

**Background Guide
Security Council
Displaced Refugees**



I. Introduction to the Committee

The Charter of the United Nations – an international treaty – obligates member states to settle their disputes by peaceful means, in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered. They are to refrain from the threat or use of force against any state and may bring the dispute before the Security Council (UNSC). The UN Charter gives the Security Council primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. The Council may convene at any time, whenever peace is threatened. In contrast to the decisions made by the General Assembly, all member states are obligated under the UN Charter to carry out the Security Council's decisions. There are 15 Council members. Five of these – France, the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States – are permanent members. The other 10 are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. Member states continue to discuss changes in Council membership and proposals to reflect today's political and economic realities. Decisions of the Council require nine yes or affirmative votes. Except in votes on procedural questions, a decision cannot be made if there is a no vote, or veto, by a permanent member.¹

When the Council considers a threat to international peace, it first explores ways to settle the dispute peacefully. It may suggest principles to the parties for a peaceful settlement, appoint special representatives, ask the Secretary-General to use his good offices, or undertake investigation and mediation. It has developed and refined the use of non-military measures including arms embargoes, travel bans, and restrictions to guard against the exploitation of natural resources to fuel conflicts, as well as taking a lead role in the coordination of international counter-terrorism efforts. In the event that a dispute has erupted into armed conflict, the Council tries to secure a ceasefire. It may send a peacekeeping mission to help the parties maintain the truce and to keep opposing forces apart. The Council may, in some cases, authorize the utilization of military force by a coalition of member states or by a regional organization or other arrangement. This can only be carried out as a last resort when all possible peaceful means of settling a dispute have been exhausted or after a threat to the peace, a breach of the peace or an act of aggression have been determined to exist.²

In order to hold combatants accountable for their actions, the Council has also created international tribunals to prosecute those accused of grave human rights violations and serious breaches of international humanitarian law, including genocide. In addition to its responsibility to maintain international peace and security, the Council also makes recommendations to the General Assembly to appoint a new Secretary-General and to admit new members to the UN. Security Council decisions are formal expressions of the will of the Council. In contrast to the decisions taken by the General Assembly, those taken by the Security Council are legally binding. As Article 25 of the UN Charter states, "The Members of the United Nations agree to

¹ "Security Council," United Nations (United Nations)

² Ibid

accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter.”³

II. Statement of the Issues

According to United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), a refugee is someone who has fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and has crossed an international border to find safety in another country.⁴ They often must flee with little more than the clothes on their back, leaving behind homes, possessions, jobs, and loved ones. Refugees are defined and protected in international law. The 1951 Refugee Convention is a key legal document and defines a refugee as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”⁵

UNHCR’s Refugee Population Statistics Database collects data through its annual statistical activities with some data going back as far as 1951, the year UNHCR was created. UNHCR’s website states: “At the end of 2021 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order, 89.3 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide.”⁶ More than 60 percent of all refugees come from just five countries: Syrian Arab Republic (6.8 million), Venezuela (4.6 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million), South Sudan (2.4 million), Myanmar (1.2 million).⁷ At the end of 2021 and before the current crisis in Ukraine, Turkey hosted the largest number of refugees, with 3.8 million people. Colombia is second with more than 1.8 million, including Venezuelans displaced abroad.⁸ An estimated 36.5 million (41 percent) of the 89.3 million forcibly displaced people are children below 18 years of age. 1.5 million children were born as refugees and between 2018 and 2021, an average of 350,000 to 400,000 children were born into a refugee life per year.⁹ Low and middle-income countries host 83 percent of the world’s refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad. The least developed countries provide asylum to 27 percent of the total.¹⁰

As of June 2022, UNHCR said “100 million people have now been forced to flee their homes globally” highlighting the worldwide food insecurity, the climate crisis, war in Ukraine and other emergencies from Africa to Afghanistan as leading causes.¹¹ Today, one in every 78 people on earth is displaced.¹² In some societies, women and girls face discrimination and violence every day, simply because of their gender. An ordinary task like collecting water or going to the toilet

³ Ibid.

⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “What Is a Refugee?” UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

⁵ Ibid

⁶ “Refugee Statistics,” UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “More than 100 Million Now Forcibly Displaced: UNHCR Report | UN News,” United Nations - UN News Global Perspective Human Stories (United Nations, June 16, 2022)

¹² ibid

can put them at risk of rape or abuse.¹³ In times of displacement, this problem escalates. Women and girls make up approximately 50 percent of any refugee, internally displaced or stateless population, and those who are unaccompanied, pregnant, heads of households, disabled or elderly are especially vulnerable.¹⁴ According to UN reports, 60 percent of preventable maternal deaths take place in humanitarian settings and at least 1 in 5 refugees of displaced women are estimated to have experienced sexual violence.¹⁵

III. History and Past UN Action

The UNHCR was created in 1950, during the aftermath of the Second World War, to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes. In 1954, UNHCR was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their work in Europe and led efforts to resettle refugees during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. During the 1960s, the decolonization of Africa produced the first of Africa's numerous refugee crises. In 1981, UNHCR received a second Nobel Peace Prize for its worldwide assistance to refugees. UNHCR now has more than 18,000 personnel working in 137 countries and in 2020 marked its 70th anniversary.¹⁶

UNHCR is also the governing body of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The Refugee Convention is the key legal document that undergirds the basis of the UNHCR's work. With 149 state parties to either or both, these two treaties define the term "refugee" and outlines the rights of refugees, as well as the legal obligations of the states to protect them. The core principle is non-refoulement, which asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. This is now considered a rule of customary international law.¹⁷ Standards and procedures for enacting the convention were agreed to in the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.¹⁸

UN Women was created in 2010 by the General Assembly and is an UN entity dedicated to gender equality as well as the advancement of women and girls. UN Women works with UNHCR and other non-governmental organizations - as well as governmental organizations – to accelerate progress on meeting women's needs worldwide. It works globally to assist refugee women and girls resettle and reintegrate into society.¹⁹ UN Women also works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls.²⁰

For decades, the UN has called upon nations to gather to solve food insecurity. In 2015, member states created and adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and

¹³ "Women," UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR),

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ "Women Refugees and Migrants," UN Women (UN Women)

¹⁶ "History of UNHCR," UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

¹⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "The 1951 Refugee Convention," UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

¹⁸ "The 1951 Refugee Convention," Immigration History (The University of Texas at Austin Department of History, September 3, 2019)

¹⁹ "About UN Women," UN Women – Headquarters (UN Women)

²⁰ Ibid

prospects of everyone, everywhere.²¹ These goals are a part of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which set out a 15-year plan to achieve the goals.²² Displaced refugees fall under Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. SDG 16 mentions “conflict, insecurity, weak institutions and limited access to justice remain a great threat to sustainable development.” In 2018, the number of people fleeing war, persecution and conflict exceeded 70 million. Also, the births of around 1 in 4 children under age 5 worldwide are never officially recorded, depriving them of proof of legal identity crucial for the protection of their rights and for access to justice and social services.²³

IV. Latest Developments

The escalation of the international armed conflict in Ukraine has caused civilian casualties and destruction of civilian infrastructure, forcing people to flee their homes seeking safety, protection, and assistance. Millions of refugees from Ukraine have crossed borders into neighboring countries, and many more have been forced to move inside the country. In light of the emergency and the scale of humanitarian needs, an inter-agency regional refugee response is being carried out in support of the efforts of refugee-hosting countries.²⁴ As of August 30th, 2022, the Russian Federation houses the largest Ukrainian refugee population at 2.4 million. Poland follows with 1.3 million refugees.²⁵

In addition to conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted the global refugee crisis. The pandemic has spread across the world, infecting over 60 million people, and taking the lives of more than one million. The world’s 79.5 million people forced to flee their homes due to conflict and persecution constitute one of the most vulnerable population groups.²⁶ Anyone can contract COVID-19, but the pandemic has affected certain populations disproportionately. Due to limited testing, the exact number of COVID-19 cases among people forced to flee remains unknown. In addition to the health threats, forcibly displaced people have faced particularly complicated economic and social challenges associated with the pandemic.²⁷ The spread of COVID-19 has devastated many countries’ health and economic systems as well as disrupted the education of more than a billion children. This has been particularly true for developing countries, which host 85 percent of the world’s refugee population. Providing forcibly displaced people with adequate healthcare and maintaining their social and economic wellbeing presents a challenge for host countries and the international community.²⁸

²¹ “The Sustainable Development Agenda - United Nations Sustainable Development,” United Nations (United Nations)

²² Ibid

²³ “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions - United Nations Sustainable Development,” United Nations (United Nations)

²⁴ “Operational Data Portal - Ukraine Refugee Situation,” UNHCR (UNHCR, August 30, 2022)

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ “Refugees and the Impact of COVID-19,” UNHCR (UNHCR)

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

V. Problems That Resolutions Should Address

The issue of displaced refugees has expanded over decades as conflict, the COVID pandemic, growing global population, and limited resources increases the number of people that are forced to flee their home to survive. Several interrelated issues need to be addressed while addressing displaced refugees.

Delegates are encouraged to consider the following issues and questions in their research and position papers:

- How has COVID made providing resources for refugee populations more difficult?
- How has global conflict affected the refugee population?
- What else can the UN do to support refugee populations?
- Is the country you are representing a source, transit, or host country for large number of refugees?

VI. Helpful Sources

- UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/>
- UN Women <https://www.unwomen.org/en>
- Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Endnotes

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14. ibid
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