

Problems with the Definition of the Refugee in International Law and Political Sciences

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The definition of the term “refugee” is one of the most debated issues in international politics and the social sciences. Before the Second World War, there was no specific or general definition of a refugee, and the refugee protection system was established under the League of Nations. The first treaties on the protection of refugees emerged in the 1920s under the auspices of the League of Nations, targeting a specific group of people rather than a universal definition. However, due to the two world wars, the world needed to provide a definition that would cover not only a specific people and group but also, more broadly, humanity. Therefore, under the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is a person who is outside their country, has a well-founded fear of persecution, and cannot return safely. Yet modern-day conflicts, crises, and economic issues, such as poverty and environmental problems that push people to move, do not fit the main definition, creating a need to understand, legally, who can be a refugee and who cannot. However, economic migration and other examples given here do not include the problem of defiance from an international law perspective.

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