



Case Study - 8 : Ethnic Conflict and Refugee Settlement

You are the officer in charge of a refugee settlement team in a multilateral humanitarian organization. There is an ethnic conflict in the nearby border area and as a result, many people are affected and displaced. The economically better-off neighbouring countries have accommodated the streams of migrants with financial support from your organization. The violence in the region has increased recently and the influx of people seeking refuge has grown exponentially. With countries following protectionist policies the refugees are left in a vulnerable situation. You are asked to represent the organization for the settlement of refugees with neighbouring countries, who also happen to be a powerful economic bloc. However, they refuse any more accommodation on the following grounds:

- a. **Drainage of resources in face of subdued economic conditions.**
- b. **Domestic political repercussions.**
- c. **Rehabilitation will encourage more influx.**
- d. **Permanency of settlement in face of better prospects than at home.**

What are the counter-arguments that can be cited to convince the countries for an immediate solution? Suggest some long term measures as well that could be followed to address the problem.

Solution

As an officer overseeing refugee settlement related issues in a multilateral organisation, my immediate responsibility is to ensure a safe haven for all refugees and also ensure that they have access to basic needs i.e. food, clothing, shelter and also medical aid.

In face of stiff opposition or reluctance by the countries to accept the immigrant refugees I would propose the following:

Continued financial support from the multinational organisation in resettlement and rehabilitation of the refugees.

Being economically powerful they can absorb temporary economic shocks while continuing to fulfill their role as a responsible nation.

Utilize the inflow of refugees as cheap labour by providing them training and thus reap economic benefits of cheap labour.

By refusing to accept refugees, they will be possibly presented in a bad light in the world by humanitarian organisations and civil activists. Economic factors like international trade is also based on perception and credibility of sovereign nations. Thus, in the long run their international relations might get affected.

Assure them that the problem is only temporary and in the future following the restoration of peace the refugees will return to their homeland.

Cite examples of other nations who are also rehabilitating refugees.

The problem though triggered by an immediate crisis, i.e., ethnic conflict, demands long-term solutions as it involves cost of life and livelihood, displacement and associated social tension, fragmentation and also inter-generational consequences. I would suggest certain long-term measures as:

Peacefully explore the permanent safe havens in other yet developing/Island nations with financial support from the organisation.

Explore the possibility of settling refugees in areas unaffected by the civil war (in the same country) so that on the restoration of peace they can be resettled back.

Starting negotiations with countries like Japan (with a predominant ageing population) to accept some refugees. They can also provide work visa for 10-15 years and also provide employment in the short term.

Support the country facing the ethnic conflict in its rehabilitation and resettlement efforts.

Highlight the refugee's issue at global forums, i.e., at the United Nations and seek assistance.

Use the internet and print media to raise awareness about the pitiable conditions of the refugees.

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