



MACMUN 2023



UNHCR

Background Guide

Welcome Letter

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the eighth McMaster Model United Nations Conference! My name is Omar, and I am joined by my co-chair Nicole. Omar is currently a first-year student in the Honors Bachelor of Health Sciences Program. He enjoys almost all sports, especially volleyball and hockey, and is an avid fantasy-sports fan. Nicole is a second-year student in the Biochemistry Honours program. She enjoys crocheting, embroidery, and keeping plants alive. We are pleased and honored to serve as the Chairs for the UNHCR for the 2023 conference.

We are also working alongside our Crisis Analysts, Manahil and Mehar, to bring to you all a fantastic experience here at MACMUN 2023. We hope that everyone emerges with a further understanding of the difficult tasks at hand for the UNHCR and gain valuable global perspective on our topics. We are also very excited to have an in-person conference! This should add to the fun and experience as we will all be able to see the conference as it should be experienced.

This year's topics should both challenge you to think outside the box and to consider multiple perspectives as you approach the problems holistically. It will demand your collaboration, understanding and problem-solving skills to best address the issues at hand. We hope that this background guide helps direct your approaches to these issues and supports you on your MUN journey. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to email us at unhcr@macmun.org.

Sincerely,

Omar Abdallah & Nicole Arango
Chairs, UN Human Rights Council
MACMUN 2023

Meet Your Committee Staff



Nicole Arango - Chair
she/her



Omar Abdallah - Chair
he/him



Mehar Sighat - Crisis Analyst
she/her



Manahil Qureshi - Crisis Analyst
she/her

Committee Mandate

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created with the intention of saving lives, protecting human rights, and producing a better future for refugees, displaced communities and stateless individuals.¹ In doing so, the committee works to protect those who have fled war, disaster, or persecution in their homes. The committee's goal is to help them seek asylum, find refuge and live a safe life where they do not have to yield any of their basic human rights.²

The most plausible way to ensure that the rights of refugees are being protected while they face turmoil and danger is in rebuilding their lives elsewhere. UNHCR provides key resources, such as food, shelter, water, and medical care to help lay down the necessary resources for the development of a community.³ Community re-establishment is easily the most important aspect of the committee's work since it increases the quality of life of the affected individuals while also producing a self-sustaining solution.

The UNHCR is staffed with 17, 000 members who work towards the goal of helping displaced individuals find refuge and asylum in a safe state, or to return to their homes voluntarily and safely.⁴ The committee is also willing to work with governments, regional organizations, international organizations and non-governmental organizations, so long as their goals fall in line with those of the committee. The UNHCR serves as an impartial organization that acts to protect refugees regardless of their race, religion, political opinion, gender, or nationality. Anyone and everyone in need of help is seen as a priority and the committee recognizes the importance behind taking the necessary action to support them.

Ultimately, the goals of the UNHCR can be simplified to the following:

1. Support and provide refuge, asylum, and safety to those affected by conflict, danger, disputed nationalities, and those displaced for other reasons
2. Reduce instances of forced displacement by encouraging coordination amongst institutions and states that protect human rights and peaceful resolutions
3. Promote the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter by
 - a. Maintaining international peace, safety, and security
 - b. Developing friendly relations between nations
 - c. Encouraging respect and the maintenance of human rights and fundamental freedoms around the world

Simulation Style and Composition of the Committee

Two chairs will be present to moderate debate and ensure that a diplomatic environment is maintained. The chairs will have the authority to open and close committee sessions, will assist

¹ UNHCR. (2022). *History of UNHCR*. UNHCR: the UN refugee agency. <https://www.unhcr.org/history-of-unhcr.html>

² UNHCR, "The UN Refugee Agency"

³ UNHCR, "The UN Refugee Agency"

⁴ UNHCR, "The UN Refugee Agency"

delegates with setting the agenda, and will manage the list of speakers. The dias will also recognize any points or motions made by delegates on the floor. Delegates must remember that the chairs have the final rule on any disputed points or motions, and that all draft resolutions must be approved by the dias before they are presented before the committee.

Pages will be present in the committee room to allow delegates to communicate with one another through the passing of notes. If used strategically, note passing can be used by delegates to work with others in the room to brainstorm ideas for potential draft resolutions. Delegates should be aware that all notes will be screened by the pages before they are delivered to the respective delegate.

Each delegate in this committee will represent a different member state of the UNHCR. Delegates will submit a position paper detailing their country-specific research on both topics prior to the conference. Individual research is important to ensure that delegates arrive to committee sessions prepared with sufficient knowledge that will allow them to actively engage in discussions.

Overall, delegates should remember to only raise points to the committee that agree with their country's foreign policy. This will ensure that the committee is best able to emulate potential real-world discussions.

Topic #1: Anti-Refugee Xenophobia

Introduction

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees began in 1950 to resettle the vast number of refugees after World War II.⁵ The organization was meant to disband after 3 years, but now, more than 70 years later, it is still a very relevant institution. According to the UNHCR, at the end of 2021, there were 89.3 million forcibly displaced people worldwide.⁶ 27.1 million of those people are refugees, and 53.2 million are internally displaced.⁷ 69% of all refugees come from just five countries: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar.⁸ Syria has been in a civil war since 2011, Venezuela is amid an economic collapse, and Afghanistan's government has failed to maintain control of the country. In addition, South Sudan is also in a civil war and is suffering several humanitarian crises, and the government of Myanmar has been conducting a genocide against its Indigenous Rohingya Muslims.

There are many reasons for refugees to leave their countries, but the main reason is that it is no longer safe to live in their homeland. The simplest solution for displaced people is to travel to nearby countries. These countries are relatively close and culturally similar. However, the neighbouring countries are generally low to middle income, much like the countries people are fleeing. 38% of refugees are hosted in 5 countries: Turkey, Colombia, Uganda, Pakistan, and Germany.⁹ Apart from Germany, these countries all neighbour a country which provides a large percentage of refugees, causing tension and conflict in the host country. Host countries are limited in resources as they are bringing in large numbers of people that need to be housed and protected, thus stretching resources thin. This scarcity creates an issue of social cohesion, where the refugees are unable to integrate in their new communities. Low social cohesion can lead to resentment, tension, and xenophobia in host communities. Even though 72% of refugees are hosted in neighbouring countries, which tend to be low to middle income, developed countries are very vocal about their distrust of refugees.¹⁰

Prominent politicians in recent years have built their platforms on anti-refugee xenophobia. Former United States' (U.S.) President Donald Trump was notoriously adamant on building a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border to prevent entry of refugees from Central America. The United Kingdom's (U.K.) Brexit party was highly criticized for its xenophobic campaign posters showing mostly non-White refugees lining up with the caption, "The E.U. has failed us all". The current Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban made anti-refugee comments in 2015 saying that Hungary should preserve its cultural homogeneity and this year made similar comments saying that unlike Western Europe, Hungary is not a mixed-race country. Recently, Denmark deemed certain parts of Syria as safe to return and is now in the process of cancelling

⁵ UNHCR, "The UN Refugee Agency"

⁶ UNHCR. (2022, June 16). *Refugee data finder*. UNHCR: the UN refugee agency. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

⁷ UNHCR, "Refugee data finder"

⁸ UNHCR, "Refugee data finder"

⁹ UNHCR, "The UN Refugee Agency"

¹⁰ UNHCR, "Refugee data finder"

visas and deporting refugees. Hearing such rhetoric from governments can influence citizens to commit dangerous crimes. From March 2020 to June 2021, there were over 9000 self-reported hate crime incidents against Asian people in the U.S. alone.¹¹ In 2019, a gunman went on a shooting spree and killed 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in a violent example of both Islamophobia and xenophobia.¹² In the U.K, the number of hate crimes has risen by 26% in the last year, with more than two thirds of those being race oriented.¹³ Xenophobia is an incredibly relevant topic today; as refugee numbers rise, countries must prepare themselves to welcome more asylum-seekers and must ensure that they are treated with respect and dignity.

History

“Xenophobia” translates literally to the fear of strangers, but in practice, it more closely resembles the fear of people who look or act different to oneself. Xenophobia is not a recent phenomenon; it has existed for as long as human societies have existed. In ancient nomadic civilizations, being afraid of people one was not familiar with was a survival tactic.¹⁴ Without knowing who they were or what their intentions were, being apprehensive could have saved many societies from conflict. But societies today are no longer primitive nor small. Humanity has evolved in impressive ways, and the communities now span nations, ethnicities, religions, and the like. Now, we see xenophobia as a result of globalization and the increasing interconnectedness of our world. It hurts real people and makes the suffering of refugees worse. Xenophobia can no longer have a place in the modern world, but what happens when those in power are xenophobic? Let us take a closer look at the 20th century.

The Holocaust was a prominent example from the 20th century. 6 million Jewish people were killed, and on top of that figure, were the millions more that died because they were perceived to be inferior by the Nazis, including the Roma, the Poles, Russians, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and those of different political ideologies.¹⁵ Over in North America, hundreds of Jewish refugees were being refused entry into the US and Canada.¹⁶ Government agencies cited security concerns with letting the refugees in. Were they spies? Would they bring the war closer to North America? The federal governments of these nations even went as far as to send Japanese citizens to internment camps out of fear that these communities were spying for their native countries.¹⁷ The interned individuals lived in inhumane conditions.

¹¹ Findling, M., Blendon, R., Benson, J., Koh, H. (2022, April 12). COVID-19 has driven racism and violence against Asian Americans: a perspective from 12 national polls. *Health Affairs Forefront*, 4(11). doi: 10.1377/forefront.20220411.655787

¹² Associated Press. (2019, May 2). *Death toll from Christchurch mosque attacks grows to 51 after Turkish man dies*. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/death-toll-christchurch-mosque-attacks-grows-51-after-turkish-man-n1001476>

¹³ Nagesh, A. (October 6, 2022). *Hate crimes reported by police up by more than a quarter*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-63157965>

¹⁴ Makari, G. (2021). *Of fear and strangers: A history of xenophobia*. W. W. Norton

¹⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (2020). Documenting numbers of numbers of victims of the Holocaust and Nazi persecution. In *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/documenting-numbers-of-victims-of-the-holocaust-and-nazi-persecution>

¹⁶ Gross, H. A. (2015, November 18). The U.S. government turned away thousands of Jewish refugees fearing that they were Nazi spies. *Smithsonian Magazine*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/us-government-turned-away-thousands-jewish-refugees-fearing-they-were-nazi-spies-180957324/>

¹⁷ Gross, “The U.S. government turned away thousands”

There was no electricity, they were overcrowded, and there was no running water.¹⁸ In the US, these camps were surrounded by barbed wire fences. In Canada, the businesses, and assets that Japanese Canadians left behind were liquidated and used to pay for the detainment.¹⁹

Later in the century, after the Rwandan genocide, refugees set up camps in Goma, in Zaire, what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These camps quickly became the base for the military groups that started the genocide and were used to attack the newly formed government.²⁰ The refugees there became political hostages, and there was no one able to ensure their safety. The host government was unwilling to demilitarize the area, which led to the mass exodus of refugees back into Rwanda, the country they had just fled.²¹ This uncertainty and chaos caused more tensions between the ethnic groups, not just in Rwanda, but in Burundi and in Zaire as well. Without a proper handling of the refugee camps by Zaire, the conflict escalated and led to more suffering.²²

While these were some major examples, refugees and the resulting xenophobia were found all over the world in the 20th century. Authoritarian governments in Guatemala, Chile, and Cuba caused mass migration. Drug cartels and a civil war in Colombia also created refugees. Conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq displaced people as well. These events created uncertainty in the countries these refugees were arriving in and spread fears such as: what if they bring the conflict closer? What if they are actually terrorists? What if they take our resources? What if they never leave? When these fears grow out of hand, and when policymakers allow these fears to inform their decision making, seeking refuge becomes a crisis.

Current Situation

The UNHCR is committed to ensuring the safety and protecting the rights of refugees around the world. However, this goal is impeded by the existence of racism and xenophobia. According to a guide put out by the UNHCR, “racism and racial discrimination can affect refugees at every stage of the displacement cycle.”²³ This is why Sustainable Development Goal 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, is deeply connected with the goals of the UNHCR. SDG 16 aims to create “peaceful and inclusive societies...[and] provide justice for all”.²⁴ Another important tenet of this goal is to create “effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions”.²⁵ This means creating a world where institutions are free from corruption, racism, discrimination, and are capable within society. These goals substantially apply to the UN and

¹⁸ Marsh, J. H. (2012, February 23). *Japanese Canadian internment: Prisoners in their own country*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. Retrieved January 30, 2023, from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/japanese-internment-banished-and-beyond-tears-feature>

¹⁹ Marsh, “Japanese Canadian internment”

²⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2000, January 1). *The state of the world’s refugees 2000: Fifty years of humanitarian action*. <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/sowr/4a4c754a9/state-worlds-refugees-2000-fifty-years-humanitarian-action.html>

²¹ UNHCR, “The state of the world’s refugees”

²² UNHCR, “The state of the world’s refugees”

²³ Marsh, “Japanese Canadian Internment”

²⁴ Sustainable Development Goals. (2022). *Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>

²⁵ United Nations, “Sustainable Development Goals”

the UNHCR. However, recently, the UN has come under scrutiny for not including an SDG specifically relating to racial equity, anti-discrimination, and xenophobia. Throughout the targets and indicators for the SDGs, there is a clear lack of “racial justice commitments”, as stated by human rights expert E. Tendayi Achiume.²⁶ She adds that this lack of resources prevents the UN and related bodies from tackling these issues.²⁷ As racial justice and the safety of refugees are closely related, allocating more resources from the UN towards racial justice directly benefits the goals of the UNHCR. It is recommended for delegates to keep in mind during discussions how rampant the issues of xenophobia and discrimination are, that even international bodies struggle with inclusivity and justice.

The 2010s were considered the decade of the “refugee crisis”, which appears to be continuing into the 2020s. With political instability in Venezuela, a civil war in Syria, a genocide in Myanmar, a famine and conflict in Yemen, gang violence in many Central American states, and guerrilla warfare in Somalia, among many others, there is no shortage of refugees in the world. Refugees are unfortunately met with prejudice, hostility, and even violence in the country they flee to. For example, in 2015, when the Syrian war was in full swing and refugees were leaving en masse, Europe was met with hundreds of thousands of these refugees. Eventually, about a million stayed within the continent. While many European countries pledged to take in refugees, the welcome they received was by all accounts discriminatory and xenophobic. Their treatment in Hungary was the most hostile. The nation built barbed wire fences on its shared border with Serbia to keep out refugees.²⁸ The refugees that managed to get in were kept in detention centers in the sun, without food, water, or medical aid.²⁹ Authorities were reported to be throwing tear gas at migrants, including children.³⁰ Hungary’s prime minister at the time was quoted saying that the EU’s quotas to accept refugees “could redraw Europe’s cultural and religious identity”.³¹ In 2021, Hungary extended its state of crisis, declared because of the arrival of the Syrian refugees, even though new arrivals decrease every year.³² Last year, they added a condition to enter the country as a refugee; now, migrants must declare asylum at the Hungarian embassy in a neighbouring non-EU country.³³ This measure effectively blocks migrants from seeking asylum by burying the process in unnecessarily complicated procedures, while technically keeping their borders open to the prospect of refugees. Similarly, the US had and continues to have xenophobic and discriminatory immigration policies. During former president Donald Trump’s administration, he enacted a widely criticized policy that families seeking asylum at the US-Mexico border would have their

²⁶ United Nations. (2022, July 5). *2030 development agenda ‘fails’ on racial equality and non-discrimination*. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/07/1121942>

²⁷ UN, “2030 development agenda”

²⁸ Beauchamp, Z. (2015, September 18). *Why Hungary is so awful to refugees*. Vox News. <https://www.vox.com/2015/9/18/9349081/syrian-refugees-hungary-viktor-orban>

²⁹ Beauchamp, “Why Hungary is so awful to refugees”

³⁰ Beauchamp, “Why Hungary is so awful to refugees”

³¹ BBC News. (2016, July 5). *Hungary to have October referendum on EU migrant plan*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36711693>

³² UNHCR. (2021, March 10). *UNHCR concerned by Hungary’s latest measures affecting access to asylum*. UNHCR: the UN refugee agency. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/3/6048976e4/unhcr-concerned-hungarys-latest-measures-affecting-access-asylum.html>

³³ UNHCR, “UNHCR concerned by Hungary”

children separated from them.³⁴ Children were kept in what were effectively cages, which were overcrowded and without adequate hygiene and medical care.³⁵ Many deaths and sexual assault allegations resulted from this system.³⁶ While this is unjust from the legal point of view, Trump's inflammatory and bigoted rhetoric brought anti-refugee xenophobia into the U.S. national culture. Trump's views on Hispanic refugees and immigrants of all kinds increased the incidence of hate crimes in the U.S.³⁷ Similar inflammatory language was used by Nigel Farage in the UK, a right-wing politician who started a political party to promote Brexit. Farage's view was that the UK had to leave the EU to "secure its borders".³⁸

Canada also has a claim to xenophobia. Earlier this year, when Russia's invasion of Ukraine began, hundreds of thousands of people fled Ukraine into neighbouring countries. Considering this, Canada made a pledge to allow the entry of any Ukrainian refugees into the country and ease bureaucratic processes to make the asylum easier.³⁹ Many European countries made similar claims as well.⁴⁰ However, with the refugee crisis of previous years, all of which had come from non-European, non-white, mainly non-Christian countries, immigration policies were not lifted to ease the transition. In fact, they were tightened.⁴¹ Making the asylum process longer and more cumbersome was said to be done in the name of security, but is it really a coincidence that the refugees that are culturally similar are treated much kinder than the strangers? Why is extra security not required with the Ukrainian refugees? Delegates are encouraged to be diligent in debate in finding solutions to anti-refugee xenophobia, and to keep in mind all points of view.

Bloc Analysis

Where refugees come from

As mentioned previously, 69% of all refugees come from Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar.⁴² This is not a complete list; refugees also come from Ukraine, Palestine, Guatemala and others. These countries all share a series of events that have made them unsafe to live in, whether that be war, economic crisis, or political instability. Citizens from these countries flee in search of safety, freedom, and stability. Even within nations, there are 53.2 million internally displaced people worldwide.⁴³ Countries are generally unable to care for these displaced people, and usually require outside support from international bodies and

³⁴ Southern Poverty Law Center. (2022, March 23). *Family separation – a timeline*. <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2022/03/23/family-separation-timeline>

³⁵ Southern Poverty Law Center, "Family separation"

³⁶ Southern Poverty Law Center, "Family separation"

³⁷ Southern Poverty Law Center, "Family separation"

³⁸ Stewart, H. & Mason, R. (2016, June 16). *Nigel Farage's anti-migrant poster reported to police*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants>

³⁹ Government of Canada. (2022, August 15). *Immigration measures and support for Ukrainians and their families*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/ukraine-measures.html>

⁴⁰ Zara, D. (2022, March 8). *Europe's unified welcome of Ukrainian refugees exposes 'double standard' for non-white asylum seekers: Experts*. ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/International/europes-unified-ukrainian-refugees-exposes-double-standard-nonwhite/story?id=83251970>

⁴¹ Zara, "Europe's unified welcome"

⁴² UNHCR. (2022, June 16). *Refugee data finder*. UNHCR: the UN refugee agency. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

⁴³ UNHCR, "Refugee data finder"

NGOs.⁴⁴ The UNHCR is committed to ensuring the safety and security of all forced migrants and is always open to working with countries to resettle refugees or internally displaced persons.

Refugee welcoming countries

Most countries that come to accept refugees are those that are in proximity to countries with conflict, for example, Lebanon, Colombia, Uganda, Turkey and Pakistan. 38% of refugees resettle in these countries. Whether these countries are prepared or not, they are tasked with the responsibility of caring for asylum seekers. As of 2022, there are 1.8 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, with a total population of 6.7 million.⁴⁵ Most refugees across these countries are settled in informal camps, where there is inadequate water, food, sanitation, education, and medical care.⁴⁶ These nations require outside help from international bodies and NGOs, although this help is not always sufficient. The refugees and the countries as a whole suffer as a result. On the other hand, there are very welcoming countries which have the ability to resettle migrants without outside help. Germany is a big example, with 1.2 million refugees housed there.⁴⁷ Germany's policy makers made entering the country as an asylum seeker very efficient and without hassle. Another useful policy change was accepting a large percentage of those who sought refuge, 72% in fact.⁴⁸ At least 44% of refugees resettled in Germany have found work or paid training.⁴⁹ Countries that accept refugees must have policies or support in place to help rehouse and resettle asylum seekers.

Refugee hostile countries

There are several countries where refugees are not welcome. These countries include Hungary, the U.S., Poland, and Denmark. Hungary has a history of detaining refugees for long periods of time in centres that are not equipped to provide food, water, or medical aid to the volume of people waiting for a visa. Recently, Hungary's government has changed their refugee policy in that now refugees must declare asylum in another EU country before being allowed entry into Hungary.⁵⁰ Under former President Trump's administration, inflammatory rhetoric from the federal government impassioned citizens to commit hate crimes against people who looked like foreigners.⁵¹ The immigration policy was tightened, and it became very difficult, and at times inhumane, for asylum seekers to enter the country.⁵² Current President Biden promised to take

⁴⁴ UNHCR, "Refugee data finder"

⁴⁵ Kayali, Y. (2022, January 18). *Syrian refugees in Lebanon need help and protection, not more pressure to leave*. The New Humanitarian. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2022/1/18/Syrian-refugees-Lebanon-help-protection-pressure-leave>

⁴⁶ UNHCR, "Refugee data finder"

⁴⁷ Keita, S. & Dempster, H. (2020, December 4). *Five years later, one million refugees are thriving in Germany*. Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/five-years-later-one-million-refugees-are-thriving-germany>

⁴⁸ Keita et al., "Five years later"

⁴⁹ Keita et al., "Five years later"

⁵⁰ Beauchamp, "Why Hungary is so awful to refugees"

⁵¹ Southern Poverty Law Center, "Family separation"

⁵² Southern Poverty Law Center, "Family separation"

in 125 000 refugees this year, but only accepted 25 000, a full 80% less than expected.⁵³ One reason for this could be refugees being wary of entering the US because of Trump’s xenophobic presidential term.⁵⁴ Similar to these countries, Poland’s popular Law and Justice Party was formed as a result of Europe’s refugee crisis a few years ago.⁵⁵ Their platform stands for anti-immigration, with the slogan “Poland for Poles”.⁵⁶ Denmark recently voted to send Syrian refugees back to Syria in a widely criticized decision. These ultimately governments preach xenophobic rhetoric and pass anti-asylum seeker policies which make the culture a hostile one for forced migrants. Delegates should note that this is not a comprehensive list and there are more countries that have tight asylum seeker policies.

Research & Preparation Questions

1. How do societal prejudices and xenophobic views effect the treatment of refugees, legislature and policies passed regarding refugees?
2. How many resources should be allocated to refugee care and accommodation and how should such decisions be made?
3. What are the concerns regarding current inhumane living conditions for refugees around the world and potential improvement strategies?
4. How can UNHCR policies and humanitarian aid efforts have any effect against countries and communities deeply rooted in xenophobia?

⁵³ Montoya-Galvez, C. (2022, October 3). *Biden administration falls 80% short of 2022 refugee admissions target*. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/refugee-admissions-target-2022-biden-administration/>

⁵⁴ Montoya-Galvez, “Biden administration falls”

⁵⁵ Santora, M. (2019, March 26). *Poland bashes immigrants, but quietly takes Christian ones*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/26/world/europe/immigration-poland-ukraine-christian.html>

⁵⁶ Santora, “Poland bashes immigrants”

Topic #2: Addressing Poverty in the Lives of Recent Refugees

Introduction

Poverty has always been a major concern of the United Nations as it is a significant factor in decreasing the quality of life of millions around the world. However, when coupled with refugee crises and displacement due to conflict and instability, it manages to worsen beyond initial expectations. The issues of refugees increase the difficulties associated with addressing poverty because safety and stability must also be established for results to be observed. Without solidifying these two pillars, there can never be any true progress made in terms of addressing poverty. Furthermore, the general rule is that no solution is truly effective unless it is sustainable and lasting after third-party involvement comes to an end. Thus, all actions taken must be self-sustaining within the populations being addressed, even with their increasing needs and challenges.

The UNHCR was formed around the need to reduce the number of refugees living in extreme poverty following the Second World War.⁵⁷ Though the world has never seen a single conflict that has resulted in the same number of refugees since then, there has been no shortage of conflicts and situations that have led to the displacement of millions. These victims are forced to live through unbearable conditions where many standards and essentials to life are simply unavailable. As such, the UNHCR set out to minimize the poor living qualities of these individuals, attempting to improve their lives by providing the basics and building the foundations of sustainable future. The relevancy of the topic emerges after considering the sheer quantity of individuals affected by poverty as refugees. It is imminent that action be taken to provide immediate relief and support to affected groups while also rebuilding their sense of humanity and livelihood.

Currently, efforts are focused on the refugee crises in Syria, Ukraine, and Afghanistan, along with a multitude of other countries. The international spotlight along with the recent conflicts in these countries has further urged the UN to increase its involvement and efforts to provide resources to address the poverty of these groups. Though the objective and methodology are both clear and valid, the biggest issue emerges through the lack of resources to conduct every single initiative needed to fully address poverty within these groups. Amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a general increase in the need for resources and a decrease in how many are available to be used. The inability to provide the needed number of supplies and resources to properly address the poverty of a population within a given region has largely halted the international progress of countless efforts, such as mass vaccination efforts and global healthcare initiatives. Another key consideration is the difficulty in reaching affected groups due to political tensions and a general lack of safety. In these cases, even when the resources are made to be available and ready for deployment, they are sometimes unable to reach their goal destinations because of barriers set in place.

⁵⁷ UNHCR, "History of UNHCR"

History

Subtopic 1: The History of Poverty Among Refugees

Refugees around the world often experience extreme levels of poverty due to the lack of support they are offered. Regardless, they are desperate to escape their home countries, therefore, they are willing to live through extreme conditions in exchange for safety. From past statistics, reports show that close to 90 million people around the world are refugees.⁵⁸ Many of these people live below the poverty line of \$2 USD, as determined by the United Nations. As such, they cannot access clean drinking water, health services and healthy nutrition, decreasing their quality of life and impacting their ability to escape poverty. The refugee crisis truly became very dire after the Second World War, in 1950 (Refugees, 2017), calling for the creation of the UNHCR, and results were almost immediately observed as displaced refugees were relocated to safer areas. However, the decolonization of Africa, combined with countless other conflicts in the world, produced too many refugees for the United Nations—with its limited resources—to aid. Due to an uneven distribution of resources allocated to certain parts of the world, poverty began to compile onto refugees as they were forced into repetitive cycles of barely surviving. Though the UNHCR still plans to tackle poverty within refugee populations, the resources needed to do so are not readily available and new initiatives are always sought out.

Subtopic 2: International Efforts Made to Address Poverty Among Refugees

The major player in addressing poverty in the lives of refugees is the UNHCR, as they have the strongest infrastructure to address a problem of this magnitude. Since 1950, the UNHCR has collaborated with countless non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments to best address refugee poverty around the world. A key example of this is the UNHCR's Poverty Alliance Coalition, where 13 NGOs along with the World Bank are working together to help refugees escape poverty.⁵⁹ The biggest focus of this group is that they produce long-term, sustainable solutions, as opposed to temporary ones. Given the increasing severity of this issue, other NGOs have also dedicated parts of their efforts to this cause. The Poverty Alliance Coalition is currently following a timeline set between 2020-25 where they are following their graduation methodology in anticipation of the best results. Most of their efforts are concentrated in Africa, Asia, Europe, and parts of Latin America.⁶⁰ Due to conflicts in these geographical regions, the alarming numbers of displaced individuals compounded with the general instability and lack of infrastructure has given way to extreme poverty to exist amongst these people, creating a need for immediate relief and sustainable long-term plans.

Current Situation

Subtopic 1: Ending Poverty among Refugee Families and Preventing its Effects on Future Generations

⁵⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2022, June 16). *Figures at a glance*. UNHCR. Retrieved October 7, 2022, from <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

⁵⁹ Poverty Alleviation Coalition. (n.d.). Alleviating poverty of 500,000 refugee and host community households. Poverty Alleviation Coalition. Retrieved October 7, 2022, from <https://alleviate-poverty.org/about>

⁶⁰ Poverty Alleviation Coalition, "Alleviating poverty"

Currently, the first United Nations Sustainable Development Goal is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. A major consideration within this is the poverty that emerges from violent conflicts. In 2022, the effects of poverty amongst refugees are further amplified because of certain outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic increased the need for humanitarian aid while governments and organizations struggled to meet financial needs due to depleted resources.⁶¹ The economic implications of the pandemic have undoubtedly increased the challenge of effectively dealing with poverty in general, let alone amongst refugees. A specific example is observed in 2020, where European governments and EU institutions were forced to reduce aid by \$284 million, while the number of people needing assistance increased by 19 million.⁶² The second consideration that must emerge from the poverty-relief efforts is that all measures put in place are both sustainable and long-term solutions. Since the goal is to eradicate poverty entirely, the solutions and systems put in place must prevent future generations from living similar lives simply because they came from refugee families. As projects and organizations target poverty, they must avoid short-term humanitarian efforts and instead seek out permanent solutions that will help refugees address both their displacement and poverty.

Subtopic 2: The Progress of the Poverty Coalition: Assessing Efficiency and Future Potential

The Poverty Coalition follows a consistent approach to all situations, known as the graduation approach. This well-developed model was built by many different organizations, thus combining the best of their knowledge to put together a simple way to reduce poverty through third-party interventions. This model inherently avoids creating a reliance on third parties by those living in poverty as this would only lead to short-term solutions. Instead, the model uses support and asset transfers initially, followed by up to two years of training, mentoring and encouragement. Since then, the model has had a success rate of 95% in reducing poverty and has led to more self-reliant households.⁶³ The model program takes anywhere from 18 to 36 months to yield results, but has shown promising outcomes that prove its efficiency, even in constantly changing circumstances. The coalition is targeting 35 countries around the world, many of whom have refugees largely contributing to their poverty demographics. These countries include Jordan and Turkey, both housing millions of Syrian refugees from recent conflicts. Ultimately, the Poverty Coalition has an effective methodology and is actively fighting poverty among refugees, showing how the UN development goal is being considered.

Subtopic 3: Major Ongoing Trends Factoring into Refugees and Poverty within their Lives

The three largest sources of refugees in 2022 were Syria, Ukraine, and Afghanistan.⁶⁴ All three countries are struggling with their own respective conflicts that have led to millions of displaced individuals and are currently the focus of most refugee poverty-relief projects. Syria

⁶¹ ReliefWeb. (2021, June 22). *19 million more people in need of humanitarian aid as funding drops, world's most comprehensive study reveals - world*. Retrieved October 14, 2022, from <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/19-million-more-people-need-humanitarian-aid-funding-drops-world-s-most-comprehensive>

⁶² ReliefWeb, "19 million more people in need"

⁶³ Poverty Alleviation Coalition, "Alleviating poverty"

⁶⁴ Concern Worldwide. (n.d.). *The 10 largest refugee crises to know in 2022*. Retrieved October 14, 2022, from <https://www.concern.net/news/largest-refugee-crises>

has more than 6.7 million displaced individuals across the Middle East and parts of Eastern Europe.⁶⁵ This refugee crisis has been the target of many relief programs and activities however, many have not yielded completely successful results. Since the country itself is still considered to be a dangerous area of conflict, it is difficult for certain organizations to enter and provide the needed aid, however, other initiatives are targeting those who have escaped the borders and are now working to diminish the existing poverty levels. Ukraine's conflict is extremely recent but has still displaced great quantities of people, forcing subpar living conditions. In less than a year, there are more than 5.2 million refugees who have fled the country due to the conflict with Russia.⁶⁶ Because of the severity of the conflict and the lack of immediate aid made available to these refugees, poverty levels are rising and are increasingly more difficult to address. Lastly, the conflict in Afghanistan, catalyzed by the increase in Taliban rule in 2021, has created another 2.6 million refugees.⁶⁷ As with multiple refugee cases, many were forced to leave behind every aspect of their lives in order to escape conflict. As such, there are vast numbers of these refugees who have accepted poor conditions and see no way out except through third-party interventions. The UN is actively monitoring all these situations along with dozens more in attempts to reduce poverty around the world and achieve their sustainable development goal.

Bloc Analysis

European Union

Europe has been the destination for many individuals who are fleeing their home countries due to danger and the threat of serious harm. Since many members of the European Union believe in the values and fundamentals that go behind protecting and aiding asylum seekers, Europe has been a popular destination for many asylum seekers originating from the Middle East and from Africa. In 2015, 1.8 million asylum seekers entered nations composing the EU because of the crisis in Syria at the time.⁶⁸ Contrastingly, in 2019, only 142, 000 asylum seekers entered the EU, proving that trends are directly correlated with ongoing conflicts in nearby regions.⁶⁹ Furthermore, the European Union has reformed their Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in 2020 to allow for efficient asylum and return procedures, fair shares of responsibility, and strengthened partnerships with third countries.⁷⁰ The current focus for potential asylum seekers and refugees comes from the conflict in Ukraine and the ability of neighboring EU countries to accept and provide support for those in need of it.

⁶⁵ Concern Worldwide, "The 10 largest refugee crises"

⁶⁶ *How many Ukrainian refugees are there and where have they gone?* (2022, July 4). BBC. Retrieved October 14, 2022, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60555472>.

⁶⁷ Concern Worldwide. (n.d.). *The 10 largest refugee crises to know in 2022*. Retrieved October 14, 2022, from <https://www.concern.net/news/largest-refugee-crises>

⁶⁸ *Common European asylum system*. Migration and Home Affairs. (2020). Retrieved November 18, 2022, from https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system_en#:~:text=The%20European%20Union%20is%20an,on%20the%20protection%20of%20refugees

⁶⁹ Migration and Home Affairs, "Common European Asylum System"

⁷⁰ Migration and Home Affairs, "Common European Asylum System"

Middle East and Northern Africa

Countries in the Middle East and in Northern Africa are experiencing an influx in displaced individuals due to conflict and potential danger. As of 2021, there are over 16 million displaced and stateless individuals who must seek refuge elsewhere.⁷¹ Local governments are either unable to support these individuals because of related conflicts or are overwhelmed with the arrival of millions of displaced individuals, as observed in Turkey. The UNHCR has worked alongside the League of Arab States with the intention of implementing the “Arab declaration on belonging and legal identity”.⁷² All in all, the UNHCR recognizes that this region is a major source of displaced individuals and that many decide to settle in neighboring countries, however, there are few opportunities that allow for stability to endure in the long run. Thus, the UNHCR, along with other NGOs have dedicated certain efforts towards helping governments find manageable and sustainable measures to incorporate asylum seekers and refugees into their population without contributing to the poverty demographic.

Central America

In the past few years, the number of refugees and asylum seekers has only increased in Central America, mostly due to crime and violence. As governments lose the ability to control drug cartels and gangs, many are unable to find safety in their home countries and are forced to escape. Displacement is mostly prevalent in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, with around 800, 000 individuals having to leave their homes.⁷³ Mexico has been a major acceptor of asylum seekers, with more than 130, 000 asylum seekers in 2021.⁷⁴ The UNHCR is working alongside 7 governments leading the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework to find manageable solutions to the displacement crisis.⁷⁵ A main area of focus is that countries accepting asylum seekers and refugees must have a method in place that gives these individuals and their families a way to live as they are displaced. Work permits,

housing, and newcomer support systems must be in place to help prevent poverty from controlling the lives of these individuals as it would greatly reduce the country’s ability to have sustainable growth and an admirable quality of life.

⁷¹ Global Focus. (2022, June 16). *Middle East and North Africa*. Retrieved November 18, 2022, from <https://reporting.unhcr.org/globalreport2021/mena>

⁷² Global Focus. (2022, June 16). *Middle East and North Africa*. Retrieved November 18, 2022, from <https://reporting.unhcr.org/globalreport2021/mena>

⁷³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2021). *Displacement in Central America*. UNHCR. Retrieved November 18, 2022, from <https://www.unhcr.org/displacement-in-central-america.html>

⁷⁴ UNHCR, “Displacement in Central America”

⁷⁵ UNHCR, “Displacement in Central America”

Research & Preparation Questions

1. After economic strain from the COVID-19 pandemic, how can countries continue to support their own citizens and businesses, while tackling the disproportionate poverty rates of refugees?
2. What are specific long-term solutions that should be endorsed and implemented by the UNHCR and how do they differ from frequently seen short term solutions?
3. What are considerations for families and future generations of refugees- how can their situations vary/be improved?
4. What are solutions that can be implemented at the direct root of the problem-issues that cause refugees to flee their home country.