those infected. Community engagement and empowerment would play major role in present scenario as there should no room for rumours, the prevention practices needs to reached to them globally in their common languages.

“A refugee is someone who survived and who can create the future.”

– Amela Koluder

The world needs to show empathy towards them and require working in solidarity with refugees.<sup>14</sup>

### **Suggestions/Recommendations**

“Refugees are not terrorists. They are often the first victims of terrorism.”

— António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres

Refugees in the global world hold a large chunk of population, if world treats them with respect; progress is always possible as small steps lead to big changes. There are few suggestions which if host countries adopts will bring drastic change in the perspective of refugees:

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<sup>14</sup><https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/the-coronavirus-pandemic-could-be-devastating-for-the-worlds-refugees/>, Marie McAuliffe, Celine Bauoz, Retrieved on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020

1. Reducing the waiting period could go a long way towards helping refugees to navigate the transition. Employment of more case workers could ease the process. Once the process is quick, it will be easy to integrate the refugees and provide them job.
2. Host country can focus on providing skill development to the refugees during the waiting time. They can also finish the enquiry process of educational qualification, languages known, and skills if any and could initiate the language training if required. Thus once they get asylum status they can immediately start job or business whatever they prefer with no delay. Health status can also be checked and treatment provided if any problem is detected.
3. The policy makers around the globe can bring policies which are prudent on part of refugees and host countries so that many persisting problems can be resolved as in like long waiting period, refugees to be treated as opportunity not burden and many other pertaining issues.
4. Host countries could invest in refugees in the beginning thinking of return in future, in case of Indonesia it has been true. They invested in them in the beginning and only in the span of 5 years, refugees are contributing to their economy, not only they are well settled but are also providing employment opportunities to the locals.
5. The host country can try to engage them in the job the area they already have experience, this little step will help them in settling fast and they would be able to contribute in the economy with their previous experience.
6. Like the citizens whose needs differ, the host country requires to treat refugees differently depending on what has been their background.
7. The children and youngsters should be engaged in schools and colleges so that future human resource is well invested and counselling to be done on regular basis. It will ensure future human resource asset for the host country. Parents will gain trust in the host country for accepting their kids and who give their cent percent in jobs with sense of security and protection. It is important to lift barrier of inclusion.
8. In the time of COVID-19, the world needs to come together and treat refugees as equal in this humanitarian crisis. They require showing empathy towards them and would leave no stone unturned to protect them from the pandemic.

## Conclusion

“To be called a refugee is the opposite of an insult; it is a badge of strength, courage, and victory”,

-Tennessee Office for Refugees

Let's not be cruel to the vulnerable groups. This is the time for solidarity. There are 70 million people around the globe living difficult life, because of violence, prosecution and war. Now this is the time for solidarity and compassion, it is time not to close our minds or hearts or borders. We must stand together against the same intolerance and fear that brought these people to the situation to flee from their country in the first place. It is only when we will understand and feel their pain and suffering; we will be kind enough to bring them out of



it. Unfortunately they have left everything I reiterate, everything except a bag full of bag and they have the sparkling eyes with hope to restart again. They hope to have secure future for their kids, they are optimistic and dream to work and contribute to community and the host country. It is just like us that they are seeking a life of dignity, freedom and security. It is already high time to address this issue. They are ordinary people like you and me who have lost everything.

Once they are provided proper legal status and are employed, in the long run they will be an asset to the country. They will give good return to the nation. The nations will have much diversity and different culture. In a globalized world, sharing global responsibility for global issues is the wise thing to do. Welcoming people from other countries is not an easy task and has many implications but the smiling faces when they settle, tremendous energy they bring to restart their life is joy to watch. World has witnessed some great souls who were known for their achievements were once refugees. They could rebuild their life only when the host country invested in them in the early stages. Lets' brighten their world like ours and make their life worth living in.

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