

Democracy demands discourse

World Affairs Wednesdays



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 2020

Welcome to Our New 'World Affairs Wednesdays' Education Newsletter Wednesday, April 1st, 2020

With schools temporarily closed, and many self-isolating at home, we felt that it's important to continue the conversation about crucial global affairs. Each week, we will send out a newsletter covering one issue of global importance, with vetted resources, reading comprehension questions and a glossary of important terms.

With the coronavirus on the top of everyone's minds, we would like to focus our first couple of newsletters on how the global pandemic is affecting other critical global topics. It is especially important to study vulnerable populations, many of whom do not have the resources or ability to isolate themselves against the virus. This week, we will explore how the coronavirus is affecting **refugees and displaced people** around the world.

Refugees and Displaced People - Crisis before the Coronavirus

According to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), there are approximately 70.8 million **forcibly displaced people** worldwide. Of this distressingly large number, there are approximately 26 million **refugees**, 41 million **internally displaced people (IDP's)**, and 3.5 million **asylum seekers**. Although refugees, displaced people, and asylum seekers each have distinct needs, the



challenges that the novel coronavirus present are significant for each group.

In some cases, individuals or families voluntarily leave their homes in search of better economic standing, educational opportunities, higher standards of living, or to be with family members. Others are forced to move from their homes and communities as they flee war, famine, economic depression, or persecution. Forcibly displaced people may face persecution from a local, regional or national government or by other ethnic, cultural, or religious groups. When someone is forcibly displaced they have no choice but to flee from their home in order to survive. Unfortunately, the act of displacement often brings significant hardship, as those who are displaced often must distance themselves from schools, health centers and reliable sources of clean water and food.

In many instances, displaced people are unable to find secure housing and are forced into overcrowded settlements and camps. These makeshift communities are often overcrowded, and lack basic necessities like adequate housing, clean water and abundant food. For some of the poorest nations on Earth, these conditions exist for displaced people even within their own country.

READ (~5 Min): Frequently Asked Questions about Refugees and IDPs:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IDPersons/Pages/Issues.aspx>

WATCH (~5 Min): Global Trends in Forced Displacement

<https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/>

Questions:

1. Familiarize yourself with the terms Internally Displaced People (IDP), Refugee, and Asylum Seeker. What are the major differences and similarities?
2. What should a government provide to displaced people? Why do some governments fail to provide these items to displaced people?
3. Which areas of the world have the most refugees and IDP's? What countries are accepting the most refugees and asylum seekers?

Displaced People and the Coronavirus

The novel coronavirus presents a significant challenge to displaced people, and the governments responsible to them. As detailed above, many displaced people are forced into crowded camps or makeshift settlements, leading to issues related to sanitation and overcrowding. The crowded conditions and lack of sanitary equipment make displacement camps a potential crisis zone for an outbreak of COVID-19 or other infectious diseases. In some cases, these makeshift settlements often have a single water source, used by thousands for drinking, cleaning and sanitizing. These inadequate systems endanger millions around the world as displaced people are threatened by both direct and indirect spreading of the virus.

When an individual living in such conditions gets sick, there is generally little or no ability for social distancing, isolation or quarantine. Some camps are provided with a medical facility, often run by international aid groups like the Red Cross or **Doctors Without Borders**. However, the facilities often do not meet the needs of the displaced people that it serves. Thus, any type of large scale outbreak of a disease or virus has the potential to race through a displaced community.



WATCH (2:30 Min): Coronavirus Pandemic Leaves Refugees Vulnerable

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/coronavirus-pandemic-leaves-refugees-vulnerable-200319170010816.html>

QUICK READ (~1 Min): The Refugee Brief <https://www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/latest-issues/>

QUICK READ (~3 Min): 10 Things You Should Know about the Coronavirus and Refugees
<https://www.nrc.no/news/2020/march/10-things-you-should-know-about-coronavirus-and-refugees/>

Questions:

1. According to the UNHCR, displaced people in which countries are most at-risk of the coronavirus?
2. What conditions inside a refugee camp or settlement expose people to greater risk of illness or disease?
3. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), why are refugees and displaced people more at-risk for contracting the coronavirus than other populations?

Refugees and Displaced People - Forgotten in the Global Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has now touched almost every country on earth, with about 750,000 cases worldwide. Experts and infectious disease specialists expect this number to grow considerably over the coming weeks as the virus continues to spread around the world.



Given the rapid rise of the virus, and the threats that the virus poses to the health and well being of people, governments have increasingly attempted to isolate their countries from the rest of the world. Travel bans, restricted movements, and calls for social distancing are some of the broadest measures a government can take to limit the spread of the virus. In some countries, these actions have taken on a **nativist** tenor, where governments become wholly occupied about the safety and security of their own citizens, often marginalizing outside groups.

Although this phenomenon was, to some measure, expected, the turn toward protecting a nation's citizens leaves out millions of undocumented people, displaced people, and refugees. It is these exact people that need the greatest support, given that they often face challenging living conditions, lack of medical supplies and lack of clean water. As the global epidemic continues to shut down economies,

limit travel, and affect the planet, it is important to continue providing for those individuals most in need.

READ (~7 Min): How the Coronavirus Outbreak can Threaten Refugees and Migrants

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/02/27/Coronavirus-Iran-refugees-IDPs-Italy-Europe-disease>

READ (~ 5 Min): Amid Coronavirus Spread, Host Countries Ignore Refugees at Their Own Peril

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/27/coronavirus-refugee-health-pandemic-unhcr/>

READ/VIEW (~5 Min): Photos from Inside Refugees Camps Show Coronavirus Threat

<https://www.businessinsider.com/a-coronavirus-outbreak-could-leave-refugees-even-more-vulnerable-2020-3>

Questions to Consider:

1. Why are displaced people, especially those in migrant or refugee camps particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus?
2. Why are concerns for migrant or refugee populations usually less than concerns for citizens?

3. What are some challenges to communicating the threats of the coronavirus to displaced people and people in refugee camps?
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Glossary/“Terms to Know”

- **Forcibly Displaced Person:** Those who are forced to move, within or across borders, due to armed conflict, persecution, terrorism, human rights violations and abuses, violence, the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters, development projects or a combination of these factors.
- **Refugee:** A person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. A crucial requirement to be considered a "refugee" is crossing an international border.
- **Internally Displaced Person (IDP):** Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border.
- **Asylum seekers:** An asylum-seeker is someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed. Every year, around one million people seek asylum.
- **Doctors Without Borders:** An international aid organization that provides trained doctors to refugee settlements, areas experiencing natural disaster or even conflict affected areas.
- **Nativism:** the policy of protecting the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants.

Teachers—please **share your memories with us!** Submit your favorite moments and photos from past World Affairs Council of Philadelphia education programs and let us know how you are still encouraging your students to be global citizens. Your entry may be featured in an upcoming World Affairs Wednesdays newsletter.

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