

Refugee Camps: Past & Present

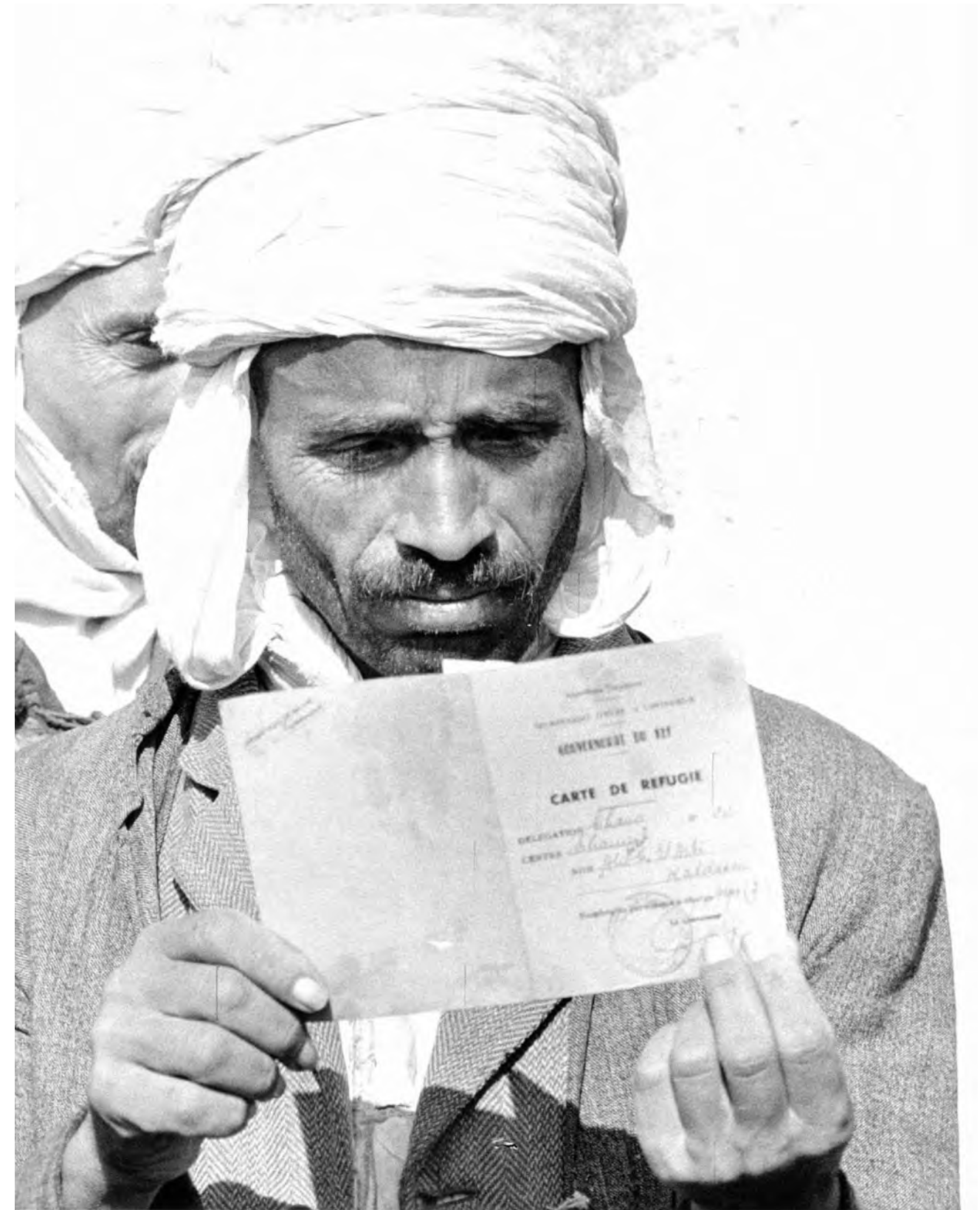
Refugee camps started all over Europe after World War II. Located in schools, empty buildings and army barracks, they were a temporary arrangement for a residual group of people who had not resettled. Since then other wars have been fought in other parts of the world displacing populations and causing a constant flow of refugees.

Today refugee camps come in many shapes and forms. Some are very large accommodating up to 90,000 people. Some are built in the most inhospitable, isolated and barren areas. Many refugees now living in camps have lived there for a long time and cannot go home.

Most camps are supported by international aid which is un dependable, erratic and inadequate. Once camps are set up, governments tend to disengage from the lives of refugees and the responsibility is shifted to the United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Although camps can save lives in the emergency phases, as years go by they progressively waste these same lives. The policy of encampment denies refugees the right to move freely and engage in productive activities. Eighty per cent of camp dwellers are women and children. Living in camps also poses problems for the socialisation of children who are obviously going through the most crucial phases of their development.

Millions of refugees are waiting for resettlement but only less than one per cent resettles in the West.



Africa's first modern refugee crisis occurred in the late 1950s during Algeria's independence struggle against France. UNHCR, during its first intervention on the African continent, provided assistance for 200,000 refugees who fled to surrounding countries.

PHOTO: UNHCR/WRIGHT/1961



As colonialism came to a close, conflicts erupted in many parts of Africa in the 1960s including, not for the last time, strife in the central African state of Rwanda. This group of Rwandese is seen waiting for the distribution of food at a refugee centre in Uganda's Oruchinga Valley.

PHOTO: UNHCR/W.MCCOY/1964



The flight of Vietnamese refugees began after the fall of Saigon to North Vietnam forces in 1975. An estimated 3 million, including these Vietnamese boat people arriving in Malaysia in 1978, fled in the wake of the various conflicts in Indochina.

PHOTO: UNHCR/K.GAUGLER/1978



The exodus of more than 6 million Afghans started in 1979. People fled to such sites as the Ghazi Refugee Village in Pakistan.

PHOTO: UNHCR/H.GLOAGUEN/1984



Drought and war resulted in a massive influx of Ethiopians into Sudan during the 1980s and tens of thousands of people died before a relief effort became effective.

PHOTO: UNHCR/M.VANAPPELGHEM/1985



The Gulf War in the early 1990s was followed by the exodus of 1.5 million Iraqi Kurds. Some refugees, including these children, were able to return home within weeks.

PHOTO: UNHCR/A.ROULET/1991



Within days of NATO's air strikes against Serb positions in 1999, nearly 1 million civilians fled or were forced into exile from Kosovo, including these civilians at a border crossing with the neighbouring Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

PHOTO: UNHCR/R.LEMOYNE/1999



An estimated 250,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar began arriving in Bangladesh in early 1991. Many returned home where UNHCR provides assistance and monitors their wellbeing.

PHOTO: UNHCR/H.J.DAVIS/1992