

# What Is Required to Ensure the Human Security of Refugees?

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In this paper, the policy question of how to ensure the human security of refugees will be considered from two interrelated perspectives: protection and empowerment of refugees. Protection, as defined here, refers to directly reducing multiple threats that refugees face, such as violence and serious violations of human rights. On the other hand, empowerment refers to enhancing the resilience of refugees so that they become more capable of dealing with such threats themselves. From these two perspectives, the three durable solutions for refugees will be reviewed: (1) return refugees to their home country after peace is restored; (2) settle refugees in their neighboring countries where they take temporary shelter; and, (3) settle refugees in third countries. In addition to these durable solutions for refugees, an idea of a digital “refugee health handbook” will be proposed, as an innovative tool to enhance human security of refugees, allowing them to keep their health information with themselves, while crossing the border from one country to the other.

**Key Words:** refugees, human security, empowerment, mother and child health handbook, digital refugee health handbook

## 1. The Underlying Issues

A German comedy movie *Willkommen bei den Hartmanns* (*Welcome to Germany*) was shown on the first day of the 12th UNHCR Refugee Film Festival in Tokyo at the end of September 2017 (Photo 1)<sup>1</sup>. The Hartmanns, a family living in a quiet and affluent residential area on the outskirts of Munich, accept a refugee into their home. Angelika, a retired teacher, decides to welcome the refugee despite opposition from her husband Richard, a doctor refusing to retire. Their acceptance of the young refugee, Diallo, leads to widening repercussions within the family, in the community, and with the government.

The movie depicts an undeniably serious theme of what could actually happen when accepting a refugee, but with a comedic touch. The audience is not only saddened by the prejudice and discrimination the refugee faces, but they can laugh from time to time, helping them better relate with the movie. Directed by Simon Verhoeven in Germany in 2016, the movie won the Highest-grossing Film of the Year at the 2017 German Film Awards, as well as the Best Film and the Best Production at the 2017 Bavarian Film Awards. *Willkommen bei den Hartmanns* is scheduled to be shown in theaters across Japan

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<sup>1</sup> More details of the 12th UNHCR Refugee Film Festival in Tokyo can be found at the following website: <http://unhcr.refugeefilm.org/2017/en/>



**Photo 1.** The 12th UNHCR Refugee Film Festival in Japan  
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starting in January 2018 under the title *Hajimete no Omotenashi*.<sup>2</sup>

In general, the following three methods are proposed as durable solutions to the so-called refugee problem: (1) return refugees to their home country after peace is restored; (2) settle refugees in their neighboring countries where they take temporary shelter; and, (3) settle refugees in third countries. Besides these proposed solutions, however, it is crucial to prevent people from becoming refugees in the first place by promoting international cooperation so as to resolve conflicts and eliminate serious violations of human rights, tackling problems at its roots. Another important perspective to have is to think of refugees as opportunities that bring new energy to a country rather than as problems that cause burdens. The movie illustrates the challenges that can arise when we choose the third solution of settling refugees in third countries.

Based on the 2016 *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants* adopted at the United Nations General Assembly (UN 2016),<sup>3</sup> the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will propose a global compact on refugees in 2018.<sup>4</sup> In this context, it is important for us to discuss how the human security of refugees can be ensured.

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<sup>2</sup> Information on the release of this film to the general public in Japan can be found at the following website: <http://www.cetera.co.jp/welcome/>

<sup>3</sup> The full text of this *Declaration* and other relevant information can be found at the following website: <http://refugeesmigrants.un.org/declaration> (accessed 22 November 2017).

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR is leading the work towards the adoption of a global compact on refugees, and relevant information can be found at the following website: <http://www.unhcr.org/new-york-declaration-for-refugees-and-migrants.html>

## 2. Violence and Human Rights Violations Produce Refugees

The young refugee in the movie, Diallo, becomes displaced from Nigeria in order to flee the violence of Boko Haram. As the focus is placed on Germany's acceptance of refugees, how refugees are generated in Nigeria is only portrayed in a scene where Diallo tells the story of his early life in elementary school. In this section, the author will discuss the first solution, "return refugees to their home country after restoration of peace," while explaining Boko Haram briefly based on the BBC program *The Missing Stolen School Children*<sup>5</sup> (distributed by Maruzen Publishing in Japan<sup>6</sup>), overseen by myself as an editorial supervisor of Japanese subtitles.

Located in the center of the African continent, Lake Chad is bordered by four countries, namely Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon. The Lake Chad Basin, which is home to about 21 million people, has been affected by a worsening humanitarian crisis resulting from armed conflicts, particularly after 2013. Consequently, many people, estimated at 2.6 million, have been forced to leave their home, including 1.4 million children. Their displacement has resulted in an enormous number of refugees and internally displaced persons, or IDPs. Particularly, internally displaced children who cannot flee the areas of conflict suffer severely from violence, malnutrition, disease and lack of education. In northern Nigeria alone, 20,000 children have been separated from their families (UNICEF 2016).

The group called Boko Haram was formed by several thousands members in northern Nigeria in 2009. It is an extremist group founded as a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist sect. Although the group claims to be Islamic, their extremist interpretations and subsequent violence, as well as serious human rights violations are not tolerated by many moderate Muslims.

One characteristic of this armed group is that they abduct women and children and make them carry out suicide bombings and espionage. Since 2014, eighty-six children have been forced to carry out suicide bombing attacks in four countries (UNICEF 2016). Another major characteristic is their hostility toward secular education and Christians. In Nigeria, Muslims, who account for about one half of the population, mainly live in the northern part of the country, and Christians, who account for forty percent of the population, mainly live in the southern part. Meanwhile, some Nigerians still practice the traditional Nigerian religion.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has reported that the murders and abduction of civilians, involvement of children in combat, sexual violence and torture by Boko Haram are gross violations of the international human rights and humanitarian law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 2015). The International Criminal Court has also been carrying out preliminary examinations in response to an allegation of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In East Asia as well, there are refugees and IDPs arising from such violence and serious violations of

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<sup>5</sup> The details of this BBC program can be found at the following website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06170dm>

<sup>6</sup> For the availability of this video in Japan, please visit the following website: [http://pub.maruzen.co.jp/videosoft/news/2017/BBC\\_worldchildren.html](http://pub.maruzen.co.jp/videosoft/news/2017/BBC_worldchildren.html)



**Photo 2.** A Devastated Rohingya Elementary School

(©Yasushi Katsuma, Kyaukpyu/2015MAR18)

human rights. One particularly serious example is Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. Many Rohingya people, living mainly in the western state of Rakhine, have been denied nationality verification and civil rights. More recently, an upsurge in violence against them has occurred, leaving many of them displaced from their homes (Photo 2). This suggests that although “returning refugees to their home country after peace is restored” may be a desirable option, it is still not easy to break down the structures of violence and serious human rights violations rooted in the countries and often impossible to guarantee safety in their home country in a short period of time.

### **3. Jordan, Accepting Refugees from Neighboring Countries**

Traditionally a refugee-friendly country, Jordan has accepted a large number of refugees from neighboring countries. In this regard, it can be said to be a model country that has contributed to the second solution, “settle refugees in their neighboring countries where they take temporary shelter.” The country has accepted a huge number of Palestine refugees in the past, then many Iraqi refugees, and more recently, many Syrian refugees. The recent massive influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan, however, has led to increased pressure on the country’s finances, particularly by causing an upsurge in its social service expenditures, including the areas of educational, medical and healthcare services.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is an international organization established to support Palestine refugees in the Middle East, namely Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank. UNRWA is working to provide assistance and legal protection to about five million Palestine refugees.<sup>7</sup> Through these services, UNRWA strives to help

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<sup>7</sup> For the activities of UNRWA, please visit the following website: <https://www.unrwa.org/>

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**Photo 3.** A healthcare clinic managed by UNRWA inside a Palestine refugee camp in Amman  
(©Yasushi Katsuma, Amman/2017JUN19)



**Photo 4.** Zaatari Refugee Camp housing Syrian refugees  
(©Yasushi Katsuma, Mafraq/2013DEC01)

Palestine refugees achieve the following four human development goals: knowledge and skills, long and healthy lives, a decent standard of living, and full enjoyment of human rights. Regarding health as one of the organization's priority areas of activity, UNRWA is providing healthcare services to 3.1 million Palestine refugees at the moment (UNRWA 2017) (Photo 3). Jordan has a long history of accommodating Palestine refugees, more than two million of whom are now living in the country, and some long-established camps even appear to be regular residential neighborhoods at a glance. After the recent humanitarian crisis in Syria, however, the situation has become increasingly complex due to a fresh influx of Palestinians from Syria into Jordan and other neighboring countries.

Jordan, which has a population of about 9.45 million people, accepted nearly 700,000 new refugees

from Syria, in addition to the over two million Palestine refugees it had already accommodated. The Zaatari Refugee Camp (Photo 4) was set up in northern Jordan near the border with Syria in July 2012, where about 80,000 refugees receive assistance. While there are several refugee camps like this in Jordan, the majority of Syrian refugees have begun living in cities and towns now to help themselves earn a living (REACH 2014).

#### 4. To Ensure Human Security of Refugees

What is required to ensure the human security of refugees? This question is considered from two perspectives: protection and empowerment of refugees. Protection, as defined here, refers to directly reducing multiple threats to refugees, such as violence and serious violations of human rights. On the other hand, empowerment refers to enhancing the resilience of refugees so that they become more capable of dealing with such threats themselves.

First of all, the solution of settling refugees in third countries, as depicted in the movie *Willkommen bei den Hartmanns*, in which the refugee is accepted into Germany, could be used as a reference for Japan as well. It is the author's personal opinion that Japan should be more willing to accept refugees. This, however, requires us to create a multicultural society by eliminating discrimination and prejudice while at the same time providing refugees with the healthcare services and educational support, including that for language learning, which they need to become capable of earning their own living through work in our society. In other words, developing a realistic plan is required to accept refugees. Looking back in history, many people came to Japan as refugees in the late 1970s and 1980s following the establishment of communist regimes in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in 1975. Some of them flowed into Japan as what we called "boat people" and the country accepted over ten thousand of them. Given today's situation on the Korean Peninsula, it would be better to assume that a similar situation may arise in the near future, and I suppose that planning a realistic refugee acceptance policy is an urgent task for Japan.

Secondly, it is vital to provide peace-building assistance to conflict-ridden countries where violence and serious violations of human rights have taken place, so that returning home after peace restoration would become possible for refugees. In the area of international peace cooperation, Japan has been providing peace-building assistance as one of its official development assistance (ODA) priorities, in addition to proactively contributing to UN peace-keeping operations (PKO). The four pillars of peace-building assistance upheld by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA),<sup>8</sup> the Japanese government agency implementing ODA, are: rehabilitation and reconstruction of socioeconomic infrastructure, economic recovery, governance, and security. Although many of the problems are difficult to resolve, it is important to continue expanding activities that can lead to greater protection of refugees, in other words, directly reducing threats to refugees, such as violence and serious violations of

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<sup>8</sup> JICA's activities in the area of peacebuilding can be found at the following website: [https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our\\_work/thematic\\_issues/peace/activity.html](https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/thematic_issues/peace/activity.html)

human rights they face.

Furthermore, it is also important to support countries that accept refugees, like Jordan, so that refugees can settle where they take temporary shelter. Japan has contributed to providing support and legal protection for refugees through grant aid to UNHCR and UNRWA. Besides this, Japan has established a framework called the Japan Platform to allow Japanese non-governmental organizations to play more proactive roles in humanitarian assistance activities, including refugee assistance.<sup>9</sup> One recent noteworthy addition to these efforts was the Japanese government's decision to provide humanitarian assistance in Myanmar and Bangladesh through international organizations in September 2017, in response to violence in the Myanmar state of Rakhine and the resulting influx of Rohingya people into Bangladesh.<sup>10</sup> Such actions are praiseworthy.

Lastly, the author would like to introduce the reader to one attempt made as a means of empowering refugees. Although it has long been a common practice across Japan to distribute *Boshi Kenko Techo* (the Mother and Child Health [MCH] Handbook) to pregnant women, this system had not been widely implemented in other countries. However, in response to a proposal put forth by an Indonesian physician inspired by Japan's MCH Handbook, JICA began supporting the development of an Indonesian version of the MCH Handbook in 1993. As a result, the MCH Handbook system had been adapted for use in all Indonesian states by 2006. This experience in Indonesia, in turn, has been shared to experts from Palestine and Afghanistan through training held in 2007.

In Palestine, an Arabic version of the MCH Handbook was introduced in 2008 in cooperation with JICA and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)<sup>11</sup> supported by a grand aid from the Government of Japan.<sup>12</sup> This MCH Handbook has then been used among Palestine refugees in neighboring countries through an UNRWA project (on the right in Photo 5). A noteworthy development was that this MCH Handbook was digitized for smartphones recently.<sup>13</sup>

Besides this, a handbook on lifestyle-related diseases has also been created by UNRWA to address rising concerns for the spread of diabetes among Palestine refugees (on the left in Photo 5). If this handbook on lifestyle-related diseases could be digitized in the future together with the MCH Handbook, the author expects that it will increase the chances of successfully deploying a more comprehensive, "digital refugee health handbook" system which targets all refugees, not just mothers and children. This kind of portable system will allow refugees to manage their own health data even when they migrate to different areas, whether it is within the same country or across national borders. As such,

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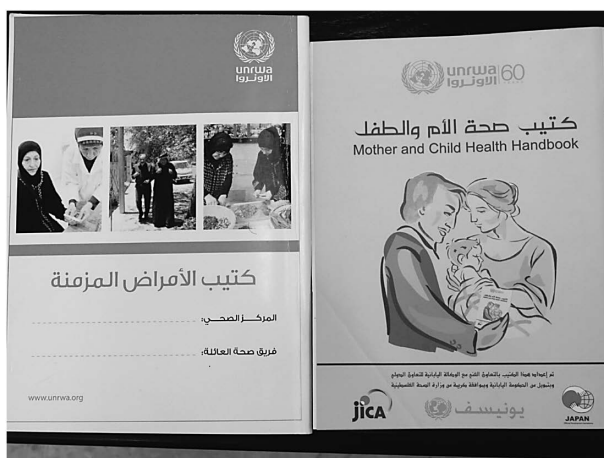
<sup>9</sup> For the mechanisms of the Japan Platform, please visit the following website: <http://www.japanplatform.org/E/>

<sup>10</sup> The press release issued by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs can be found at the following website: [http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e\\_001743.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001743.html) (accessed 22 November 2017).

<sup>11</sup> The press release issued by UNICEF can be found at the following website: [https://www.unicef.org/oPt/media\\_1715.html](https://www.unicef.org/oPt/media_1715.html) (accessed 22 November 2017).

<sup>12</sup> The introduction of the MCH handbook in Palestine is explained in the following YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YqpiW2y7mw> (accessed 22 November 2017).

<sup>13</sup> The press release issued by UNRWA can be found at the following website: <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/jica-and-unrwa-start-digitization-maternal-and-child-health-handbook-jordan> (accessed 22 November 2017).



**Photo 5.** MCH Handbook (right) and the Handbook on Lifestyle-related Diseases (left)  
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the idea of a “digital refugee health handbook” can be said to have high potential as a tool to enhance human security of refugees, allowing them to keep their health information with themselves, while crossing the border from one country to the other.

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