Current State of the Refugee Crisis

Europe has been the destination for African and Middle Eastern refugees for quite some time, but starting from 2015, the number of refugees heading to Europe has increased radically. The rapid increase in numbers is largely due to the intensification of the Syrian War, as the Islamic State (IS) became involved in the Syrian War. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2015 alone (until October), more than 4.1 million people have lost their homes and fled for their lives, and it is estimated that more than half of the Syrian population (11.4 million) have lost their homes and became refugees since the outbreak of the Syrian War.

Even though Europe has been the main actor in the European Refugee Crisis, most of the Syrian refugees do not point their feet to Europe. 66% of the refugees in Syria are wandering around Syria, and the rest (34%) of the refugees are going to other nations. Most of these “other nations” do not include European countries, but rather neighboring or other Islamic states, such as Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iraq, and others. The table to the right compares the number of refugees in countries near Syria to the number of refugees in Europe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Number of Refugees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1,940,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>1,120,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>660,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>630,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>800,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table above, Europe has not been the main player; yet most of the discontentment has arisen from Europe. Hopefully, however, the overall public opinion has changed after the picture of the Aylan Kurdi's dead body was spread. Several European nations decided to open their doors to refugees, although a number of nations’ borders still remain closed. Furthermore, as time progressed, nations that opened their doors could not support the influx of refugees; therefore, nations that opened their doors closed down their borders once again. Frequent changes in these policies have only darkened the chaos among the seekers of new their home.

1) Aylan Kurdi was a victims of a shipwreck in the Mediterranean sea, the picture of his dead body received attention from the world as part of the European Refugee Crisis.
European representatives gathered to find a solution and have agreed upon a new resolution, the Refugee Quota System, on September 23, 2015. The Refugee Quota System sets the number of refugees that each European state will take. Even though this was designated as the plan, the proposed resolution has its limitations, and many of the Eastern European states disagree with the provision. Other present conventions such as the Dublin Convention and the Schengen Agreement also came up with possible alternatives, but these conventions have their own restrictions as well. The inability to find a resolution that everybody can agree on has only created more cracks in the European Union (EU).

### Problems in Decision-making

#### Problems in the International Agreement

**Refugee Quota System**

The Refugee Quota System is a plan instigated mainly by France and Germany, in which EU countries will hold a to discuss the allocation of the number of refugee reception. The conference will take into consideration each member state’s population, economic strength, existing number of refugees accommodated, and unemployment rate. The problem with the Refugee Quota System is that it does not guarantee any effectiveness or have any forcefulness as a fundamental solution to the refugee crisis. For instance, there have been signs of disunion between Western Europe and Eastern Europe. At the Foreign Ministers’ meeting held in Luxembourg on September 5, 2015, Eastern European countries, including Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, initiated strong opposition under the pretext that the Refugee Quota System will only allow more refugees to cross the borders. With faltering economies and no properly established social and physical infrastructure for refugees, simply allocating numbers of refugees will not genuinely solve the problem. The day before the meeting, the four countries also expressed that the method of accepting refugees should be on the basis of solidarity and spontaneity, from which they displayed reluctance to accepting the obligatory and permanent quota system. Further adding to their hesitation, Hungarian Prime Minister Orban Viktor once stated that Muslim refugees are going to undermine the foundation of Christianity as well.

**The Dublin Regulation**

The Dublin Regulation prescribes that the first country a refugee steps into should assume responsibility for that refugee. Discussions on incorporating seven more countries, including Macedonia and Albania, in addition to the current 32 signatories are occurring. The debates, however, have become rather controversial as critics say that this solution shifts the burden to countries at the frontier line of the routes through which refugees come. As a result, refugees will be trapped in the border area - not being able to move inwards to wealthier European states, and thus financial burdens to Eastern European countries, Spain, Greece, and Italy are expected to rise. Moreover, a number of refugee-related organizations point out that the lengthy waiting time for asylum seekers is also a problem that the Dublin Convention should seek to remedy. As mentioned above, social and physical infrastructures for refugees are still lacking in many countries, which prolongs the process of recognizing asylum seekers as refugees. Once they have agreed to receive the refugees, they should be able to take responsibility for them as soon as they can rather than neglecting the refugees while they are sitting on the streets.

**The Schengen Agreement**

The Schengen Agreement allows all refugees to freely move within the countries signed up within the Schengen Area, provided that the refugees are in possession of the member states’ visa and nationalities. However, the Schengen Agreement is often accused of violating national sovereignty and making treaty powers expend too much effort on border control. For instance, both the United Kingdom (UK) and the Republic of Ireland share an area classified as the Common Travel Area, which is a travel zone in which British
people and Irish people are given permission to freely travel both countries. The problem is that when the UK joins the Schengen Agreement, then regardless of Ireland’s intent, it will automatically be dragged into accepting refugees as long as the Common Travel Area subsists.

Problems in the Currently Enacted Solutions

Refugee Camp

One of the plans proposed establishing refugee camps near Turkey and Africa in order to prevent refugees from coming into Europe. However, this way of dealing with refugees will only hasten the problem. “We are just staying, waiting here, for what I do not know,” says Shabani, one of the Congolese refugees. Tens of thousands of young people with boundless potential are wasting their lives while confined in refugee camps. This is a large loss of international manpower, and with no clear aid plan to integrate them somewhere as valuable human resources, the problem will remain. Furthermore, the more the refugees amass in certain areas, the more brokers and criminals become systematized, leading to various types of offenses such as drug and human trafficking. This could bring about a hotbed of international crime.

Eritrea

Eritrea has also been at the heart of the debate, as a few European countries had summit talks with Eritrea’s dictatorial government. In June, the solicitor general of Norway visited Eritrea and proceeded with negotiations on returning refugees from Norway back to their homeland. The finalized talks state that approximately 2,000 Eritrean citizens are expected to be sent back by the end of this year. Recently, Britain and Italy have joined the negotiation with the same intent. Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki was given economic aid or relieved from economic sanctions under the premise of reinforcing the sealed border. While this seems like a viable solution, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) said that if European countries continue to offer economic aid to the Afwerki regime, it will only aggravate the decimation that is taking place in the border area.

Involvement in Wars

Several European countries, including Britain and France, are already involved in the Syrian War through launching airstrikes, justifying their involvement by saying that the refugee crisis could not be solved simply by receiving more and more refugees. The countries believe that being involved in the war can lead to a genuine solution to the current situation because putting an end to the war will also stop the creation of more refugees. The circumstances are becoming even more complicated as Russia has indicated on October 5, 2015, that it is examining expansion of its military action, which has been previously confined to air strikes, to sending ground forces to Syria. Not only is Syria the biggest exporter of oil for Russia, but also its anti-government democratic movements hinder Russia’s sphere of influence. The international relations and interests surrounding the area will only magnify the possibility of a military collision and will create more refugees as a result.

Possible Solutions

The problem that lies at the heart of the refugee crisis is obscured by European countries confronting each other with their national interests. It is time to overcome myopic self-centeredness and find effective measures that will put an end to the crisis. As the above supranational movements suggest, institutional devices have proven futile in solving the refugee crisis, but the role of civil society in Germany, which shed its nationalistic way of thinking, is coming to the forefront as a potential solution.

German Government’s Current Position

On August 31, 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin at a Federal Press Conference mentioned that Germans “can be proud of the humanity of our constitution” because it recognizes the right of asylum for refugees due to political persecution. Although Germany ostensibly seems well-disposed towards refugees, something of the opposite is happening behind the scene. For instance, the German National Assembly discussions are ongoing on whether the country should reduce subsidies for the refugees to less than 300 Euros, which barely meets the minimum level of standard living. The Assembly is also planning on increasing the number of signatories for the Dublin Convention. Furthermore, despite the increase in exports in 2014 and 2015, which enabled a significant tax boost with its GDP higher than $300 trillion, only $1.2 billion (0.4%) was allotted for refugees.

Civil Society’s Response

German Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) perceive the refugee crisis as an opportunity, rather than a critical situation, that would be able to present the right path to the serious problems such as low birth rates and an aging population that Germany is currently
facing. They assert that refugees should be taught the German language, German culture, and political and social constitution so that they can naturally be assimilated into German society as an outstanding workforce. A number of actions have been taken in order to achieve the goals suggested by the CSOs. For example, on October 10, the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra offered to perform at a charity concert free of charge. The profit made during the event will be used to help refugee relief. Moreover, there have been voluntary movements among students to help the children of refugees adapt to school and the new environment by assisting with their homework or by being a simultaneous interpreter. It is expected that their activities will also have an effect on the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), which could lead to efforts to create conformity in common European issues such as a unified asylum law, the Aliens Registration Act, and an integrated financial law. The INGOs could make use of the opportunity to create a new and unprecedented sense of unity in Europe. For countries that have similar problems as Germany with respect to their social structure, the actions of CSOs could be a helpful reference to break through the common problems of the wealthiest countries.

What About Korea?

Door is Bigger

In comparison to other Asian countries, South Korea is a nation that is rather generous towards refugees. South Korea has signed several conventions related to refugees, such as the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (in 1951) and the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (in 1967). Furthermore, Korea was the first country in Asia to enact the Refugee Act in 2013; the Refugee Act forbids deportation, supports refugees financially, and supplies other materials that refugees need upon arriving in Korea. South Korea also has a system called “humanitarian status holder” for the rejected refugee status applicants. Humanitarian status holders are given this status usually because their home country is in a devastated condition that makes them unable to return. By holding the humanitarian status, the possessor can legally be employed and treated as a normal worker in Korea. The length of the status is one year, though this can be extended. At present, the South Korean government shows a tendency to accept refugee status applicants as humanitarian status holders, and most of the Syrian refugees who fled from the Syrian War received this designation. The statistics show that in 2014, out of 713 refugee status applicants, 577 applicants were accepted as humanitarian status holders. Considering that only 177 people were given humanitarian status holder prior to 2013, this big rise suggests that South Korea is opening its doors.

Room for Improvement

Even though there are more lights for refugees in South Korea than in other Asian nations, some shadows remain and need to be removed. By looking at the figures, one can see that South Korea is behind world standards. First, South Korea devotes less support towards refugees. South Korea’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) compared to Gross National Income (GNI) was 0.06% in 2010, and 0.1% in 2011. This percentage is quite low compared to that of the EU (0.41%) and Germany (0.41%), which are currently the most active supporters of refugees. Currently, the acceptance rate of refugees in Korea is 6.7%, but if comparing this percentage to that of the world (38%), the rate is quite low. This low allowance rate is mostly due to difficulty in being acknowledged as refugees in Korea; the South Korean government is very cautious in recognizing refugees because of the confusion caused in Korean society when accepting large numbers of refugees at once. In addition, the South Korean government is worried about whether they will be able to maintain control over the situation if there is a massive influx of newcomers. In 2012, UNHCR encouraged the South Korean government to lower boundaries for admitting refugees, but no big changes have been made.

To provide an example of the stagnation, Syrian workers in Korea wanted to invite their family from Syria to help them escape from the threats of war, but this request was rejected by the National Assembly. Additionally, the current humanitarian status holder system has problems as well. Even though the system allows the refugees to stay and work in Korea, the refugees cannot receive basic rights such as medical insurance and compulsory education. The humanitarian status holders, therefore, cannot afford to go to the hospital because the economic burden is too great.
of refugees are not yet coming to South Korea. Because of the
distance, South Korea is not directly feeling the crisis. Another
critical reason is that South Korean society is not ready to accept
refugees. South Korea is a nation with strong racial homogeneity,
and there can be confusion within society if a massive number of
refugees are allowed to penetrate this homogenous culture. Lastly,
the financial aid required to sustain refugees is considerable, as
refugees need support in every area of living - including education,
housing, clothing, food, and other necessities. The stance of
Korean society towards Syrian refugees is skeptical. Park Ji-Hoon,
the director of “Help Syria,” has commented that the reaction of
Koreans towards Syrian refugees has been rather cynical or that
some Koreans are totally ignoring the situation. The negativity that
Koreans show towards foreigners could also be the result of the
negative image of Islam in Korea due to the presence of radical
groups such as IS or the Taliban.

Possible Direction for Korea’s Refugee Treatment

Is It Necessary?

Humanitarian Standpoint

Since the Korean War, South Korea was able to maintain its
sovereignty as various nation states around the world have offered
assistance to it in order to impede North Korea’s aggression to
occupy the South. In this context, offering humanitarian aid to the
people who are in despair over their country’s ruination is the basic
attitude that should be cultivated to keep world peace.

Global Positioning

At present, the UN Secretary General is Korean, and if Korea takes
the lead in managing refugee problems such as the Syrian Refugee
Crisis, its diplomatic position in the international community
in Northeast Asia will be strengthened. For instance, it has been
proven that Qatar has supported Syrian refugees prior to Saudi
Arabia’s intervention. Although Saudi Arabia is the leading power
among the Arabian nation states, the new Qatari king, Hamad
bin Khalifa Al Thani, decided to support the Syrian Refugee Crisis
before Saudi Arabia did in order to be rid of the sphere of influence
of Saudi Arabia. This eventually resulted in receiving international
support.

Long Term Policy for Korea-Syria Relations

Despite the fact that it is not recommendable to be calculating
when facing people who are in need, international relations are
often portrayed to be superficial and calculative where the strong
prey upon the weak. However, Arabians do not forget people
who spare no material or emotional support on them in the time
of their need. For example, the Jordanian king had supported
Saddam Hussein in 1991 during the Gulf War, despite the fact
that the West, especially the United States of America, imposed
economic sanctions against Jordan. Iraq and Jordan have shared a
strong relationship since then. If, from the current situation, Syrian
President Bashar Assad’s regime collapses and a new government
emerges and regenerates the normal function of the state, Syrian
refugees who have received support from the Korean government
will be able to return to their homeland. There will be people who
are willing to become government officials among the returnees,
and they will remember the active support from Korea. This will
serve as momentum for Korea and Syria to become allied nations
in all sorts of fields, especially in politics and economy. This might
make a telling solution to the endemic problem of the diplomatic
offices and major conglomerates of Korea in the Middle East,
which are always in pursuit of short-term outcomes. If Syrian
refugees are treated and accommodated with a long-term view as
a foothold for business, Korean companies will be able to advance
into Syria and its neighboring countries after Bashar Assad’s regime
is ousted from power.

How Should Korea Progress?

It remains true, as mentioned above, that Korea has a stronger basis
for civil society to act when facing the refugee crisis compared to
other East Asian countries. However, this does not mean that South
Korea can be complacent about their role in the situation. There
is still a lot to change in order for society to recognize the need to
show compassion towards the refugees. Even the countries directly
involved in the refugee crisis are having difficulties fostering this
maturity. For the vast majority of students at Korean universities,
there is a great deal of pressure on them to conform. Since they try
to earn good grades and increase their market value to employers, their ability to have critical minds to their surroundings
or the society in which they belong is relatively lacking compared
to that of German students. Citizens should always ask critical
questions, and when there is a problem, they should be able
to identify and rectify it. By extension, political parties should
embrace the ideas from the citizens and put those into practice for
the betterment of society rather than giving populist policies to
earn more voting counts. When these structural reforms in Korean
society as a whole take place, only then will the refugee crisis be
manageable. This change requires some efforts from below: the
civil society.

Should the burden of the Syrian Refugee Crisis be only on Europe’s shoulders? The ongoing crisis is a concern that requires worldwide attention, and Korea is not an exception. Helping the Syrian refugees will improve South Korea’s position in the international community, but the support should not from the calculations. Providing provisions for the refugees should start from the basis of the society, and the transformation of the Korean civil society is needed.