

# Research report

Forum: UNHCR  
Issue: Ensuring the safety of asylum seekers  
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## Introduction

Large numbers of people leave their home every day, due to conflicts and certain beliefs in their home country. For example, some of these may fear persecution or poverty. These asylum seekers go through horrendous journeys by unreliable boats on dangerous seas or by walking immense distances to get to a safer place. They get physical injuries most of the time which need healthcare that is not always provided for them.

Asylum seekers have the right to seek the protection of their safety. However, a lot of those people need to wait a long time to get certainty about their stay in the country, because it takes a long process of interviews to decide whether a person is qualified to receive protection or not. Furthermore, asylum seekers often are not allowed to find a job to make a living, because they are not recognized as actual residents yet. This makes it very hard for them to continue with their old lives.

Besides the fact that asylum seekers must leave their homes, they also experience issues with communicating to adapt to another country.

This report will discuss the different aspects of experiences that asylum seekers must face in their daily lives.

## Definitions of key terms

### Asylum seekers

Asylum seekers are people who have requested protection for conflict or persecution in another country, but their request has not been processed yet. They are acknowledged as asylum seekers when they have submitted an asylum application to a local authority. That application has a process of interviews about the status of the asylum seekers, which causes a long waiting time.

### Refugees

It is important to recognize the distinction between asylum seekers and refugees when discussing this issue. Refugees are people who have been involuntarily forced to leave their country due to fear of persecution or overall unsafety, however these refugees have temporary permission to stay in a country for a long period of time. Unlike asylum seekers who have not got a processed asylum application yet.

### Residence permit

A residence permit is a document that proves that a person is eligible to stay permanently or temporary in a country.

### The Temporary Protection Directive

The Temporary Protection Directive is a regulation which was created after the conflict in former Yugoslavia. It was first used when the Russian army had trespassed the Ukrainian borders on 24 February 2022. The regulation was invented to help massive groups of asylum seekers to flee their country in the most efficient way possible.

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### GP registration

GP is the abbreviation for general practitioner, which means family doctor. Therefore, a GP registration is being registered with a family doctor.

### Racially profiling

When people discriminate or target a certain person with a different ethnicity, religion, or nationality, it is called racially profiling. Even though the person with the different ethnicity is equal to the other person, the person with the ethnicity will be treated different in a negative way.

## General overview

According to the UNHCR's Refugee Population Statistics Database, there were 5.4 million asylum seekers worldwide at the end of 2022. The lives of a lot of asylum seekers are extremely unfortunate. Nonetheless, most of them are suffering from racism, poverty, and lack of other basic human needs when living in camps in, for example, neighbouring countries. Those countries do not always have the resources to provide medical and psychological assistance for the asylum seekers. After finally making it to a neighbouring country, asylum seekers may have developed issues regarding this like depression, anxiety, and physical injuries. Some examples are the 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Not only are there Syrian refugees, but also hundreds of Palestinian refugees, which include asylum seekers. As a result of a severe economic crisis in Lebanon, almost 2 million refugees are experiencing a lack of food. Also, several financial and political crises are causing a lot of poverty in the country and the public services are barely managing to hold up. Because of the low wages in Lebanon, many healthcare workers have been leaving the country, which makes it even harder for the people to receive physical support. This backlog in helping the asylum seekers in Lebanon happens to a great number of other countries, such as the Netherlands.

An issue that asylum seekers may face are overcrowding accommodation centres. This happened in June/July of 2022 when the Ter Apel centre in the Netherlands was being overflowed with asylum seekers. The goal of the centre was to process the applications of asylum seekers in only a few days. However, this plan did not have its desired result. These migrants, mostly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Türkiye, had to wait several months to get their applications reviewed. Not all refugees had gotten a place to sleep, due to the housing shortage. Even though they had granted residency permission, they still did not have an assigned home. This was followed by the non-stop overflowing of asylum seekers, which eventually build up to a lot of people sleeping in tents outside the centre.

The second reason for the overflowing is about the coalition agreement of the Netherlands. The agreement states that the country must reduce their supplies when the number of asylum seekers decreases. Therefore, the faculties and other necessities for them also decrease. However, it takes a lot of energy and time for the asylum centre to increase supplies and housing when the number of asylum seekers suddenly rises. Therefore, resulting in lack of accommodation.

Furthermore, a third reason, which is also quite recent, is the Russian-Ukrainian war in February of 2022. This caused an amount of approximately 66.000 Ukrainian people to flee to the Netherlands. However,

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Ukrainian asylum seekers have a different regulation for staying in the Netherlands than asylum seekers from other countries, called The Temporary Protection Directive. They are granted temporary support by the EU lasting for one year depending on the asylum seeker's personal situation. This regulation only applies for all the legal residents who have lived in Ukraine before 24 February, including non-Ukrainians. Due to this directive, the Ukrainian asylum seekers were able to access a house to stay, healthcare, education, a workplace, and the freedom to travel through the EU-countries within 90-days after the establishment of a residence permit. This means that these particular asylum seekers did not have to go to the Ter Apel centre to register. The Ukrainian asylum seekers were automatically granted an accommodation by several municipalities, which caused a lack of housing for the people from Syria, Afghanistan, and Türkiye.

A study done by the London Refugee Advocacy Forum, exploring 681 refugees and asylum seekers in London investigated the situations of those people. According to their research, 54% of the asylum seekers with mental health issues in London have no access to any treatments. Furthermore, 31 percent of the men that were evaluated and 23 percent of the woman had rated their English writing skills as average. This had made the access to required healthcare treatments very challenging, because not all the asylum seekers were able to register a GP. Additionally, during the Covid-19 pandemic in January 2020-May 2023, asylum seekers and refugees struggled to access online services, causing the gaining of information more difficult.

A lot of asylum seekers who arrive in the United Kingdom have numerous injuries caused by, sexual assault, war crime, imprisonment, abuse, and many other horrible things. These asylum seekers often were not able to have medical professionals to treat them. It is nevertheless important to put maximum effort in aiding them and guaranteeing safety.

Another problem that is crucial to discuss is the mistreatment of asylum seekers such as governmental tactics. An infamous example is a racist Greek authorities' way to "dispose" refugees and asylum seekers at sea. A captured moment in 2023, a few days before the general election in Greece, was published by the New York Times. The asylum seekers, which consisted of children, a baby, and adults were pushed back into the sea on an inflatable boat without any survival supplies. It was their governments' way of solving the inconsistency of the inflow of refugees and asylum seekers. The premier of Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, believed that according to this way he had fulfilled his duty of protecting the borders of Greece, and hereby protecting the residents of the country.

Moreover, in the summer of 2023, many asylum seekers and refugees were fighting the high peaks in temperature of Syria's Mediterranean climate. Reaching even 42 degrees Celsius. The so-called facilities of the camps where they lived in were tents. The temperatures were so unbearable that it affected a child's health absurdly. Nonetheless, a 1-year-old girl sadly passed away. This was a horrendous unintentional death that must be prevented in the future.

Furthermore, a cruel way to get rid of refugees and asylum seekers was used in Texas, the United States. To make immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers dislodge, Greg Abbott's Operation Lone Star brought

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Venezuelan asylum seekers on boats to the sea or to somewhere on the land, with the goal to separate them from each other. The separated families were clueless about the place their partners or children had gone to.

Most of the time, the men get taken away and sent to jail, without access of any communication with their families, which is absolutely inhuman, and a big issue to tackle.

Asylum seekers frequently get discriminated. When black or Arab asylum seekers try to cross borders in France, they often get checked by police officers, who racially profile those people. For instance, when recently, the French police approached the only two black men of all the white passengers from the train to check their papers. According to a 19-year-old resident of Spain who crosses the border daily, this racially profiling has become an everyday occurrence.

To conclude, the hardships that asylum seekers face on a day-to-day basis are inhuman. Therefore, helping to solve and tackle these difficulties is extremely important.

### Root causes

When thinking of solutions for the problem, we must find the root causes. An important piece of information to know is where all the asylum seekers are coming from and what exactly happened in their country to force them to leave. The data that is documented by the UNHCR states that 52% of the forcibly displaced people come from the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. In each of these countries, conflicts have occurred.

A war that is currently happening is the conflict between the leader of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, and rebel groups who are fighting against the totalitarian regime. The civil war that has been there since the 15th of March had caused a large number of crises that cascaded in a line. Therefore, 90% of the families in Syria to be in poverty and more than 50% have lack of food, which made millions of the people forcibly leave.

Additionally, Afghanistan has experienced a pandemic, poverty, and food scarcity, and over 40 years of conflict. Due to the Taliban that have taken over Afghanistan, many restrictions on women's behaviour have been made. They cannot study, work, get a full education, and have freedom of speech, the list goes on. All this has made millions of residents to be displaced in and outside of their own country.

Lastly, the Russian-Ukrainian war that started when on 24th of February, Russia invaded Ukraine, which had a global impact, causing certain food scarcities. The economic and political situations in Ukraine ended up becoming crises, forcing 66.000 residents to leave the country.

## Major parties involved

### *Iran*

Iran is in the top five countries that host the most refugees and asylum seekers. Therefore, with 3.4 million people, it has an important position in ensuring safety for the asylum seekers for already 40 plus years. The asylum situations in Iran seem to go well, because around 90% of the refugees in Iran are living together with the Iranian population. Therefore, this country may be a good example to cooperate with.

### *Afghanistan*

Approximately 5.7 million of the people who have fled come from Afghanistan. These asylum seekers, therefore, need a lot of support when forcibly leaving their country.

### *Syria*

In a report of the UNHCR was stated that in 2022, 90% of the Syrian refugees were suffering from mental and physical issues. Around 6.8 million refugees come from Syria, which is the top origin-country of refugees compared to other countries. The Syrian Arab Republic is therefore very involved in the asylum seeker issues.

### *Germany*

Germany hosts an amount of 2.1 million refugees; therefore, it is in the top five of the refugee host countries. It is a country that is economically stable, that can give refugees and asylum seekers a stable environment, compared to countries such as Syria. However, several politicians of the German government have said that if the home-country of an asylum seeker is considered safe, the must be sent back immediately. Therefore, Germany has mixed opinions about the asylum seekers. The country is however suitable for cooperate in tackling the issue.

## Timeline of Key Events

28/10/1933	Convention Relating to the International Status of Refugees is adopted by the League of Nations
10/12/1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) declared by the United Nations General Assembly
14/12/1950	UNHCR founded
1979	Refugees fleeing after the Soviet-Union invasion of Afghanistan
1979	Fall of the Iranian monarchy
1980-1990	Asylum seekers fleeing from Iran due to religious and political persecution
1998	Taliban takes control of the majority of Afghanistan
15/03/2011	Start of the Syrian civil war
24/02/2023	Russian invasion of Ukraine
15/04/2023	Sudan conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF)

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

### Bankrupt UN agencies

In 2015, the abrupt influx of refugees and asylum seekers from Africa, the Middle East, and Europe were suffering from food scarcity, and lack of healthcare. Due to the flawed budget, cut offs of food, water and medical services had to be made. The funding that the agencies had received were not enough at the time. According to experts, the short-term system of supply chains at the time was not effective. Their idea for a solution was to apply long-term systems to handle massive inflows of asylum seekers and refugees.

### The Solutions strategy for Afghan refugees

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries (SSAR) was created in 2012 by Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and the UNHCR. NGO's, UN agencies and more than 60 governments got involved with the collaborative strategy.

## Possible solutions

When thinking of solutions to protect asylum seekers, the delegates should be able to address the root causes of the problem. As stated in this report, the underlying issues are mostly about the asylum seekers who flee to neighbouring countries that do not have safe environments. The journeys that they have to undergo can cause them injuries, as well as mental and physical. The delegates can think of ways to make fleeing journeys less suffering, because this can reduce the need of healthcare. Overall, the most important underlying issues are the wars that cause environmental and political crises, making the people leave the country.

## Further reading

A crucial website for finding more information about asylum seekers can be found at the official UNHCR site with their many sub-sites for each country. Additionally, there are plenty of unbiased news articles regarding asylum seekers and refugees such as the Guardian. The UN and EU sites are also very useful for doing research. Additionally, the articles in the bibliography are a helpful tool for gaining information.



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