MINIMIZING NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF URBANIZATION ON IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Forum: SOCHUM
Issue: Minimizing negative impacts of urbanization on immigrants and refugees
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1. Introduction

a. <u>Introduction</u>

As Li Keqiang, the current Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, once said "Urbanization is not about simply increasing the number of urban residents or expanding the area of cities. More importantly, it's about a complete change from rural to urban style in terms of industry structure, employment, living environment and social security". Without a doubt, urbanization is one of the most dominant trends of the 21st century. As the human population continues to rapidly expand and make progress in areas such as technology, the transition from rural areas to urban areas becomes more of a need. Right now, more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas and this is quite understandable considering the fact that urban areas offer more job opportunities, better transportation and accommodation facilities and better education opportunities; however, such rapid urbanization has many negative side effects, especially on more vulnerable groups of people among the communities such as refugees and migrants.

The United Nations express its concerns regarding rapid urbanization by including Goal 11, "Making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable", to Sustainable Development Goals. The targets of the goal indicate that the UN envisions a world in which cities urbanize in a sustainable and inclusive way while considering the rights and needs of vulnerable groups. It is highly important to bear in mind that it is not urbanization in general that has a negative impact on refugees and migrants but, in most cases, it is the act of unplanned and rapid urbanization that has a negative impact on these groups. If we look at the countries that are mostly chosen by refugees and migrants as a destination point, we can see that most of these countries are the ones that are rapidly urbanizing. Because, as mentioned above, urbanization offers many benefits to those who reside in urban areas, refugees and migrants choose these countries to restart their lives in. On the other hand, urbanization can cause many disadvantages to refugees and migrants when it is unplanned and at an uncontrollable speed. This research report will mainly focus on rapid urbanization and minimizing its effects on migrants and refugees.

b. **Definition of Key Words**

Urbanization: Urbanization can be defined as the process of shifting from rural areas to large cities. Currently, 55 percent of people are living in urban areas and this percentage is expected to reach 68 percent by the year 2050.

Slum: Slum can be defined as an overcrowded urban district possessed by very poor people. According to UN Habitat, one in every eight people live in slum conditions today, making it around a billion people in total. Rapid urbanization is one of the main causes of slum formation, along with poverty. Because the governments cannot keep up with the pace of urbanization, they cannot provide sufficient housing, environmental and health infrastructure and this results in the formation of slums. The largest proportion of population living in slums in the world is in the Asian region, which is, at the same time, urbanizing at the fastest rate.

Participatory Planning: It is an urban planning approach that focuses on the involvement of the entire community in the process of urbanization. Considering that many minorities or groups with low income feel that their opinions are not respected enough, this approach gives every individual in the society to state their opinions and exchange ideas in order to build a better city for all.

Industrialization: The process in which a society shifts from being an agricultural society to be a society that manufactures goods.

Refugees: Refugees are people who were forced to leave their home countries due to violence, war, persecution or the fear of being subjected to these because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. According to UNHCR, there are 22.5 million refugees worldwide.

Migrants: Migrants are people who move from one place to another in hopes of finding work or better living standards. It is estimated that a total of 4.3 million people immigrated to one of the European Union Member States during 2016.

Asylum Seekers: Asylum seekers are people whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed. It is estimated that every year, around one million people seek asylum.[1]

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[1] See, Asylum-Seekers, Site: http://www.unhcr.org/asylum-seekers.html

2. Body

a. General Overview

i. Historical Background

Even though the history of urbanization dates almost back to ancient times, it became a dominant trend during the industrialization of the 19th century. The industrialization process introduced people to many problems and changes, one being urbanization (this was due to the fact that the new factories which were established required workers, so people had to move to big cities in order to work). Urbanization made the cities even more crowded and the fact that there weren't any plans for expansion made the situation even worse. The United States of America can be a good example of how the process of urbanization developed during the 19th century. In the first few decades of the 19th century, US was urbanizing at a very low rate (below 10 percent). Between the years 1830 and 1930, the rate of urbanization became 60 percent. By the year 2010, the rate of urbanization became 80 percent. The improvements in transportation technology also played a key role in the increase of urbanization. This clearly demonstrates how industrialization rapidly increased the rate of urbanization over the course of time.

ii. Major Parties Involved and Their Views

UN Habitat: UN Habitat is a United Nations Programme that aims to "promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all"[2] and it was mandated by the UN General Assembly in 1978 in order to address the problems related to urban growth. UN Habitat is currently active in over 70 countries worldwide. UN Habitat strives to implement the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11 which is "making cities inclusive, resilient and sustainable".

United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR): UNHCR was established in 1950 as a response to the drastic aftermath of World War II in order to help millions of European refugees who had to leave their homes behind due to the conflict. Up to now, UNHCR has helped over 50 million refugees to rebuild their lives. UNHCR works hard to provide shelter for those have been forced to flee their homes.

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[2] See, UN Habitat at a Glance, site; https://unhabitat.org/un-habitat-at-a-glance/

United States of America: New York is the most crowded city in the United States of America with 8.5 million people residing. New York experienced its two large waves of immigration between the years 1860 and 1920, and between 1965 and present. The city is home to approximately 3.2 million people who are foreign-born. This situation is highly understandable given the fact that the city offers a large economy, job opportunities in internationally recognised sectors and a rich cultural history. Around 1.6 million of the foreign-born population are naturalised US citizens. The rest of the population (1.6 million) consist of those with a Green Card, those who have a diplomatic, student or skilled worker visa and residents with refugee or asylum status. It is estimated that there are half a million immigrants in New York who are undocumented. The city fully accepts all New Yorkers regardless of their immigration status. As an example of this, IDNYC was developed in order to function as a government-issued identification card for vulnerable groups of people in the city such as immigrants.

Germany: Between the years 2015 – 2016, Berlin (the capital city of Germany) experienced an increase of 76,000 refugees led by migrants who were seeking asylum. 24,000 more refugees are expected to come to Berlin by 2020. As a result of these numbers, housing has become an issue in Berlin. Every year, the city needs up to 20,000 new apartments. Temporary housing is very much needed bearing in mind the increasing number of refugees since 2015. Sports halls were used to accommodate those who arrived in 2015 and
2016; yet, those who arrived in 2017 had to be accommodated in collective accommodation centres, containers (temporary homes) and regular apartments. Berlin has an urban development plan focused on housing and this is integrated into Berlin Strategy 2030. The main goal is to incorporate refugees into the general housing market. In general, Berlin works hard to integrate refugees and immigrants into the German society in a healthy way.

A sports hall in Germany used to accommodate refugees

b. Timeline of Events

Date of Event	Explanation
31 May – 11 June 1976	Habitat I, the first UN Conference on Human Settlements, took place in Vancouver, Canada as a result of UN Resolution 3128. The outcomes of Habitat I were the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlement and the establishment of United Nations Centre for Human Settlements in 1977.
June 3–14, 1996	Habitat II took place in Istanbul, Turkey twenty years after the first one. The issue of assuring adequate shelter for all was discussed by NGOs, high-level representatives of both national and local governments and many members of the private sector.
29 April – 3 May 2002	The first session of World Urban Forum was held in Nairobi, Kenya in order to discuss the urban issues. The forum was organized by UN Habitat.
2009	50% of the world became urban and this was considered as a tipping point.
17 – 20 October, 2016	Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, took place in Quito, Ecuador. Habitat III was concluded by the adoption of the New Urban Agenda.
	The ninth session of the World Urban Forum was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. With the attendance of 23,000 people from all around the world, WUF IX was the largest

7 – 13 February, 2018	WUF conference ever and the second largest UN conference.

Conventions and Treaties

The Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements: The Vancouver Declaration was adopted on 11th June, 1976 at the Habitat I conference. The declaration points out the importance of international cooperation and taking bold measures in order to adapt effective human settlement strategies. This declaration can also be considered as the foundation of the next two declaration that were adopted as a result of the following two sessions of Habitat.

The New Urban Agenda: The New Urban Agenda was adopted at the Habitat III conference. By adopting the agenda, member states show commitment to;

- Provide basic services for all citizens
- Ensure that all citizens have access to equal opportunities and face no discrimination
- Promote measures that support cleaner cities
- Strengthen resilience in cities to reduce the risk and the impact of disasters
- Take action to address climate change by reducing their greenhouse gas emissions
- Fully respect the rights of refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons regardless of their migration status
- Improve connectivity and support innovative and green initiatives
- Promote safe, accessible and green public spaces

Considering these commitments, we can say that the New Urban Agenda is an agenda that focuses on the preservation of the rights of refugees and migrants while taking strong measures to integrate these groups of people to the process of urbanization and urban life.[3]

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants: The New York Declaration consists of brave commitments towards saving the lives of millions of refugees and migrants, protecting their precious rights and sharing responsibility among nations. As stated by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, "The New York Declaration marks a political commitment of unprecedented force and resonance. It fills what has been a perennial gap in the international protection system – that of truly sharing responsibility for refugees". The declaration was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 19th September 2016.

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[3] See, The New Urban Agenda: Key Commitments, Site:
https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/10/newurbanagenda/

3. Conclusion

a. __Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue__

In the past, representatives of many nations gathered together to discuss and come up with a solution to minimize the negative impacts of urbanization on refugees and migrants. The very first United Nations conference regarding this was Habitat I and the Declaration of Vancouver was adopted as a result of the discussions. Two decades later, Habitat II was held in Istanbul, Turkey. The outcome of Habitat II was Habitat Agenda of Istanbul. As stated in the Agenda, each and every representative who attended the conference "endorsed the universal goals of ensuring adequate shelter for all and making human settlements safer, healthier and more liveable, equitable, sustainable and productive"[4]. This agenda was created in 1996 and because there were many improvements made over the years, Habitat conference was once again held in 2016. The New Urban Agenda (which was the outcome of Habitat III) was pretty much the improved version of the Habitat Agenda of Istanbul, adapting it's measures to the 21st century.

Other than these three significant conferences, the World Urban Forum was organised by United Nations Habitat. The newest session of the forum was held in Kuala Lumpur between 7 − 13 February 2018.
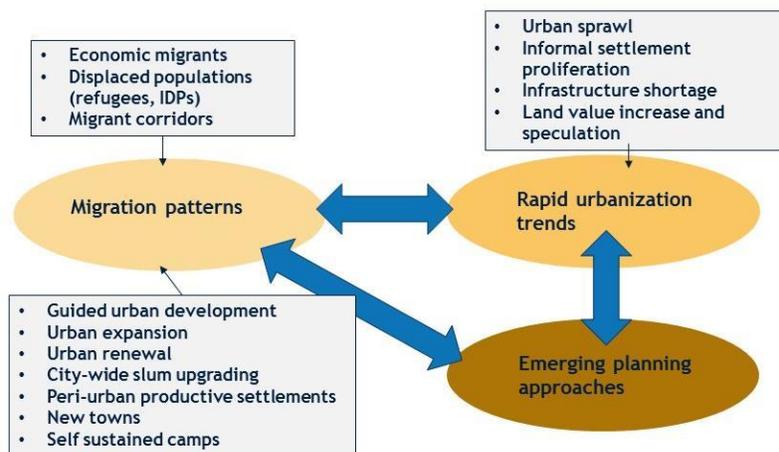
b. __Possible Solutions__

While coming up with solutions to tackle this issue, delegates must bear in mind that there is a strong correlation between the rate of urbanization and the number of people living in a country. As the population of a country increases, the need for more housing, more job opportunities and strong transportation facilities increases. With that being said, it is important to choose a strategy plan that aims to include refugees and migrants in the process of urbanization as a part of the society. Writing a resolution based on participatory planning approach can be a good idea to start with. It is extremely important to protect the rights of migrants and refugees since they are quite vulnerable and can easily be subjected to discrimination and violence due to possible social tensions caused by demographic changes. Humanitarian organizations can offer their expertise to governments since they are professionalized in protecting the rights of people, especially vulnerable groups.

In addition to this, rapid urbanization and overpopulation cause shortage in infrastructure and this is a crucial problem which should be tackled. Health services, accommodation and transportation facilities and water supplies cannot keep up with the pace of development and this affects not just

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[4] See, The Habitat Agenda: Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements, Site: http://www.un.org/ga/Istanbul+5/declaration.htm

the natives of that country but also the groups of refugees and migrants who are seeking shelter in that country. Strengthening the infrastructure of the countries who are struggling to provide adequate housing and other services for their refugees and migrants can be a good point to take into consideration while coming up with solutions.

Other than these, delegates may consider ways to create more job opportunities for migrants and refugees in order to integrate them to the economy of the countries, and eventually make them a part of the society. Please keep in mind that not accepting any refugees or migrants to countries is not a very peaceful way of solving the problem since these people leave their homes behind because of unwanted circumstances and it is against the very basic aim of the United Nations which is to protect the lives of humans with all the power they have.

Migration patterns, rapid urbanization trends and emerging planning approaches

c. **Notes from the chair**

Here are some websites and documents which can help you with your research;

- "Migration and Its Impact on Cities." *World Economic Forum,* www.weforum.org/reports/migration-and-its-impact-on-cities.
- United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. "The Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements - A/CONF.70/15 Chapter I - UN Documents: Gathering a Body of Global Agreements." *A/RES/14/1386 - Declaration of the Rights of the Child - UN Documents: Gathering a Body of Global Agreements*, www.un-documents.net/van-dec.htm.
- *Migrants and Rapid Urbanization: A New Agenda for Humanitarian and Development Urban Planning?*

www.bing.com/cr?IG=A58ADBA3AD8F445783EA586B38EB847E&CID=019A87F57A866080192A8BFF7B7B6154&rd=1&h=uRuM_1ZzDE5C22wZuRRdYRC_hzKBSgchD22b6wr2A-8&v=1&r=http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/27/papers/VI/paper-Murillo-final.pdf&p=DevEx.LB.1,5516.1.

- "Habitat III." *UN-Habitat*, unhabitat.org/habitat-iii/.
- "Implementing the New Urban Agenda." *Implementing the New Urban Agenda :: Projects - Durban*, nua.unhabitat.org/.
- "National Urban Policy in OECD Countries, *OECD*, www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy/the-state-of-national-urban-policy-in-oecd-countries-9789264271906-en.htm.
- *Ten Key Findings and Recommendations - Un.org*. www.bing.com/cr?IG=AF017F7F3DE044B7B56CE7D7102BF491&CID=2B3CE825C8156E9606A2E42EC9E86FA0&rd=1&h=ASdc27sivEhRv9yI-ioeCbTixOakO4S7lQtUo-ZQf0k&v=1&r=http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/commission/pdf/51/CPD51_10KeyFindings.pdf&p=DevEx.LB.1,5081.1.
- "The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants." *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/1.

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d. **Bibliography**

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- "OHCHR | Urbanization and Human Rights." *OHCHR | Convention on the Rights of the Child*, www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Urbanization/Pages/UrbanizationHRIndex.aspx.
- "New York Declaration | Refugees and Migrants." *United Nations*, United Nations, refugeesmigrants.un.org/declaration.
- "The New Urban Agenda." *Habitat III*, habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/.

- "World Urbanization Prospects - Population Division." *United Nations*, United Nations, esa.un.org/unpd/wup/.
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- *Migrants and Rapid Urbanization: A New Agenda for Humanitarian and Development Urban Planning?* www.bing.com/cr?IG=A58ADBA3AD8F445783EA586B38EB847E&CID=019A87F57 A866080192A8BFF7B7B6154&rd=1&h=uRuM_1ZzDE5C22wZuRRdYRC_hzKBSgch D22b6wr2A-
- "Migration and Its Impact on Cities." *World Economic Forum,* www.weforum.org/reports/migration-and-its-impact-on-cities.
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