DEUTSCHE SCHULE THESSALONIKH MODEL UNITED NATIONS | 2020

Committee: Special Conference on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SPECON)

Issue: Countering toxic narratives about refugees and migrants

Student Officer: Andrikopoulou Konstantina

Position: President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Andrikopoulou Konstantina and I am a student at HAEF, Psychico College. This year, I will have the honor to serve as President of the Special Conference on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SPECON). This will be my third time chairing, and I will be the expert chair on the topic of countering toxic narratives about refugees and migrants.

MUN is a great opportunity for all of us, not only to develop our personal skills of great importance, such as public speaking skills, but also to become familiar with issues that affect humanity on a global aspect. With that being said, I would like to congratulate all of you on participating in the 3rd DST MUN Conference and reassure you that there will definitely be a fruitful interaction and a heated debate.

Taking into consideration that immigration and refugee cases have reached a spike over the last decade, it is of utmost importance to reassure the community that refugees and migrants will not become the victims of hate speech, resentfulness and other forms of physical and verbal violence.

This study guide will provide you with essential information regarding the third topic of the Special Conference on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SPECON) and help you get familiar with the issue. By all means, you are highly encouraged to conduct further research not only about the topic but also your countries' policies as well, for you to be fully prepared for the conference.

I wish you all most of luck with your preparation and I reassure you that the current presidency will be at your disposal both prior and during the conference.

Should any questions arise, do not hesitate to contact me via email, (konstantina.andrikopoulou@yahoo.co.uk).

Looking forward to meeting you in person,

Andrikopoulou Konstantina

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The debate of migrants and refugees has always been a heated one, let alone when it involves toxic narratives[1]. Unfortunately, there is a large number of influential voices worldwide who are determined to eradicate both refugees and migrants, converting them into objects of wrath. The major tool of these voices is the creation of toxic narratives centered on the quintessence of the human phobias concerning the "other". Undoubtedly, this is divisive among the members of a community, and it causes convulsions to the cornerstone of the human society.

More practically, it can be said that this kind of "otherness" concerning the nationality, the religion, the tradition and the language is the new enemy, even if the truth is completely different with millions of stateless people to whom nationality and fundamental rights are not given. Needless to say that according to recent data, one person every two seconds is forcefully displaced because of conflicts.

The issue of migrants and refugees encompasses narratives related to economic insecurities, cultural commotion and religious conversion. Such insecurities create misleading perceptions associated with the nature of immigration. On the other hand, the protectors of migrants and refugees, are harshly berated as individuals whose role is iffy. As a result, the effectiveness of aid towards migrants and refugees is being diminished, creating at the same time a hostile environment where integration and amicable relationships cannot thrive.

It is our duty, responsibility and obligation to combat the toxic narratives which cloud people's good judgement and pare down hatred and social conflict.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Migrant

A person who moves away from his birthplace, a) within his country itself or b) across international borders, for a wide range of reasons, such as political, environmental and economic ones. A migrant is not regularly someone who flees in order to avoid persecution or violence. His primary goal is the amelioration of his living conditions. It should be noted that the definition of migrants exists even if it is not universally accepted whatsoever.

Refugee

A person who flees war, persecution or general conflict, by crossing international borders, is called a refugee. In this case, his primary goal is the pursuit

---

[1] An approximate number of 272 million people are currently abandoning their countries.

of safety. Unlike the definition "migrant", the definition "refugee" is clearly defined by international law.

Toxic Narrative

A toxic narrative is a kind of verbal force majeure with a negative impact within people's lives and societies, and its goal is to evoke rejection and hate.

Hate speech

Hate speech is the kind of communication which uses discriminatory language referring to a group of people based on their origin, ethnicity, religion, race or other identity factors.

Segregation

The action of placing a person or a group of people apart from the others by showing at times hostility or contempt. This phenomenon is usually detected in societies where there is a religious, social or cultural gap.

Disinformation

False and misleading information, usually issued by a government, an organization or the media and propagated to harm a rival tower.

Fact-checking

The investigation of an issue in order to corroborate facts. It can also be a tool combating prejudice and hate speech.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical Background

In the 19th century, an unprecedented mass migration took place because of the new forms of transport. Between 1846 and 1914, more than 30 million migrants left Europe for the United States of America (USA). Even if this migration was initially unrestricted and unhindered, later on by the late 19th and early 20th century the host countries made an attempt to control immigration and be more selective. During the First World War and the Russian revolution, more refugee and migrant crises appeared. Additionally, in 1923 there was a shift of populations between Greece and Turkey which moved in both directions. After the end of the Second World War and by May 1945 there were almost 40 million refugees in Europe. Finally, it is worth mentioning the European refugee crisis starting in 2011 with a spike in 2015, as it mainly included a warzone in Syria making the situation worse with the ongoing inability of states in the Global South to cope with their refugee populations.

Currently, the repercussions of this crisis are still present by deteriorating the image of both refugees and migrants and triggering more toxic narratives.

Refugees and migrants as "threat"

It is rather undoubtedly that the main cause of toxic narratives is the false assumption that refugees and migrants stand as a threat against the western values, religion, culture, educational system, employment, health system and other public services. Refugees and migrants are looked at askance as the two main sources of terrorism and crime. A number of statistics have shown that the locals usually oppose accepting refugees as they were overly concerned about links to extreme violence. Yet, data have shown that refugees and migrants are unlikely to get involved in violence as they have already fled persecution and hatred. It is not uncommon when the inhabitance of host countries attributes their country's economic recession to refugees and immigrants' presence. This is a complete fallacy as the signs of the economic deterioration are commonly prior to their arrival. As a result, unemployment rates show both immigrants and refugees as the main culprits, even if the locals would not be disposed to undertake poorly paid jobs. Another factor for considering these populations as "threats", is that their presence evokes emotional cords such as religion, long historical tradition, culture and national identity. As most of them come from a completely different social, religious and cultural background, they are constantly perceived as an ongoing threat. Last but not least, the locals are narrowly focused on the misconception that the national public services will not be able to fund the needs, to which their entitled, because of their immigrants and refugees' advent.

Hate speech

Bullying

Currently, the bullying issue has come to the forefront of public attention, as researches have shown that migrant and refugee children are more likely to be bullied by their peers. This is, of course, one of the many angles of hate speech. Moreover, this social group is often the victim of hate crimes and contempt. As a result, they are repeatedly discriminated and excluded from social events.

Public opinion

Several statistics have pointed out that the result of public opinion surveys vary profoundly and depend on the socioeconomic status of the host country. Consequently, public opinion defines the way with which immigrants and refugees are treated. Undoubtedly, the establishment of close relationships with the locals and their participation in the society is a herculean task. This often results in their inability
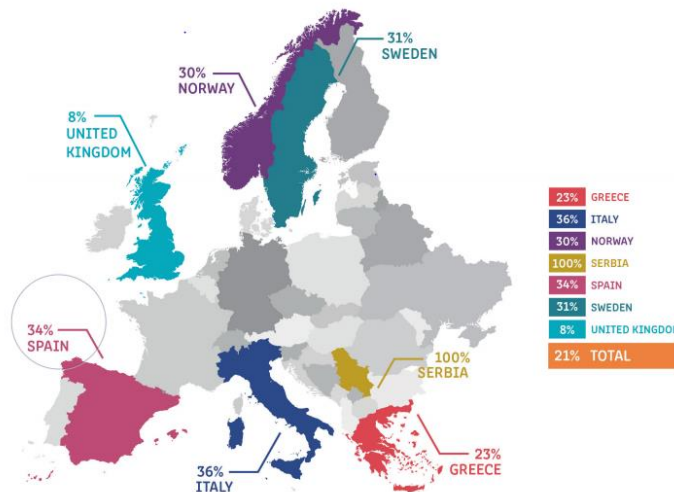
and weakness to peacefully integrate in the new environment. On the contrary, they remain isolated, segregated and forgotten.

Social media and journalism

The role of media is definitely undeniable when it comes to the effect they have on public opinion. The way immigrants and refugees are mentioned in the news poignantly shows the rate of their marginalization. In most cases, they are subjects of the stories and are presented as occupants. As a result, refugees and immigrants who are deprived of their dignity are used as a scapegoat for the ills of the society, by labeling them in an offensive way.

Even if impartial journalism is vital to prevail, the presence of the opposite effect is rather common. That is biased and unsympathetic journalists, who overemphasize on the refugees and immigrants as a burden for the society. At the [2]same time, they distort both reality and truth since the media plays a powerful role in everyday life.

The above course of action violates the five core principles of ethical journalism, which are: the accuracy, the independence, the impartiality, the humanity and the accountability. Such actions lead to inflammatory and divisive comments which marginalize immigrants and refugees more deeply. Consequently, when these hateful narratives and comments are repeatedly heard, it makes it rather impossible to be overturned.

Figure 1: Percentage of people in the news stories referred to as migrants or refugees

---

[2] 2020. [ebook] Available at: <https://www.refugeesreporting.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Changing_the_Narrative_Media_Representation_of_Refugees_and _Migrants_in_Europe.pdf>.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Greece

The situation in Greece is widely known due to its controversial and debatable relations with the neighboring countries, Turkey and North Macedonia. However, Greece has always been a host country for both refugees and migrants, showing compassion towards people in need. Although Greece has proven multiple times its welcoming intentions, it is undoubtable that in many cases, migrants and refugees have been the victims of toxic narratives and have faced intense segregation.

Italy

Over the last decades, Italy has been the host country for large scale immigration, which triggered heated debate from the late 1980s to early 1990s. Since then, the phenomenon of immigration has grown substantially, resulting in immigration laws unfavorable to both immigrants and refugees. A wave of media caused public hostility by describing migration in the Italian Press in derogatory terms. Furthermore, a number of politicians and journalists legitimated ethnic prejudice with the use of toxic labeling of migrants as: "illegals", "irregulars" or "clandestinos". At the same time, the above elites used propaganda so as to disseminate fear concerning job competition or welfare benefits. The escalation of this nemesis were rumors concerning the distortion of cultural and national identity.

USA

Currently, a significant increase in populations attempting to reach the USA through Mexico has been reported. The abovementioned ethnicities mostly consist of family groups, and unaccompanied minors derive from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The response of the USA government and administration was the promotion of persecutions, hindrances and barriers to the acquirement of asylum and border enforcement. This strategy has been both concerning and alarming, as the implementation of the aforementioned measures, contributes to the intensity of toxic narratives.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR, established in 1950, has been a major factor contributing positively to crises in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Currently, it consists of 16,803 personnel, and its actions affect a total of 134 countries. Its role has always been to provide stateless people with support and assistance. This can be achieved through the aid of expertise and collaboration with regional legal instruments.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) is the main UN entity related to human rights. The principal and foremost focus of this program is the ensuring and the protection of human rights. An additional commitment of this body is the preservation of the three intertwined values of the United Nations: peace and security, human rights and development. Finally, OHCHR offers support via technical expertise so as to ensure the implementation of human rights.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

IOM was established in 1951, undertaking the role of the intergovernmental organization related to migration. It numbers 172 member states and a further eight observer-states in more than 100 countries. Its ultimate goal is to promote human and orderly migration.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
March 3, 1891	The Bureau of Immigration was established
1939-1945	The Nazi persecution of Jews and other minorities during World War II caused a global refugee crisis
2004	The International Migration Law Unit was established
2016	The project Refugees Reporting – Refugees and Communications Rights – was launched by the World Association for Christian Communication Europe Region (WACC Europe) and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)
2018	1.1 million new refugees fled conflict in Syria, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

A/HRC/RES/35/17

On 22 June 2017, the Human Rights Council adopted the resolution 35/17. Its focus was to ensure and safeguard the human rights of immigrants and refugees, as it was stated that all human beings are equal in dignity and entitled to all rights and freedoms. It is worth mentioning that it was reaffirmed that all people have the right to freedom of movement within the borders of the United Nations.

16 September 2019 – Side event on Migration: building a new vision of governance based on human rights and solidarity

On 16 September 2019, during the Human Rights Council's 42nd session, an additional event was organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The content of the event was: "Migration: building a new vision of governance based on human rights and solidarity". Its primary concern was governance impregnated with the ideals of human rights and solidarity. The co-sponsors of the event were Mexico and the Kingdom of Morocco.

15 December 2015 - Panel Discussion: Promoting tolerance, dispelling myths, protecting rights - an evidence-based conversation on migration

On 15 December 2015, a panel discussion took place in Geneva aiming at the promotion of tolerance and the debunking of prejudice. The incentive was the increase of cases of extremism and radicalizations. During the discussion, the participants underlined the necessity for security, stability and respect for the human rights of refugees and migrants.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The creation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950, by the United Nations General Assembly. The main focus of the agency is to lead and supervise international action that aims to the protection of refugees and resolves related issues.

Expert discussion on the theme "Changing the public narrative on migration: promoting tolerance and confronting xenophobia against migrants"

Moreover, on 21 April 2016, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) organized a one-day expert discussion on the theme "*Changing the public narrative on migration: promoting tolerance and confronting xenophobia against migrants",* to elaborate on the impact that toxic narratives have on migrants

and to propose possible solutions that could contribute to the combating of the issue and ameliorate the conditions under which migration happens.
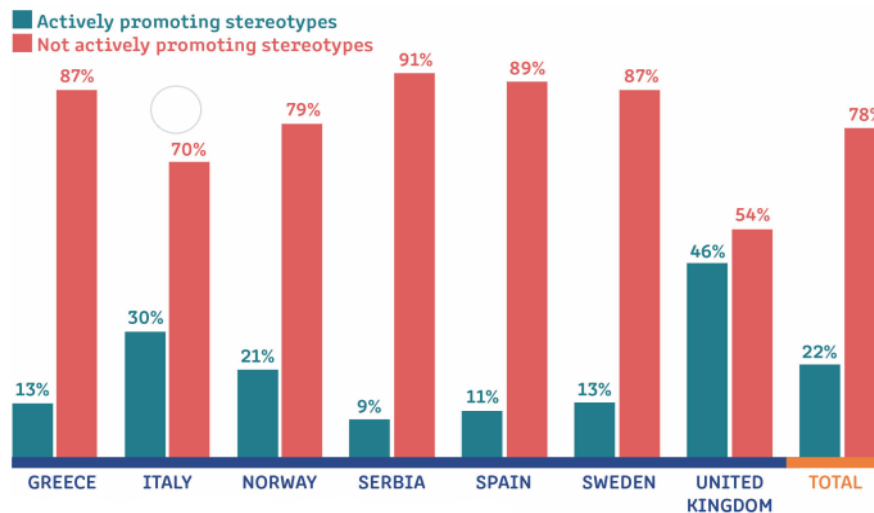
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Fact-checking

Unfortunately, the disinformation about refugees and migrants is a widely common phenomenon. Their image is often distorted because of fake information via social media. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for companies, governments and media to be aware of the significance of their role towards a fairer direction where human rights and life are revered. Consequently, a thorough fact-checking is required so as to debunk all myths related to refugees and migrants. As a result, it is imperative that social media join forces to fight misleading information.

Social media and the role of journalists

It is undoubtedly admitted by all parts involved in this issue, that the impact of social media on the public opinion is undeniable. Therefore, every piece of information should be placed under scrutiny. Furthermore, major social media platforms should also play a positive role in combating hate speech and the distortion of the truth. In order for this to occur, journalists should emit and broadcast news through the spectrum of transparency and impartiality. This can be easily achieved by banning content supporting racism, violence and retaliation.

Figure 2: News stories promoting negative stereotypes against refugees and migrants[3]

---

[3] 2020. [ebook] Available at: <https://www.refugeesreporting.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Changing_the_Narrative_Media_Representation_of_Refugees_and_Migrants_in_Europe.pdf>.

The role of politicians

Additionally, a politician's role and involvement are needed too, as they can be extremely influential figures. They owe themselves and the society to represent values, such as kindness and compassion. It is their obligation to take measures which promote justice and equality and support strategies against segregation. Moreover, through the implementation of new legislation, placed on the old ones, they should combat toxic narratives and empower the position of migrants and refugees in society by publicly demonstrating acceptance, tolerance reverence.

Encounters between refugees and migrants and host communities

Last but not least, the measure which seems to be the most long-lasting one is the creation of sincere encounters between refugees and migrants and host communities. For this reason, further contact between these two parts should be encouraged, and their voices should be heard in public debates. Through the organization of events and the distribution of necessities by hist communities, both sides will have the opportunity to meet, interact and establish closer relationships.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"About Migration Law." *International Organization for Migration*, 29 Jan. 2015, www.iom.int/about-migration-law.

"Emergency Handbook." UNHCR, emergency.unhcr.org/entry/44937/migrant-definition.

"Global Facts and Figures about Refugees." *Amnesty International*, www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/global-refugee-crisis-statistics-and-facts/.

"Global Migration Data Portal." *Migration Data Portal*, migrationdataportal.org/?i=stock_abs_&t=2019.

"IOM - International Organization for Migration Knowledge Policy European Commission." Knowledge for Policy - European Commission, 15 Mar. 2019, ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/organisation/iom-international-organization-migration_en.

"OHCHR | Migration: Building a New Vision of Governance Based on Human Rights and Solidarity." www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Migration/Pages/buildingnewvision.aspx.

RefugeesReporting.eu – Refugees and Communication Rights in Europe, www.refugeesreporting.eu/wp-

content/uploads/2017/10/Changing_the_Narrative_Media_Representation_of_Refugees_and_Migrants_in_Europe.pdf.

ReliefWeb - Informing Humanitarians Worldwide, reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Mixed-Migration-Review-2019.pdf.

 "Shaping the Public Narrative on Migration." *OHCHR*, www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Migration/Pages/Shapingthepublicnarrativeonmigration.aspx.

Unicef. "Latest Statistics and Graphics on Refugee and Migrant Children." UNICEF, www.unicef.org/eca/emergencies/latest-statistics-and-graphics-refugee-and-migrant-children.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "About Us." UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/about-us.html.

Welcome to the United Nations, www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_HRC_RES_35_17.pdf.

www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/GA74thSession/WFP.pdf.

2020. [ebook] Available at: <https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/toxic_narratives.pdf> [Accessed 15 May 2020].

2020. [ebook] Available at: <https://www.refugeesreporting.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Changing_the_Narrative_Media_Representation_of_Refugees_and_Migrants_in_Europe.pdf> [Accessed 15 May 2020].

2020. [ebook] Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f0417.pdf> [Accessed 15 May 2020].