

Refugees in the EU And the SDGs: Decoding Inclusivity of Refugees in Assessment System of SDGs and Progress Towards SDGs

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Abstract

Migration issues began specifically after the world wars and evolved in various forms to this day. The biggest inflow of refugees in Europe was seen in 2015 which brought new issues at the forefront of the European Union. European Union had tried to control the crisis through various policies and systems in place. EU countries have shared responsibilities to ensure the asylum seeker is processed in a dignified manner. But the process is not as simple as it looks. And many a times there are incidences of violation of basic universal Human rights which are also part of SDG's. When we look into SDG's, one point strikingly comes into light which is the "refugee gap" connoted by the International Rescue Committee in their report "Missing Persons: Refugees Left Out and Left Behind in SDGs" (2019). Such other reports point out lacunas in the policies made to achieve inclusivity.

My proposed topic is **Refugees in the EU and the SDG's: Decoding inclusivity of refugees in assessment system of SDG's and progress towards SDG's**. The paper will try to study SDG's, migration, policy lucidity and responsibilities of member states to ensure providing basic services obligated under SDG's. It is crucial to study whether the "well-managed migration policies" are able to include refugees into the SDG's assessment and are they coherent with SDGs aim of "not leaving anyone behind."

Keywords: Refugees, SDG, EU, inclusivity,

1. Introduction:

The World Leaders in 2015 came in concert to fight poverty, hunger, and to improve health, education all over the globe, with aim of peace and prosperity for the world. This unison effort took the form of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targeted to get achieved by 2030, it consists of 17 goals and a pledge to "leave no one behind." The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development symbolizes a shared vision and obligation on the part of member countries of the UN who ratified it; however, it only contains a single goal relating to Refugees, which fall short on many fronts.

Refugee Convention 1951 defined refugee as "someone who due to justifiable fear of being persecuted on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is incapable or, owing to such fear, is reluctant to get themselves of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former habitual residence, is unable or, due to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (Article 1).¹ Refugees

¹ The 1951 Refugee Convention | UNHCR India

as a vulnerable population needs safe, secure haven and socio-economic welfare programmes designed to provide decent living conditions (in short more than a place at refugee camp).

The SDGs cover “refugees” in 10.7 target stating the facilitation of “orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.”² Other goals or targets covering refugees are 10.7.2: Proportion of countries with migration policies that facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, 10.7.3: Number of people who died or disappeared in the process of migration towards an international destination, 10.7.4: Proportion of the population who are refugees, by country of origin, this indicator was later added in 2019 as not a single target on refugees was present in the original framework, 17.18: to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.³

According to International Rescue Committee (IRC) “Missing Persons: Refugees Left out and Left Behind in the SDGs (2019), 25.9 million refugees are present all over the globe and distributed unevenly with multitude of them going to poverty-stricken and unstable countries which are near to their country of origin, moving to such fragile and volatile nations could worsen the already distressed refugee’s living conditions. The report also mentions that refugees are absent from SDGs progress statements, exclusion of refugees from national self-assessment tools like Voluntary National Review (VNR) to measure data on progress towards SDGs, they are not mentioned in any national developmental strategy of Countries. The limited inclusiveness of refugees in the progress report of SDGs by means of VNR exemplifies as “SDG Refugee Gap” by the IRC report.

Refugees are not included in VNR on the basis of their socio-economic conditions which is crucial to measure their progress to achieve the SDGs targets. In 2019, 41 Countries submitted VNRs, only 13 cited refugees as deserving specialised attention, despite adhering to the commitment of “leaving no one behind.”⁴ International data indicate that refugees are not as good as their contemporaries, children accompanying refugees are five times more probable to be out of school than the non-refugee children, and barely 23 percent of refugee youths go to secondary school as against their counterparts who are 84 percent worldwide.⁵ It is prevalent that refugees face more barriers to attain a decent self-dependent life and even more difficult for women refugees who are looking for jobs as the top four Countries with huge population of refugees are also the one with maximum curbs on refugees seeking jobs.⁶ These statistics are not present anywhere in the official progress reports of SDG, which is quite concerning as refugees are meagrely represented in data and hence data fails to register their issues and needs.

The research paper tries to gauge whether these targets are enough to reduce the “refugee gap” and study the presence and extent of refugee gap causing hurdles to achieve the motto “leaving no one behind.”

² SDG Indicators, Global Indicator Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/> see p. 12, (last visited 09 October 2023)

³ Ibid, (last visited 09 October 2023)

⁴ IRC (2019), Missing Persons: Refugees Left Out and Left Behind in the SDG, available at: <https://migrationdataportal.org/resource/missing-persons-refugees-left-out-and-left-behind-sdgs> (Accessed on 09 October 2023)

⁵ UNHCR. 2017. Left Behind: Refugee Education in Crisis. <https://www.unhcr.org/left-behind/>

⁶ World Bank Group. 2017. Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced, and Their Hosts. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25016/9781464809385.pdf?sequence=11&isAllowed=y>

At this point of time, there are seventeen goals with related targets and indicators designed under the Global Indicator Framework for the SDGs⁷ Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, and simply Goal 10 contains a direct mention to migration processes and policies. The 10.7.4 target referring refugees unequivocally was added to the SDG framework in 2020 after the proposal was passed by the UNHCR and the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDG (IAEG-SDGs).⁸ This addition would “accord the due importance and visibility to the refugees on the 2030 agenda”, stated by the UNHCR.⁹ The proposal was the result of emphasis made by the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report, “The Future Is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development”¹⁰ recognised that refugees are absent from the SDGs and suggested the use of data disaggregation strategies like adding “refugee status” as a parameter to attend the issue, nevertheless, it did not provide a precise set of action to minimise the gap.

With reference to European Union (EU), refugee migration is a controversial issue unsettling Europe for decades now affecting political, social and economic landscape of member states of EU. The refugee crisis of 2015 had placed the EU at the centre of the discourse on refugee migration, so it is crucial to study the SDGs and refugees residing in the EU with respect to their visibility in the assessment of SDGs progress report which will implicitly reflect upon the living conditions of refugees in the EU.

EU has historically experienced refugee migration, but the magnitude, frequency and intensity it experienced during the 2015 refugee crisis is unprecedented, there was a steady upsurge in the number of asylum applications till 2012. Later, the number of asylum seekers increased more quickly, to top at approximately 1.3 million in 2015. In 2016, the number flattened at about 1.2 million, and fell drastically till 2018 around 0.6 million applications. In 2019, the number of asylum seekers scaled to 0.7 million, but reduced once more in 2020, with 0.5 million asylum seekers applying for international protection. Later then, the number has risen reaching almost 1 million applicants (962 160) - it surpassed the number of applicants in 2021 by more than half (52.1 %) and was the peak since 2016.¹¹ In 2022, the share of refugees in the EU was 1.5% compared to its total population.¹² Given the presence of such large number of refugees in the EU, even so the policies of the EU and its Member States are insufficient and non-inclusive, leaving thousands of refugees behind, in miserable conditions, in explicit infringement to their SDG commitments.¹³

The marginalization of refugees from the SDGs is evident from the household survey data and Voluntary National Review (VNR) submitted by the EU member states. Germany, Italy, France has considerable

⁷ SDG Indicators, Global Indicator Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/> (last visited 09 October 2023)

⁸ Visit the official website of Sustainable Development Goals, available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/> (last visited 10 October 2023)

⁹ UNHCR (2019), Including Forced Displacement in the SDGs: A New Refugee Indicator, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/blogs/including-forced-displacement-in-the-sdgs-a-new-refugee-indicator/> (last visited 10 October 2023)

¹⁰ Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the UN Secretary-General (2019), Global Sustainable Development Report 2019. The Future is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development, available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf (last visited 11 October 2023)

¹¹ Annual Asylum statistics (2008-2022), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Annual_asylum_statistics, (last visited 11 October 2023)

¹² Statistics on migration to Europe, Refugees in Europe, Overall situation in 2022, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_en#RefugeesinEurope, (last visited 11 October 2023)

¹³ SDGs and Migration in the European Union, Published by Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) Researched and written by Sylvia Beales & George Gelber – BealesGelber Consult, January 2022, [SDGs-and-Migration_report_final-13-feb-22.pdf](https://www.gcap.global/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/SDGs-and-Migration_report_final-13-feb-22.pdf) (gcap.global), (last visited 11 October 2023)

population of refugees still their VNRs does not mention refugees as a population in particular need. These countries and the UK fail to add socio-economic data on refugees in their VNRs, this amount to invisibility and absenteeism of refugees from the SDGs progress reports, the defining element of “refugee gap.” EU publishes regular data on asylum and refugees, from 2011 EU has segregated the data into whether the person is a first-time asylum applicant; (ii) whether an asylum applicant is an unaccompanied minor (only from 2018); (iii) first-instance decisions on applications; (iv) final decisions taken on appeal or review on asylum applications; and (v) the number of resettled persons, (VI) pending applications.¹⁴ This collection of data provides information on the status of the refugee which help build a comprehensive data and fulfil the 17.18: to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated based on various parameters. However, this data is collected by the Eurostat (central agency), suffers from few discrepancies due to realistic and operational causes, and this could only be the first step towards inclusivity and recognition of refugees in the SDGs.

SDG target 10.7 is in consonance with the Lisbon Treaty of the EU 2013 which pledges to abide by the non-refoulement principle and fair treatment; unfortunately, measures considered by the European Union and Member States from 2015 to minimise the influx of refugees to land in the EU are in clear contravention with respect to non-refoulement principle, their SDG commitments and pledge to Leave No One Behind. The European Consensus on Development (2017) clearly says that “Eradicating poverty, confronting discrimination and inequalities and leaving no-one behind are at the core of EU development cooperation policy”, including all people regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, disability, religion or beliefs, sexual orientation and gender identity, migration status or other factors.¹⁵ At the European Union level, even though commitments to policy coherence for development, there continues an inadequate alignment among the EU’s several external policies, with development, security, migration occasionally dragging towards separate ways.

This paper tries to investigate whether “refugee gap” exists in the case of the EU, identify the likely challenges and possible measures toward the attainment of the motto “Leave No One Behind.”

2. Analysing the SDG targets and the “Refugee gap”

IRC (2019) underlined for the first time the presence of “refugee gap” based on its full-fledged investigation of the SDGs assessment and progress reports, reviewing the mentioning of “refugee well-being” in the VNR submitted by the member states and aiming for certain goals. IRC described the “SDG refugee gap” as characterized by limited data on refugee well-being, the marginalisation of refugees from SDG monitoring and assessment systems and country wise reporting, and exclusivity of refugees from national medium- and long-term development planning.¹⁶ It is important to study the member states of the EU on these parameters and identify the areas where refugees are underrepresented. It is important to acknowledge that this particular gap can be formulated mainly from two issues, Firstly, the limited actual data disaggregation frameworks working to segregate data on the basis of refugee status, and the resulting

¹⁴ Asylum Statistics Introduced, Eurostat Statistics Explained, data extracted in March 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Asylum_statistics_introduced#cite_note-3, (last visited 11 October 2023)

¹⁵ The New European Consensus on Development ‘Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future’ Joint Statement By The Council And The Representatives Of The Governments Of The Member States Meeting Within The Council, The European Parliament And The European Commission, 2017, P. 6-7, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-09/european-consensus-on-development-final-20170626_en.pdf, (last visited 12 October 2023)

¹⁶ IRC (2019), p. 7-8

data gap on refugees' progress towards SDGs; secondly, the absence of a refugee specific indicator within the SDG indicator system, which was recognised as a probable elemental measure in reducing the refugee gap. The need for genuine, regular and good quality data on refugee was recognised by the Expert Group

on Refugee and IDP Statistics (EGRIS)¹⁷ in its International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (2018). In the same direction, in December 2020, when UNHCR, JIPS and STATS4SD¹⁸ acknowledged 12 priority SDG indicators suggested to be disaggregated by forced displacement. They were referable to 3 main policy areas, i.e.: 1) basic needs and living conditions; 2) livelihoods and economic self-reliance; and 3) civil, political, and legal rights.

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Nevertheless, probable complications in implementing the proposed measures were exemplified by the broadness of the SDG framework, the lack of data collection capacity of States and absence of mandate to gather and disaggregate data on refugees, and the voluntary-based nature of providing data on progress towards SDGs, refugees particularly those living in camps are generally not included in national household surveys. Other hurdles would be, political consequences of giving thorough data on the status of refugees. For example, member states may fear that giving this information may imply that refugees obtain special treatment than citizens going through equally susceptible conditions.²¹

Country	Refugee Population	Mentions Refugees ²²	Includes Socioeconomic Data on Refugees	Year of VNR
Belgium	59,208	No	No	2017
Denmark	36,100	Yes	No	2017
Finland	21,599	No	No	2016
France	355,222	No	No	2016
Germany	1,021,706	No	No	2016
Greece	55,565	Yes	No	2018
Italy	180,829	No	No	2017
Netherlands	102,899	Yes	No	2017
Norway	58,107	No	No	2016
Serbia	30,935	Yes	No	2019
Sweden	242,725	Yes	No	2017
Switzerland	98,530	No	No	2018
United Kingdom	124,018	Yes	No	2019

Table 1. Top Refugee-Hosting Countries (>20,000 refugees) with Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on SDGs achievement²³

²² This means the VNR mentions refugees beyond the contexts of being a burden and a country giving international aid to help refugees elsewhere.

The data shown in table 1 is collected from Countries with more than 20,000 refugees, however, other Central, Eastern European Countries like Hungary hold influence over refugee and migration issues, so it is imperative to collect an all-EU member states data which would give a more comprehensive picture and suffice the refugee gap in many aspects.

The EU member states from time immemorial have experienced influx of large numbers of migrants (asylum seekers, refugees) like Germany, Italy, Netherlands, United Kingdom, yet did not include any parameters related to the socio-economic conditions of the refugee, which are crucial for measuring their progress with respect to the SDG indicators. Few European Countries do mention refugees, but merely mentioning refugees is inadequate to measuring, supervising and assisting this susceptible population in the spirit of efforts to attain the SDGs. The partial presence or total absence of data on refugees in the voluntary reporting activities by countries in reference to the progress towards the SDGs, would confirm the widening of “refugee gap” as defined by the IRC, notwithstanding the new addition of indicators. The SDGs VNR system being voluntary in nature is falling short to give a complete report on all SDGs and probable population subcategories. As per experts, the “lack of capacity” of different States to collect and analyse thematic data on SDG becomes a barrier, and for some states, the addition of refugees in their voluntary reports is certainly not a priority, becomes a choice to not include refugees.²³

In 2018, Greece’s first VNR progress report was published in 2018, it focused on minimising social inequalities and encouraging the integration and inclusion of migrants, identified as a “vulnerable social group”, current reports on migrants, and specifically refugees, are negative. The OECD ranked Greece 31st out of its 35 member states with respect to its SDGs progress.²⁴ UNHCR stated that “support for many acknowledged refugees is halting hastily, even before they have an actual chance to avail occupation and social welfare policies.²⁵ Adding to this, it is near unfeasible for refugees to acquire important documents required for employment and accommodation. In effect, decent living conditions are enormously hard to come by for refugees and have no security net in the form of social rights,²⁶ violating

¹⁸ UNHCR, JIPS, STATS4SD (2020) Data Disaggregation of SDG Indicators by Forced Displacement, available at: <https://www.jips.org/jips-publication/data-disaggregation-of-sdg-indicators-by-forced-displacement-dec2020/> p.7, (last visited 13 October 2023)

¹⁹ The UNHCR and the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) as part of the EGRIS, EGRIS (2018), International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics, available at: <https://www.jips.org/jipspublication/international-recommendations-on-refugee-statistics/> (last visited 13 October 2023)

²⁰ UNHCR, JIPS, STATS4SD (2020) Data Disaggregation of SDG Indicators by Forced Displacement, available at: <https://www.jips.org/jips-publication/data-disaggregation-of-sdg-indicators-by-forced-displacement-dec2020/> p.7, (last visited 13 October 2023)

²¹ See IRC (2019), p.10

²² This means the VNR mentions refugees beyond the contexts of being a burden and a country giving international aid to help refugees elsewhere.

²³ Denaro, C., Giuffrè, M., 2021, UN Sustainable Development Goals and the “Refugee Gap”: Leaving Refugees Behind? *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 2022, 41, 79–107, Oxford publications, <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdab017>, (last visited on 14 October 2023)

²⁴ GCAP (2022), P.24

²⁵ Andrej Mahecic, 02 June 2020, Greece must ensure safety net and integration opportunities for refugees – UNHCR, Briefing Notes, UNHCR UK, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/briefing/2020/6/5ed603924/greece-must-ensure-safety-net-integration-opportunities-refugees-unhcr.html> (last visited on 14 October 2023)

²⁶ Fallon, K., Malichudis, S., 2021, Greece says migration crisis over; refugees beg to differ, *Migration, News Feature*, The New Humanitarian, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2021/10/5/Greece-says-migration-crisis-over-refugees-beg-to-differ>, (last visited on 14 October 2023)

commitments towards SDGs.

SDG Goal 10 target 10.7 states ‘To facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies’ (see footnote 11, p. 12). Its two indicators are (GCAP 2022, P. 15):

Indicator 10.7.1: Recruitment cost borne by employee as a proportion of yearly income earned in country of destination

Indicator 10.7.2: Number of countries that have implemented well-managed migration policies,

As per UN SDG report 2020²⁷, 111 countries with available data in 2019 saw that 61% of EU Member States had a complete set of policy measures to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people. Though, on migrant (read refugee) socioeconomic well-being, just 59% of governments had comprehensive set of policy measures. The 2021 report asserts that ‘Despite thousands of migrant deaths each year, not all countries have comprehensive policies on migration.’²⁸

The other indicator which is considered as a promising instrument to include refugee in the SDG progress assessment process, is related to data disaggregation policies of SDG data by migratory status (incorporating refugee status) is in line with the target 17.18 which states to improve capacity building of developing countries, as well as least developed countries and small island developing States, to enhance drastically the accessibility to good quality, regular and dependable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts by 2020. The development towards this has been sluggish, stated by the UNHCR (2019). In the case of EU, the data segregation framework and subcategories used for registering data is well-maintained and does stand proficient on few SDG parameters such as data collected on minor accompanying asylum seekers which would help formulate policies and actions to protect and secure children, other data entries which disaggregate data on the basis of whether the person is a first-time asylum applicant, first-instance decisions on applications, final decisions taken on appeal or review on asylum applications, the number of resettled persons, pending applications. However, the existence of “migratory status” as a parameter for disaggregation is not by itself an adequate means to assure refugee data at disposal. The “migratory status” as mentioned in target 17.18 could probably be recognized as a variable which could connote different meaning like “asylum seeker, refugee, working migrant, so on.” But the actual experience is rather unusual and complicated. The benchmark could only advance the obtainability of disaggregated data for the broad set of “people moving,” giving no information regarding the causes of getting such migratory patterns, and on the number of people of a given population are refugees.²⁹

In the light of the fact that the target stated under goal 17, target 17.18 i.e., data disaggregation with the criteria of “refugee status” has not been formally included and hence the public information on this is very less.

From a positive standpoint, this would be an important action towards the gradual plugging of the refugee gap. Nevertheless, this would still be the first step and other measures appears to be desirable such as organized data collection on refugees relating to all the SDGs: inadequate data is present on the

²⁷ Reduce inequality within and among countries, 2020, Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-10/> (last visited on 13 October 2023)

²⁸ Reduce inequality within and among countries, 2021, Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/goal-10/> (last visited on 13 October 2023)

²⁹ Denaro, C., Giuffre, M., 2021, p.91

implementation tools of the SDGs. This implies that there are no explicit guiding principles and also no incentives for the governments to introduce refugees in their SDGs, national and regional plans.

Another dimension important to discuss the existence and extent of the refugee gap is the absence of a refugee-specific indicator from the SDG assessment system. The only target mentioning refugees is 10.7.4, which states that “Proportion of the population who are refugees, by country of origin.” This was suggested by the UNHCR and later added in the SDG framework under goal 10 target 10.7, however, initially it was supposed to be added under goal 16 “Access to justice”, under target 16.3 “Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.” (UNSTAT 2019)

Target 16.3 was rather clear that it will identify the reasons behind the fragility of the rule of law in the country of origin from where a large number of refugees are coming.³⁰ But such clarity was not present with target 10.7.4 as to what kind of information indicators would provide in relevance to the “well-managed migration policies.” UNHCR (2019) also acknowledged and restated that it is still uncertain how the “proportion of the population who are refugees” should indicate the presence or absence of well-managed migration policies and how to decide the accountability and upon whom (countries of origin, transit countries, destination countries) is a serious question. For instance, there is unavailability of data on reception conditions in the destination countries for the SDG assessment, therefore inferring that the correlation of indicator 10.7.4 and target 10.7 was not systematically contemplated from the beginning.³¹

3. In what ways not to leave refugees behind, few recommendations

- The European Commission ought to publish regular reports on SDG performances such as VNRs and should register detailed data on refugees, and act upon explicit policies to guarantee they are not being left behind. (GCAP 2022)
- Fulfill SDG promises to advance education and skill development of refugees so that they are able to live a decent life with social security and dignity.
- Prioritize and execute SDG pledge to “Leave No one Behind” giving more emphasis on employment (SDG 8) and social protection (SDG 1, 8 and 10) of refugees and asylum seekers, minors and women.
- Prioritize data disaggregation process and include more vulnerable forcibly displaced populations like refugees, asylum seekers, as separate entities to get a clear picture of the situation.
- To provide political, legal, and economic motivators to the member states to collect regular, genuine and priority data and so they do not simply think of it as a “voluntary” duty.
- To formulate refugee-sensitive policies and frameworks as the rights, well-being, and welfare of the refugees are missing.
- The inclusion of committed attention on border management in the SDGs framework, which is a crucial part to the broader concept of migration policies. (Denaro, C., Giuffrè, M., 2021)

4. Conclusion

The IRC first highlighted the fundamental “refugee gap” in the form of refugees being left out and left behind from the SDG assessment and framework. This paper studied the goals and targets to be achieved for a better, sustainable life by 2030 under the SDG framework which preliminarily highlighted deficiencies

³⁰UNHCR (2016), The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/new-york-declaration-for-refugees-and-migrants.html#compactonmigration> (last visited 07 October 2023).

³¹ Denaro, C., Giuffrè, M., 2021, p. 101

with respect to the data collection, a substantial lack/absence of disaggregated data by refugee status at disposal. To accentuate the fact that refugees are missing was evident from the absence or mere mention of refugees in national voluntary reporting, and in political planning at regional and national level. Regardless of the attempts to plug the refugee gap, particularly with the addition of “refugee status” within the data disaggregation policy and the proposition of including new refugee and migrant linked indicators in the SDGs system, such a gap still exists.³² The data on refugees lacks any information regarding the socio-economic condition of the refugee and one cannot assess the well-being of refugee when it comes to the SDG indicators. This shows the extent of refugee gap as it fails to provide basic data to measure the SDG progress of refugees and how such gap is persisting towards non-compliance of the principle of “Leaving No One Behind.”

In case of EU, the refugee crisis of 2015 had placed the EU at the centre of the discourse on refugee migration, so it is crucial to study the SDGs and refugees residing in the EU with respect to their visibility in the assessment of SDGs progress report which will implicitly reflect upon the living conditions of refugees in the EU. The member states are not faring well with respect to inclusion of refugees in the SDG assessment system, such as including the refugees in their VNR and also the policies of the EU and its Member States are insufficient and non-inclusive, leaving thousands of refugees behind, in miserable conditions, in explicit infringement to their SDG commitments. It is evident that refugees and other vulnerable displaced persons are often excluded, overlooked, and unattended. Regarding policy incoherence, even though commitments to policy lucidity, there continues an inadequate alignment among the EU’s several external policies, with development, security, migration occasionally pulling against each other. The EU ought to embrace the SDGs as their ‘North Star’ and to walk towards efficient and harmonized results throughout the whole spectrum of external actions.

Refugee migration is international in nature, a global transgressing phenomenon, it needs international collaboration and well-managed migration policies harmoniously working with each other, as it is not always conditions in countries of origin or countries of destination that give rise to susceptibilities and therefore refugee migration cannot be relegated by the SDG framework. To wrap up, although it is not legally binding, the SDG agenda 2030 gives a point of reference to the existing positioning of refugee’s rights,³³ it provides a roadmap and targets to achieve which with States promise to execute it with values like solidarity and shared belief, agreeing to come together as one global village to “ensure safe, orderly and regular migration” entailing complete recognition for human rights and the humanitarian handling of migrants irrespective of migration status, of refugees and of displaced persons,³⁴ this could possibly led us to a more safe, sustainable future with “no one left behind.”

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1. Agenda 2030, paras 29, 39 and 73, available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> (last visited 23 October 2023).
2. Andrej Mahecic, 02 June 2020, Greece must ensure safety net and integration opportunities for refugees – UNHCR, Briefing Notes, UNHCR UK,

³² Denaro, C., Giuffre, M., 2021, p, 104

³³ M. Panizzon, COVID-19 was a Big Test for UN Migration Initiatives. Did they Succeed? 2021, available at: (last visited 23 October 2023).

³⁴ Agenda 2030, paras 29, 39 and 73, available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> (last visited 23 October 2023).

- <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/briefing/2020/6/5ed603924/greece-must-ensure-safety-net-integration-opportunities-refugees-unhcr.html> (last visited on 14 October 2023)
3. Annual Asylum statistics (2008-2022), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Annual_asylum_statistics, (last visited 11 October 2023)
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