Humanitarian Corridors Garnished with Artillery

The Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

As February ended, the United States experienced something new and exciting~ unity. While many have been calling for it, something clicked within the American people when the news broke. Even corporations united in sharing compassion. Zara, Exxon, Boeing, Nike, Disney, Estee Lauder. What unites these groups? The Russia-Ukraine war. But what is the true origin of the conflict that garners support from all sides of the political spectrum? And how does this conflict affect those closest to it? The Ukrainian refugee crisis has grown drastically since the start of the war- the mass exodus has become one of the largest refugee crises in Europe since WWII. Mainly women and children, this giant new refugee demographic skyrocketed to over 1.5 million within the first few weeks of conflict. Such a huge rise in refugees leads to some major questions, the largest being 'What caused this?'

The roots of this crisis reach back to the collapse of the Soviet Union. As the US and Russia worked to limit those in control of nuclear warheads, Ukraine was left with not much more than security assurances to keep out invaders. Vox explains, "The United States and Russia worked with Ukraine to denuclearize the country, and in a series of diplomatic agreements, Kyiv gave its hundreds of nuclear warheads back to Russia in exchange for security assurances that protected it from a potential Russian attack." This left Ukraine reliant on the international community to hold Russia accountable to their promises.

As time passed, Russia and the United States were preoccupied with Cold War fighting, which kept Ukraine safe until Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Most

nations opted to leave the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which gifted Russia demonstrable power over Ukraine. In 2022, Russia spread falsehoods of widespread Neo Naziism within the Ukrainian government and amassed troops at Russia's border with Ukraine. Soon, the global community watched as Russia invaded Ukraine.

As soon as Russian troops entered Ukrainian land, allegations of war crimes spread, and soon Ukrainian lives were at risk. Civilians hid in makeshift bomb shelters. Russians shot artillery at hospitals, daycares, schools, and homes. Talks between Ukraine and Russia resulted in humanitarian corridors, but there is significant evidence that these corridors were not respected. Mines and other artillery discovered in the corridors have made a safe escape nearly impossible for civilians. The international community widely condemned Russia's actions, but most nations are sticking to sanctions and arming Ukraine, leaving Ukraine's military largely outnumbered. Considering the current situation, Ukraine's civilians have a foreboding future ahead of them. But what might that entail?

As of March 8, approximately 2,011,312 people fled Ukraine (UNHCR). Over 1 million of these refugees entered Poland, others headed to Hungary, Slovakia, Russia, and Moldova. Many plan on moving farther west. Topping off the disaster, The UNHCR estimates that 4 million people will flee Ukraine before this conflict ends.   Most of these refugees are women and children- many of these children are unaccompanied, creating the risk of abuse for these vulnerable, traumatized children. Xenophobia and racism have further complicated the effects of this war, as many Black civilians have reported being denied entrance onto trains leaving the war zones, adding a layer of racism to their wartime trauma.

As refugees from Ukraine make their way west and away from the war, they will likely encounter the same xenophobia that has trapped Africans in Kyiv. Influxes of refugees will likely grow negative sentiment from host populations. Ukrainians adjusting to living in a new place will simultaneously lose loved ones to the war as casualties climb. To even ponder the complex pain of the futures of these families, we need to consider how the humanitarian crisis can be ended with as little bloodshed as possible.

The simplest, and the most farfetched solution, would be to end the war. Because this is a developing conflict, much of Ukraine would be suitable for civilians if the war was ended today. NATO has made it increasingly clear that they won't provoke a war against Russia, which makes ending the war unlikely. Nevertheless, we must consider more likely options, because those currently suffering don't have the time to wait for that outcome. An important move for world nations is to protect humanitarian corridors. This could mean taking control of the airspace above corridors, or even supplying stronger weapons to be used at corridors, allowing more Ukrainian refugees and civilians to flee as the war ramps up. To combat racism keeping Black refugees in danger, nations should barter supplies for equitable policies within the Ukrainian government. Even within warzones, we cannot let racism seep in.

Moving forward, the international community must unite in support of these refugees by enacting legislation to allow as many refugees into safe borders as is manageable. We cannot judge the number of refugees we need to accept based on how many or how few our neighbors accept- falling into this trap of competition could divide us. We need to support as many Ukrainians as possible as swiftly as possible, and division in the international community will only lead to more graves.

On the smaller scale, communities such as our own need to prepare to support refugees. This can manifest as organizing with groups who have a history of supporting refugees by providing transitional housing, social connection, and job opportunities. Anything from donating money to sharing a room in your home to giving rides to providing pro bono therapy or medical care could improve quality of life for these refugees. It is integral that everyone lends a hand where they can to support the Ukrainian people. In the end, when Russia can aggress no more, and every soldier has laid down their arms, the war won't matter. But those who are still alive, and those who sought refuge will be around to remember, and the way they are treated will impact the geopolitical landscape for centuries~ we must act compassionately.

Works Cited:

BBC, 2022. Evacuation convoy attacked outside Kyiv. [podcast] BBC Global News Podcast.

Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0bv3393> [Accessed 13 March

2022].

Bunn, Curtis. "Black Immigrants Chose Ukraine for Quality of Life, Education. War Leaves

Them Fearful." *NBC News*, 2 Mar. 2022, www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/black-

immigrants-chose-ukraine-quality-life-education-war-leaves-fearf-rcna18169.

Horton, Ben Anthony. "'Ukrainians Go First': How Black and Brown People Are Struggling to

Escape the Russian Invasion." *Euronews*, 2 Mar. 2022,

www.euronews.com/2022/03/02/ukrainians-go-first-how-black-and-brown-people-are-

struggling-to-escape-the-russian-invasi.

Kirby, Jen, and Jonathan Guyer. "The Russia-Ukraine Conflict, Explained." *Vox*, 24 Feb. 2022,

www.vox.com/22917719/russia-ukraine-invasion-border-crisis-nato-explained.

Regan, Helen, et al. "One Million Refugees Flee Ukraine as Russia Escalates Bombardment of

Key Cities Including Kyiv and Kharkiv." *CNN*, 4 Mar. 2022,

edition.cnn.com/2022/03/03/europe/ukraine-russia-invasion-thursday-intl-

hnk/index.html.

"Ukraine Refugee Situation." United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, 16

Mar. 2022, data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine.