Armed conflict, violence, human rights violations and natural disasters are all factors contributing to people leaving their homes in search of stability. Recently, images of Syrian refugees fleeing their country to seek asylum in Europe flashed across television screens and newspapers. And, while the media is concentrating its efforts on the situation in Syria, the refugee crisis is a global concern affecting several continents.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at the end of last year there were more than 59.5 million displaced individuals and 2014 saw the largest annual increase of 8.3 million people. [1] The war in the Syrian Arab Republic escalated the disaster. More than 8 million Syrians have fled their war-torn country, which means that one in five global refugees are of Syrian decent. [2]

The Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea and Somalia all experienced human atrocities over the last decade. More than 26 percent of the world's refugees come from this geographical area. [3] Fighting in Ukraine contributes to the crisis there. More than 1.35 million internally displaced people and an estimated one million refugees that have left for neighboring countries. [4] Ethnic conflict and violence and natural disasters in Southeast Asia and especially, Myanmar has added to the global crisis, with over 3.5 million people either internally displaced, without state citizenship or refugees. [5] In Colombia, in-fighting between Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the Army of National Liberation has displaced or removed more than 6 million people. [6]

There is clearly no true epicenter to the refugee crisis nor is there a one geographic area where refugees migrate. Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees, estimated to be more than 1 million. [7] From January to March of 2015 in Europe, Germany had the most refugees seeking asylum, with more than 70,000, followed by Hungary, Italy, France, Sweden, Austria and the UK. European Union law "states that people must apply for asylum in their country of arrival and wait for their application to be granted before they can legally travel onwards through the EU." [8] Most refugees entering Europe are arriving by sea and therefore Greece, Italy and Spain are especially overwhelmed.

The global refugee crisis is not just emerging. Issues of violence, civil war, sectarian violence and natural disasters have always triggered migration. The lack of a plan, or proactive measures, continues to remain an issue. "Europe needs to look at the future of this crisis in very different ways than it is doing now. Or it will face far bigger problems than it does now." [9]

References:

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