



Impacts of Covid-19 on Migrants and Refugees

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ABSTRACT

Abstract Since the 1970s, in the aftermath of new social movements, the concept of refugees and migration in international politics has dominated both the academic discipline and public debates. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 82.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced from their homes by the end of 2020, either as internally displaced persons (IDPs) or as refugees, as a result of violent conflict, persecution, famine, or natural disasters. Even in normal times, the lives of refugees and migrants are fraught with difficulties, but in the midst of a pandemic like Covid-19, this problem has taken on new dimensions. The only way to avoid the pandemic is to take precautions and maintain a safe distance from one another. These precautions are extremely difficult for refugees and migrants to take amidst a global pandemic. Keeping in mind the international efforts and the problems faced by refugees and migrants, this paper is an attempt to comprehend the challenges faced by refugees and migrants during Covid-19 and what global efforts have been made to mitigate the pandemic's impact on refugee and migrant life.

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INTRODUCTION

On a national and global scale, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on the living and working conditions of refugees and migrants. Because of its diverse and complex nature, policymakers face a difficult task in determining its implications for human security. Furthermore, states all over the world are facing challenges such as physical separation and other infection prevention measures as a result of large-scale evacuation and displacement of people. Migrants who were forced to return home put additional strain on an already precarious health-care system and livelihoods. As a result, there is a pressing need to comprehend the theoretical and practical implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on migration and refugees worldwide.

A common definition for refugees or migrants has not been agreed by the scholars. According to USA for UNHCR (2022) “A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence” and who have suffered severe damage to the public system (USA for UNHCR, 2022). Therefore, they need international security and assistance. On the other hand United Nations defined migrants as “ International migrant is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status” (United Nations, 2022). Migrants and refugees are among the most affected social groups by the COVID-19 crisis, and they bear a disproportionate share of the social and economic consequences. They are at the forefront of the pandemic, providing critical services such as health, cleaning, domestic work, agriculture, and food production, as well as ensuring the continuity of supply chains. The pandemic has also increased the vulnerability of refugees and asylum seekers in urban, rural, and camp settings, while having a negative impact on humanitarian aid (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2020).

Due to the periodic conflicts and changes in the world, many people live the life of refugees and migrants every year. Recently, Global pandemic known as Covid-19 has engulfed the entire globe. Every country has attempted to deal with it on their own terms. Keeping in mind of international efforts and the issues confronting refugees and migrants, this study attempted to highlight the following goals First, Problems or difficulties encountered by refugees and migrants during Covid-19 and the Second, Trace International efforts which are being made to limit the pandemic's impact on refugee and migrant life.

RESEARCH METHOD

Using surveys and data from several international organisations, this study attempts to understand the challenges of refugees and migrants during and the post Covid-19 time. Measures to address these challenges and actions to improve the living standards of refugees and migrants are discussed using both primary and secondary sources related to this topic. In this study, an attempt was made to conduct quantitative analysis using available data.

RESULT**Refugees in COVID-19 Pandemic**

The pandemic's impact on refugees is so drastic that it has resulted in a severe crisis worldwide. Many refugees in India, including the Rohingyas and Bangladeshis, are attempting to save themselves from this new disease. At the same time, there is an increase in the number of refugees. Figures from 2020 to the present show that millions of people have been forced to migrate in just one and a half years. The fight between government forces and their opponents, or the conflict between the two groups, was the primary cause of the displacement.

More than 2000 refugees in the Central African Republic, over 1.3 million Somali refugees, approximately 7000 Ethiopian refugees, approximately 1000 Helmand refugee families, more than 17,500 refugees displaced from the West African country of Burkina

Faso, and so on are some of the recent incidents (Siegfried, 2021). All of this displacement occurred in 2021, and according to an old UNHCR report, the list could be even longer. It is not just about the increase in the number of refugees; the main issue is how governments around the world are attempting to deal with the pandemic today. However, the question here is whether governments are also dealing with the problems of these refugees.

Consider some governments that have exacerbated the problems of these refugees even in the midst of this pandemic. Recent events have highlighted the Danish government's decision to revoke the residency permits of some refugees, which has been widely condemned internationally. When Myanmar's army took over on February 1, 2021, many journalists were forced to flee to Thailand. Australia's newly amended migrant law has made life even more difficult for refugees living there (Siegfried, 2021). Such incidents are extremely upsetting because everyone is attempting to resolve a difficult situation in which some governments are exacerbating the problems for refugees.

How safe will this Covid-19 be expected to be by avoiding refugees and migrants? Today, there are nearly 80 million refugees on the global stage, including internally 45.7 millions displaced, 4.2 millions asylum seekers, 26.3 millions refugees and 3.6 millions displaced (UNHCR 2020). According to surveys conducted by international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), these refugees are suffering from the effects of Covid-19, as well as issues such as sexual violence and human trafficking. However, some governments are paying attention to these as well. According to a recent IRC report, nearly 2000 refugees settled in the United States during the fiscal year, and the President of the United States has announced plans to increase refugee admissions to more than 125 thousand by the next fiscal year (Molina & Forin, 2021). However, it appears that governments are slowing down the work that needs to be done for the benefit of these refugees.

Migration in COVID-19 Pandemic

This pandemic has nearly engulfed the entire globe. Every country has done everything possible to avoid this, including cancelling international flights and declaring a state of emergency. These conditions had the greatest impact on the migrants. Due to unexpected flight cancellations, many migrants were unable to return to their home country. It is surprising that, despite the pandemic, the number of migrants increased from around 271.5 million in 2019 to 280.6 million by mid-2020. International migrants increased by 48 million between 2000 and 2010, with the remaining migrants discovered between 2010 and 2020. (UN DESA, 2020). Despite the fact that the number of migrants has increased almost everywhere in the world, the list of major countries remains unchanged. Although the number of migrants has increased almost everywhere in the world, the following are the major countries with high migrant populations.

Table 1 Countries with the Most Immigrants

Name of Country	No. of Migrants (in million)	Percentage of Total World's Migrant Population
USA	51 million	18%
Germany	13 million	4.8%
Saudi Arabia	13 million	4.7%
Russia	12 million	4.4%
UK	10 million	3.7%

Source: Leimer, R. (2021, June 25).

Subhash Kumar Baitha, Rinkal Tyagi, Souvik Chatterjee:

Impacts of Covid-19 on Migrants and Refugees

With 87 million international migrants, Europe had the highest number of international migrants among the world's major regions in 2020. With nearly 59 million migrants, Northern America hosted the second-highest number of migrants. Northern Africa and Western Asia were close behind, with a combined population of nearly 50 million. Countries have begun to adopt measures to facilitate safe, orderly, and regular migration as a result of the General Assembly's adoption of landmark agreements such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration. In a recent survey, 54 percent of the 111 governments that responded said they had such policies ([United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2020](#)).

DISCUSSION

Unemployment

The importance of the ILO Report 2020, the WHO Survey 2020, and the IFRC Report in understanding the impact of this pandemic cannot be overstated. According to surveys, the pandemic had a significant impact on migrants and refugees (7.5 / 10). Many countries imposed an immediate lockdown, causing millions of people to lose their jobs. According to the ILO report, global unemployment has increased by approximately 25 million during the crisis ([Sheth, 2020](#)). Approximately 22 million people were laid off during the 2008-09 global financial crisis, with the unorganised sector accounting for the majority of job losses. The unemployment rate caused by Covid-19 was higher than in 2009 ([Khanna, 2020](#)). According to statistics, unemployment will peak in the middle of 2020. Between February and April 2020, between 2.2 and 2.8 million people lost their jobs in South Africa, while this figure was estimated to be around 5 million in the Eurozone by mid-2020. In Asia and the Pacific, an estimated 10 to 15 million people were unemployed, with more than 10 million unemployed in the United States.

Table 2 The Unemployment Rate Worldwide

Workers	Employment Loss (in %)
Total	4.3%
Female	5.0%
Male	3.9%
Young	8.7%
Adult	3.7%

Source: International Labour Organization ([2022](#))

According to ILO data, the covid-19 crisis has had the greatest impact on young workers, with 8.7 percent of youth losing their jobs compared to 3.7 percent of adult workers. Female unemployment was 5.0 percent higher than male unemployment ([International Labour Organization, 2021](#)). Furthermore, as a result of the sudden announcement of the lockdown, a large number of migrants began returning to their home country. Because of this sudden migration, the figures of pandemic and unemployment among migrants have been extremely high.

Health Care Barriers

While the health system is being emphasised the most in order to avoid the pandemic, WHO survey shows that many migrants and refugees have been unable to access essential services ([World Health Organization, 2020](#)). Despite the pandemic's symptoms, many migrants and refugees do not seek medical attention. The main reasons are:

1. Lack of financial means

2. No Entitlement
3. Lack of proper health care services
4. Fear of Deportation
5. Don't know where to find a doctor

According to the Apart Together Survey, the majority of migrants and refugees did not demand health services due to financial reasons, due to fear of eviction, a lack of clinic services etc ([World Health Organization, 2020](#)). Countries such as Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Thailand, on the other hand, have taken significant steps to provide health care to refugees and migrants. However, in most cases, governments justified harsh policies toward refugees and migrants by citing the need to halt the spread of Covid-19. The violations of human rights were justified in the name of halting the spread of Covid-19. It has been observed that the health facilities of refugees and migrants living in overcrowded conditions have received little attention. For example, 740,000 Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh, as well as refugees and migrants in the United States, face unsanitary conditions and inadequate health care. Another example can be found in the Maria camp in Greece ([Lupieri, 2021](#)). The main cause of this pandemic is poor hygiene, as migrants and refugees share the same toilets, soap, and water sources ([Litzkow, 2021](#)).

Communication Barriers

Because each country has its own mother tongue, the problem does not end there. As a result, if information is given to migrants and refugees, the language plays a different role. Many other factors contribute to the spread of pandemics among migrants and refugees, including a lack of social support, communication barriers, a poor livelihood system, and so on ([International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2020](#)). Just keep in mind that when these migrants and refugees are given advice on how to avoid the pandemic, it should be done in their native language. The harsh reality is that organisations that work with migrants and refugees do not understand their languages, and vice versa, making communication difficult ([Translators Without Borders & Mixed Migration Platform, 2017](#)). In such a situation, how many migrants and refugees remain unknown is beyond the scope of the necessary information. Language barriers not only prevent access to information, but also prevent access to other forms of assistance. As an example, in the survey, a 61-year-old woman named Filipina stated that when she called her hospice général for assistance, she found it difficult to communicate with him because he was responding in French, and Filipinas did not speak French ([Burton-Jeangros et al., 2020](#)).

Xenophobia

Although xenophobia and racism are already prevalent in our society, their impact was amplified during the pandemic. Whereas xenophobia discriminates against individuals on the basis of their status as outsiders or foreigners, racism discriminates on physical and ideological grounds such as skin colour, language, and so on. On the one hand, while governments attempted to halt the pandemic in 2020, xenophobia and racism were on the rise ([Hennebry & KC, 2020](#)). Haryana's Home Minister, for example, referred to Haryanvi workers in Delhi as "Corona carriers" ([Bhanot et al., 2020](#)). Similarly, the South African government decided to construct a 40-kilometer fence along the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe to prevent the spread of Covid-19, which was perceived as creating a xenophobic atmosphere among South African citizens ([Mukumbang, 2021](#)). During the early

Subhash Kumar Baitha, Rinkal Tyagi, Souvik Chatterjee:

Impacts of Covid-19 on Migrants and Refugees

Covid-19 era, Asian people were targeted in xenophobic incidents all over the world. Later, expatriates from countries where Sars-Cov-2 has been identified, such as South Africa, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and India, have reported xenophobic incidents (Mukumbang, 2021).

Education

The children of migrants and the displaced are the ones who suffer the most from any emergency or pandemic. While more than 31 million children lived in refugee camps in 2018, approximately 33 million children were displaced from their home country in 2019. They are not provided with adequate health care, education, or living conditions; instead, they are housed in overcrowded camps. Even before the pandemic, refugee children struggled to complete their education, with language posing a significant barrier. Following Covid-19, education became increasingly reliant on online resources, making it impossible for refugee students to obtain an education.

The Jordanian lockdown affected approximately 18,000 Syrian refugee students, though UNHCR and UNICEF are assisting these students in continuing their studies. A similar problem was seen among Rohingya refugees, with the Bangladesh government promising to solve the problems of these children. But the question is whether their problems will be completely resolved. Because, once the pandemic has subsided, most children will be required to work in order to help their families cope with the financial crisis, it will be difficult for them to continue their education.

CONCLUSION

Although everyone is aware of the plight of all migrants and refugees, is this enough to comprehend their plight? It is not enough to understand the situation of migrants and refugees in today's critical pandemic; it is also necessary to find solutions to their problems. Governments all over the world must also take some sort of welfare measures to help these migrants and refugees. As previously stated, the number of refugees and migrants has increased even while the pandemic is ongoing. As the population grows, it becomes more difficult to meet their basic needs such as health and education. It is critical to solve health-related problems in the Covid-19 era. UN organisations such as WHO, UNHCR, and IOM have also stated that if the world does not include vulnerable people such as migrants and refugees in this crisis, all measures to address the crisis will fail (Ivakhnyuk, 2020). Rather than exacerbating their problems during this pandemic, there is a need to provide them with better health care and insist on improving their living conditions.

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