

United Nations High  
Commissioner for Refugees

UNHCR



Model United Nations of the University of Chicago

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## CHAIR LETTERS

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Dear Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to MUNUC 35 and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). My name is Hannah Maidman, and I will be your committee chair along with Kallie Hoffman. I am so excited for this year's conference, and I look forward to meeting all of you and seeing you create innovative resolutions.

Here's a little bit about me: I'm a third year in the college, majoring in Business Economics with a minor in Spanish. On campus, I'm extremely involved in MUN and am a member of UChicago's traveling MUN team and ChoMUN—UChicago's college MUN conference. Last year at MUNUC 34, I served as co-chair in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Outside of MUN, I work as a tour guide in the UChicago admission office, an administrative assistant at The Center for Robust Decision Making on Climate and Energy Policy at UChicago, and conduct research at UChicago's Law School. I am also on the women's club ultimate frisbee team, am the Vice President of Fellowship for Alpha Phi Omega, a co-ed community service fraternity, and play the alto saxophone in UChicago's Jazz X-Tet. I also enjoy running, reading, and hanging out with my dogs and friends.

I truly hope you are as interested and thrilled as we are about this committee and topics: Rights of Refugees in the Middle East and Climate Refugees. Both of these topics are extremely important and influential, not only to refugees, but also to the world and its treatment of human rights. Therefore, it is crucial that we do not forget the importance of these very real and ongoing issues in the world. Consequently, we hope that you treat these issues with the utmost respect and seriousness they deserve. With respect to Refugees in the Middle East, I encourage you to address these problems in a diverse way, by creating comprehensive solutions that address globalization's effects on maintaining individual & community identities, while developing strategies and initiatives that increase accessibility of resources and aid to refugees. With the issue of Climate Refugees, we encourage you to address this multifaceted issue through long-term and short-term initiatives and strategies. Climate change and global warming continue to occur, so it is imperative that prevention and intervention occur globally to better help vulnerable populations.

In all, I hope that you find this committee enjoyable and learn as much as possible. Kallie and I hope to make this committee engaging, educational, inclusive, but also upbeat and fun. We want to hear from everyone, regardless of your MUN experience, and meet as many of you as possible in-person. Again, I am beyond excited to meet you all, so please feel free to reach out to me about anything, whether for questions about the background guide, MUNUC in general, the University of Chicago, or something else!

Best regards,

Hannah Maidman

[hannahmaidman@uchicago.edu](mailto:hannahmaidman@uchicago.edu)



Dear Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to MUNUC 35 and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). My name is Kallie Hoffman, and I will be serving you as your committee chair, along with Hannah Maidman. I look forward to meeting you all and working alongside you to generate the greatest possible resolutions and diplomatic debate.

I am a third year undergraduate student at the University of Chicago majoring in History with a double minor in Education and Human Rights. I plan to pursue either a career in law or education, but I am also incredibly passionate about International Relations and Public Policy. Last year at MUNUC 34, I served as chair for the United Nations Committee on the Status of Women (CSW), and at ChoMUN, I served on the International Bioethics Committee, which dealt with the challenges scientists face based on notions of ethics and morality. In addition, I am also in the Model United Nations circuit myself, having competed at both Harvard and the University of Southern California. Aside from Model UN, I am a member of the varsity women's lacrosse team at UChicago, a member of the Alpha Omicron Pi (AOPI) sorority, the head of finance for the Phi Alpha Delta pre-law fraternity, and a major foodie @citybites.

I sincerely hope that you are as enthusiastic about this committee as I am and our Topics: Rights of Refugees in the Middle East and Climate Refugees. We must not forget that these are very real and ongoing issues in the world. Furthermore, we should treat these issues with the utmost respect and seriousness that they deserve. With the issue of refugees' rights in the Middle East, I aim for you to familiarize yourselves with the history of the problem, as well as past and current solutions, so you can arrive at the conference well equipped to collaborate with other delegates and work towards implementing global change. In regards to climate refugees, I encourage you to look at the issue from a human rights perspective and to become well versed in the extent of the problem. Although you may have seen news reports on various refugee crises in current events, I wish for you to explore these issues through the lens of human rights and ask what we owe to each other as human beings. The message I want you all to take away from this committee is that human rights should not be politicized, as they are universal. Human rights do not belong to any one country or group, and

refugees, in particular, require and deserve our time, energy, and resources in order to acquire greater opportunities and a higher quality of life.

Over the next few months, I hope you acquaint yourselves with these topics and absorb as much information as possible. Feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions regarding these background guides, MUNUC in general, or the University of Chicago.

Looking forward to seeing you!

Best regards,

Kallie Hoffman

[kalliehoffman@gmail.com](mailto:kalliehoffman@gmail.com)

## HISTORY OF COMMITTEE

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created by the UN General Assembly on December 14, 1950. The original plan was for the UNHCR to address the aftermath of the Second World War and to help find homes for millions of the people displaced by the conflict. Although the UN originally only gave the committee a three-year mandate to complete its work and then disband, one year later, on July 28, 1951, the UN adopted a legal foundation and basic statute, the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, to guide the UNHCR's work and help refugees worldwide.<sup>1</sup> The commission has now evolved into one of the primary committees of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and "strives to ensure that everyone has the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to eventually return home, integrate or resettle."<sup>2</sup>

The UNHCR is instrumental in promoting refugees' rights, reshaping the conversation on refugee equality, empowering refugees, and documenting the reality of refugee treatment and conditions throughout the world. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees first attended to the refugee crisis following WWII, but beginning in the late 1950s, displacement caused by conflict and corruption in other regions outside Europe, including Hungary and Africa, broadened the scope of the UNHCR's operations.<sup>3</sup> The number of refugees continued to increase as nations faced the pressures of decolonization and the reality of the postwar environment. The UNHCR intervened with the uprising in Hungary, the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong, the Algerian refugees who fled to Morocco and Tunisia, and more.<sup>4</sup> Suddenly, more than ever before, there was an urgent need to coordinate a wider, global response to ensure refugee protection and humanitarian assistance.

The refugee crisis in Africa prompted the UNHCR to reevaluate its work and find different ways to provide for refugees. Unlike in Europe, there were no established solutions in Africa, and many

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<sup>1</sup> "The 1951 Refugee Convention," UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency, 2021). <https://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>; "History of UNHCR," UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency, 2021), <https://www.unhcr.org/rs/en/history-of-unhcr>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees," Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, 6AD), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_High\\_Commissioner\\_for\\_Refugees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_High_Commissioner_for_Refugees).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

refugees who fled one country only found instability in their new country of refuge.<sup>5</sup> The UNHCR broadened the definition of refugee and found better ways to care for individuals in dangerous or difficult situations. In addition, the committee faced challenges when nations targeted civilians, countries closed their borders to refugees, and refugees caused socio-economic concerns for both home and host nations.<sup>6</sup> The UNHCR has changed its strategies and priorities many times over the years, but it has consistently assisted refugees in hostile environments and upheld its primary purpose of safeguarding the rights and well-being of refugees.

The UNHCR employs a staff of over 17,000 people in 138 countries. There is one High Commissioner, elected every five years, who makes annual reports to the UN General Assembly on the approach and progress of the commission.<sup>7</sup> However, most of the operations are in the field, where they are managed from a series of regional offices, branch offices, and sub-offices. The worldwide operation has become highly complex, ranging from the recruitment of new staff and ensuring their security in dangerous situations to the procurement of everything from medical supplies and bulk food shipments to aircraft charters.<sup>8</sup> The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees brings together members from diverse backgrounds and cultures, where representatives discuss the progress and gaps being implemented within the current approach to the international refugee crisis. Further actions to accelerate the progress and promotion of exercising refugees' rights in refugee camps and host countries are also discussed in full detail. Overall, the fundamental purpose of this body is to promote and empower refugees and provide them with the best tools and resources to build a better, safer future for themselves. In a world where over 82 million people are forcibly displaced as a result of conflict or persecution, the work of UNHCR is more important than ever.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees," UNHCR (United Nations), accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2013/09/office-of-the-united-nations-high-commissioner-for-refugees/>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



## TOPIC A: RIGHTS OF REFUGEES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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### Statement of the Problem

Refugees are not a new phenomenon in the Middle East, but the rise in recent conflicts across a wide variety of Middle Eastern nations has triggered a massive displacement of men, women, and children. Nearly 40% of the 60 million people displaced worldwide are from the Middle East, with a particular emphasis on Syria and Afghanistan. The crisis has not only put immense pressure on origin countries, from which they are losing millions of their population, but it has also created concerns for host countries receiving the refugees. In many instances, countries have not been able to properly care for refugees, resulting in a systematic decline in their rights, the quality of their lives, and in the educational standards and future prospects of their children.

#### *Syria*

The most significant current refugee crisis began in 2011 as a result of the Syrian Civil War.<sup>9</sup> The Syrian government cracked down on public anti-government demonstrations, hindering the people's freedom of speech and instituting an authoritarian style of leadership. The conflict quickly escalated and the country descended into a civil war that forced millions of Syrian families out of their homes. The civil war swallowed entire communities and villages, and thousands perished in the destruction. People desperately tried to remove their families from the harmful situation, but the state of war forced many to resort to illegal travel methods to have even the smallest chance at refuge.

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<sup>9</sup> "Syria Refugee Crisis Explained," UN Refugees (UNHCR, June 5, 2021), <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>.

The graph illustrates the cumulative number of refugees over time. The y-axis is labeled 'Total number of refugees' and ranges from 0 to 4,000,000 in increments of 500,000. The x-axis is labeled 'Time' and shows dates from 3/15/2012 to 8/25/2015. The data points show a consistent upward trend, with a particularly sharp increase starting in early 2015.

Time	Total number of refugees
3/15/2012	~50,000
6/14/2012	~100,000
9/16/2012	~250,000
12/16/2012	~450,000
3/15/2013	~900,000
6/16/2013	~1,500,000
9/16/2013	~1,900,000
12/15/2013	~2,300,000
3/15/2014	~2,500,000
6/15/2014	~2,800,000
9/15/2014	~3,000,000
12/15/2014	~3,200,000
3/15/2015	~3,900,000
6/15/2015	~3,950,000
8/25/2015	~4,050,000

**Vox**



<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

or stability. More than 70% of Syrian refugees live in poverty, with limited access to basic services, education, and job opportunities, and their chances of ever returning home have dwindled over time.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the countries that initially took them in are coming to see the refugees as a burden and are receiving pressure from lower government officials and the general population to institute stricter border measures and refugee quotas. People have lost their livelihoods and are unable to meet their basic needs—a situation that has only been exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>13</sup> Due to their lack of protection, many refugees have been exposed to risks such as child labor, sexual violence, exploitation, and both physical and mental abuse.

## ***Afghanistan***

Afghanistan has faced internal conflict and food insecurity for over 40 years, but since January 2021 alone, an estimated 667,900 Afghans have been newly displaced inside the country, primarily due to insecurity and violence.<sup>14</sup> They have been forced to flee their homes and seek a new life in order to obtain greater access to shelter, food, water, and health services, yet they have become internally displaced within Afghanistan or pressured into crossing the borders without any basic plan or provisions to guide their way. Afghan refugees are the third-largest displaced population in the world and flock to Pakistan and Iran, which continue to host more than 1.4 million and 780,000 registered Afghan refugees, respectively.<sup>15</sup> The UNHCR has intervened to provide refugees with emergency support and assistance, but there is only so much the UN body can offer when there are millions of people in need of aid.

For Afghan refugees, the most devastating impact has been on women and girls. Most of the time, the females flee while the males stay behind. Not only do these families rarely ever reunite, but for the women, their isolation within these new host countries or refugee camps, on top of the lack of hygiene kits, has led to a high number of sexually-transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> "Afghanistan Refugee Crisis Explained," UN Refugees (UNHCR, August 16, 2021), <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/afghanistan-refugee-crisis-explained/>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

forced marriages.<sup>16</sup> Women constantly face threats to their security and are left in situations where they face severe persecution and conflict.

## ***Iraq***

The Iraq War started in 2003, but the displacement and refugee crisis did not escalate until 2014, and the situation has only worsened in recent years.<sup>17</sup> When violence broke out in the northern part of the country and attacks launched by the Islamic State targeted civilian homes and villages, families had no choice but to flee before the conflict destroyed the country's entire infrastructure and agricultural land.<sup>18</sup>

Today, thanks to the rise of modern data and analytics, it is estimated that more than 270,000 people have left Iraq, and over 1.2 million are still displaced inside the country, half of whom are young children.<sup>19</sup> The UNHCR has reported that for the majority of displaced people and refugees who have been unable to return to their homes, they continue to face many of the same challenges as described for the refugees above in Syria and Afghanistan. There is barely any food, water, sanitation, or healthcare, and although many will make it to surrounding countries, there is hardly any livelihood to be established and built. Millions of Iraqis are in need of humanitarian assistance, but many other nations and the overarching international community have chosen to turn a blind eye and ignore the needs of these vulnerable immigrants.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Tatiana Almeida, "The Most Urgent Refugee Crises around the World," World Vision Canada (World Vision International, April 6, 2022), <https://www.worldvision.ca/stories/refugees/refugee-crises-around-the-world>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

## Host Countries

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of Refugees</i>
Turkey	3,696,831
Jordan	3,027,729
Uganda	1,475,311
Pakistan	1,438,523
Lebanon	1,338,197
Germany	1,235,160
Sudan	1,068,339
Bangladesh	889,775
Iran	800,025
Ethiopia	782,896

Table 1: Top 10 Countries Hosting the Highest Number of International Refugees, as of 2021<sup>20</sup>

The countries surrounding conflicts in the Middle East have been generous in accepting immigrants over the course of history, but in recent years, the pressure refugees place on the national government and individual citizens has escalated to levels of concern. There are three major considerations with regards to immigrants:

1. In order to address the influx of refugees, there need to be straightforward guidelines from the national government. The states that host refugees incur substantial financial costs because they must pay the salaries and expenses of officials and security forces who are tasked with handling refugee responsibilities.<sup>21</sup> In addition, they must construct buildings and vehicles to monitor the emergencies and provide homes and care for the refugees.<sup>22</sup> Many nations might receive some monetary assistance from the United Nations or other countries, but for the most part, they are on their own to provide for and design a living environment for refugees.

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<sup>20</sup> "Refugees by Country 2022," World Population Review (World Population Review, 2021), <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/refugees-by-country>.

<sup>21</sup> "The Role of Host Countries: the Cost and Impact of Hosting Refugees," Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (UNHCR, May 31, 2011), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/excom/standcom/4de4f7959/role-host-countries-cost-impact-hosting-refugees.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

2. Refugees also cause a wide range of economic concerns for the countries where they land. The sudden influx of people from a neighboring or nearby state can increase market prices and decrease local wages.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, there is the possibility of a detrimental effect on the environment as the need to build camps and villages leads to deforestation and the reduction or contamination of water supplies.<sup>24</sup> There is a heavy toll taken on roads, bridges, warehousing facilities, and the availability of land.
3. States that host refugees must also deal with how their new population affects their political processes and relationships with other states. When large numbers of people arrive in a country, especially when they are fleeing situations of conflict, natural disaster, or violence, they do not share the same ethnic or cultural linkages with the host community.<sup>25</sup> The refugees themselves can be ostracized, but other countries that once had political alliances with the host can suddenly choose to back out of agreements or offer less aid. Also, there can also be extreme tension between the country of asylum and the country of origin.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the European Union (EU), specifically, is in desperate need of a better system to manage migration, as it has been at the point of controversy for its questionable stance regarding the status of migrants. Many countries, such as Germany, have been more than open to accepting refugees, but according to the Migrant Acceptance Index, North Macedonia, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and the southeast European countries of Greece and Italy are the least-accepting countries for migrants.<sup>27</sup> As a result of these findings, the EU faces pressure to create a comprehensive system across its 27 member states for handling refugees and asylum-seekers.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> "Hungary," US News, 2022. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/hungary>; "Serbia," US News, 2022. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/serbia>; "Croatia," US News, 2022. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/Croatia>; "Greece," US News, 2022. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/greece>; "Italy," US News, 2022. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/italy>; "World Less Accepting of Migrants, Study Finds," US News (U.S. News and World Report, September 23, 2020), <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2020-09-23/countries-less-accepting-of-migrants-study-finds>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



## ***Rights of Refugees***

War, violence, poverty, famine, and more force people from their homes every day, where they will face treacherous journeys before they reach what they hope to be a “safe haven.” Families are ripped apart for the chance of a better livelihood, yet many end up living in horrible conditions with not enough food, clean water, or proper sanitation. Some people spend decades as refugees with no prospect of formal occupation or a decent education.<sup>29</sup> All refugees and displaced persons have the right to receive assistance, the right to protection from abuse, and the freedom to seek asylum.<sup>30</sup> However, their rights are hardly ever respected, and most of their essential needs are simply ignored.

In terms of violence, not only do refugees flee regions of immense violence and catastrophe, but once they arrive in their host countries, they are often subject to killings, torture, and abductions.<sup>31</sup> Women, especially, are subject to grave violations such as being forced into marriage or sexual violence. In severe instances, women are taken as sexual or domestic slaves.

In terms of food and water, there is little to none within host countries and refugee camps. Insecurity in the origin countries has led to widespread destruction of vital infrastructure such as hospitals and schools, and the conflicts have destroyed farmlands, preventing agriculture and fishing jobs. At their new homes, there is also a devastating food and water crisis, as they are forced to survive on only what they can find to eat.<sup>32</sup> The lack of safe water is also increasing the threat of cholera and other water-borne diseases.

In terms of shelter, most refugee housing environments are hardly better than what they escaped. Many host countries are wary of formal refugee camps as they do not want refugees to grow complacent and remain in the camps indefinitely, so instead of building proper and safe shelters, many refugees are forced to live in brutal settlements.<sup>33</sup> They are at constant risk of eviction, and

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<sup>29</sup> “Rights Refused: 5 Fundamental Needs Denied to Refugees,” Oxfam (Oxfam International, May 25, 2022), <https://www.oxfam.org/en/rights-refused-5-fundamental-needs-denied-refugees>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

there is not a moment of peace to be enjoyed. There is no running water or electricity, and there is nothing to shield refugees from the uncertainty of the weather and the harsh nature of the elements.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, while all refugees are impacted, the crisis takes an especially significant toll on children and young adults. Children are at a critical period of development where it is crucial for them to receive some semblance of comfort and security. However, the refugee crisis has uprooted children and negatively affected their physical and mental wellbeing in the following aspects:

1. Limited access to quality education: refugee children are five times more likely to opt out of school than other children, often due to school safety, language barriers in the classroom, and financial issues. Instead of seeking a formal education, many will end up in child labor.<sup>35</sup>
2. Threat of "lost childhoods": while children are still developing emotionally and mentally, they are not as well-equipped as adults to handle trauma, so the refugee crisis can have a disastrous effect on their mental health.<sup>36</sup> According to UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore, "prolonged exposure to violence, fear, and uncertainty can have a catastrophic impact on children's learning, behavior, and emotional and social development for many years."<sup>37</sup>
3. Separation from families: this not only heightens a sense of loneliness and isolation, but refugee children that are separated from at least one parent are proven to be at a greater risk of exploitation and abuse.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> *Education Uprooted*, UNICEF, September 2017.

[https://www.unicef.org/media/48911/file/UNICEF\\_Education\\_Uprooted-ENG.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/48911/file/UNICEF_Education_Uprooted-ENG.pdf); McConville, Kieran. "Language Barriers in the Classroom: From Mother Tongue to National Language," Concern Worldwide US, 23 September 2019. <https://www.concernusa.org/story/language-barriers-in-classroom/>; "5 Unique Challenges Facing Refugee Children," Concern Worldwide US (Concern Worldwide, December 23, 2021), <https://www.concernusa.org/story/refugee-children-unique-challenges/>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

4. *Shifting family dynamics*: overcrowded housing, aftermath of trauma, and difficult financial circumstances put children in an extremely vulnerable position and require them to grow up before they are ready.<sup>39</sup>
5. *Isolation in the host country*: xenophobia and discrimination play a big role in isolating those seeking asylum.<sup>40</sup> Amid such lonely conditions, it is hard to rebuild a life or regain a sense of normalcy.

The refugee crisis in the Middle East has created concerns for all countries and individuals, regardless of background or origin. The disdain for refugees and the blatant disregard for their rights is unacceptable and is the problem that this committee must seek to address over the course of the conference.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

## History of the Problem

The rights of refugees in the Middle East is a crucial and extremely important topic to discuss. However, in order to begin to solve and enact change on this global issue, it is crucial to look at the history of refugees in the Middle East. Today, the Middle East seems to be undeniably associated with refugees, from people displaced by current and recent conflicts in Syria, Yemen, or Iraq to others defined as refugees since the 1940s. This section will explore an earlier period, between the First and Second World Wars, to push delegates to think and ask what the role of refugees played in Middle Eastern history in the years when its modern states emerged, and what role the Middle East has played in modern refugee history. This history will highlight three distinct periods: the Post-Ottoman period, the Development of Refugee Camps period, and the Post WWII period.

### ***Post-Ottoman***

The last century and a half of Ottoman history was marked by forced displacement into the empire on a huge scale. As the region's post-Ottoman nation-states took shape under colonial domination, the arrival and settlement of large numbers of refugees played a crucial part in their formation.<sup>41</sup> Between the Russian conquest of Crimea in 1783 and the second Balkan war in 1913, five to seven million Muslims entered the Ottoman domains.<sup>42</sup> Some were subjects of the Sultan, leaving—or expelled from—areas that had broken away from the empire under Christian rule.<sup>43</sup> Others were fleeing the consolidation of Russian rule in the Crimea and the Caucasus.<sup>44</sup> This mass migration is an important historical phenomenon, as it deals with the introduction of great migration worldwide.

Managing the flow of migrants became a priority of the state after about 1850, due to practical as well as political reasons (for instance, assisting refugees supported the state's faltering claim to offer protection to Muslims).<sup>45</sup> The "migrant commission" was created in 1860, in the midst of a refugee

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<sup>41</sup> White, Benjamin Thomas, and Laura Robson. "The Middle East in Refugee History, 1918–39: University Calendar: The George Washington University." GW University Calendar. Accessed July 3, 2022. <https://calendar.gwu.edu/middle-east-refugee-history-1918%E2%80%9339>.

<sup>42</sup> Blumi, Isa. "Ottoman Refugees, 1878-1939: Migration in a Post-Imperial World." Ottoman refugees, 1878-1939: migration in a post-imperial world | Reviews in History, 2018. <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/1690>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

crisis that followed Russia's official adoption of a policy of forcible expulsion of Crimean Tatars.<sup>46</sup> This developed into one of the key bureaucratic agencies of the modernizing Ottoman state. It arranged long-distance resettlement and channeled aid to refugees in the form of land grants, agricultural subsidies, like seeds and tools and sometimes cash, as well as tax exemptions.<sup>47</sup> However, over the years, these agencies developed an ulterior motive. Assisting refugees allowed the empire to expand its tax base by advancing the agricultural frontier, especially in the Arab provinces, where the refugees were provided security against nomadic incursions.<sup>48</sup> As a result, they were disproportionately recruited into the state's coercive forces. From the 1870s, it is clear that there are two-way relationships between the state-formation and population displacement at work.<sup>49</sup> These relationships characterize the refugee crisis generated by the First World War.

### ***Development of Refugee Camps, Post-WWI***

Within the field of refugee history, the late Ottoman state's responses to mass refugee crises foreshadowed many aspects of the management of the "refugee problem" after World War I, by nation-states, colonial empires, and international organizations. The Middle East became one of the first places where the refugee camp appeared as a way to manage populations of displaced people.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, this resulted in the creation of many different types of resettlement and refugee programs. For instance, there was a resettlement of refugees, as well as the creation of a haven for refugees as a core part of a state's "mission."<sup>51</sup> These types of "missions" took advantage of the vulnerability of refugees, whether it was through soft power as a channel for state-led economic development, or hard power, which incorporated refugees into society through coercive forces.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, it is beneficial to look at camps across the Middle East, specifically the camp at

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> White, Benjamin Thomas, and Laura Robson. "The Middle East in Refugee History, 1918–39: University Calendar: The George Washington University." GW University Calendar. Accessed July 3, 2022. <https://calendar.gwu.edu/middle-east-refugee-history-1918%E2%80%9339>.

<sup>51</sup> Blumi, Isa. "Ottoman Refugees, 1878-1939: Migration in a Post-Imperial World." *Ottoman refugees, 1878-1939: migration in a post-imperial world* | Reviews in History, 2018. <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/1690>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Baquba, to help understand the history of the refugee camp, its roots in military logistics, as well as the history of colonial domination and national sovereignty in the early state of Iraq.<sup>53</sup>

The Baquba camp was a refugee camp near Baghdad from 1918-21. Run by the British occupation authorities in Mesopotamia, otherwise known as modern Iraq, the camp housed nearly 50,000 people and thousands of animals at its height.<sup>54</sup> Its location was determined by the need to accommodate thousands of sheep, goats, and cattle.<sup>55</sup> Baquba is a very early example of a modern refugee camp.<sup>56</sup> Efforts to stimulate economic activity within the camp were built around animal products and labor. Animals mediated the refugees' interactions with each other and the people they lived among, whether in peace, through the sale and exchange of animal products, tension, such as friction over grazing, or over even war, through mounted refugees serving in the British military.<sup>57</sup> Animals played a multifaceted role in structuring the experience of refugees. Altogether, the Baquba camp is a historical moment that is reflected in camps today.

### ***Post-WWII***

With the outbreak of war in Europe, there were thousands of displaced people and refugees. As the Nazis and Soviet army stormed through parts of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, many civilian populations were displaced. Consequently, organized evacuation and resettlement were needed and created by the exodus of civilian refugees. Tens of thousands of refugees fled the war and journeyed across the Eastern Mediterranean, with the promise of sanctuary on the other side.<sup>58</sup> This journey was done by thousands of people from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, who were housed in a series of camps across the Middle East.

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<sup>53</sup> White, Benjamin Thomas, and Laura Robson. "The Middle East in Refugee History, 1918–39: University Calendar: The George Washington University." GW University Calendar. Accessed July 3, 2022. <https://calendar.gwu.edu/middle-east-refugee-history-1918%E2%80%9339>.

<sup>54</sup> White, Benjamin Thomas. "Humans and Animals in a Refugee Camp: Baquba, Iraq, 1918–20." OUP Academic. Oxford University Press, May 14, 2018. <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/32/2/216/4996010>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Tharoor, Ishaan. "The Forgotten Story of European Refugee Camps in the Middle East." The Washington Post. WP Company, December 1, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/06/02/the-forgotten-story-of-european-refugee-camps-in-the-middle-east/>.



A British-led scheme known as the Middle East Relief and Refugee Administration was launched in 1942 to help protect these displaced people.<sup>59</sup> This program was facilitated by officials based in Cairo, and provided 40,000 Poles, Greeks and Yugoslavs safety in the Middle East.<sup>60</sup> The refugees were spread out between camps in Egypt, southern Palestine and Syria. Aleppo, an ancient and thriving metropolitan center, was already a hub of emigres, exiles and spies in the 1940s.<sup>61</sup> By 1944, the initiative would become part of the "United Nations," the formal term for the Allied alliance.<sup>62</sup>

In addition, in 1943, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) was founded. Its purpose was to "plan, co-ordinate, administer... measures for the relief of victims of war in any area under the control of any of the United Nations through the provision of food, fuel, clothing, shelter and other basic necessities, medical and other essential services."<sup>63</sup> While the UNRRA was limited in assisting in the repatriation—the return of someone to their own country—of Displaced Persons, the creation of this organization was monumental.<sup>64</sup> It was the first time that planning for anticipated refugees had occurred during the war.

The next section of this history will focus on highly populated regions and countries of the Middle East, where refugees have been living for years.

## ***Palestine***

Palestinian refugees are citizens of Palestine, and their descendants, who fled or were expelled from their country over the course of the 1947-49 Palestine War and the Six-day War in 1967.<sup>65</sup> Most Palestinian refugees live in or near 68 Palestinian refugee camps across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.<sup>66</sup> As of 2019, more than 5.6 million Palestinian refugees were registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> "What Happened to People Displaced by the Second World War?" Imperial War Museums. Accessed July 3, 2022. <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-happened-to-people-displaced-by-the-second-world-war>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> "Palestine Refugees." UNRWA. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East. Accessed July 3, 2022. <https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

East (UNRWA).<sup>67</sup> In addition, most of these refugees are located internally or within the Middle East. Palestinian refugees live in four main locations: Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and Jordan.<sup>68</sup> Today, one in four people are refugees in Lebanon, which has become a country that houses over 1 million Syrians and 450,000 Palestinians.<sup>69</sup> Most Palestinian refugees have lived in Lebanon for generations in the country's 12 camps.<sup>70</sup>

The UNRWA was created to help aid services to Palestinian refugees, which are defined as "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict."<sup>71</sup> While the responsibility of the UNRWA is limited in refugee camps, UNRWA helps provide services and administration, such as maintaining schools, health centers, and distribution centers in areas outside the recognized camps. In addition, the UNRWA has a camp service office in each camp, which residents visit to update their records or raise issues relating to the Agency with services with the Camp Services Officer (CSO).<sup>72</sup>

## ***Syria***

After 11 years of crisis, the Syrian refugee crisis remains the world's largest refugee and displacement crisis of our time.<sup>73</sup> Since the Syrian civil war officially began on March 15, 2011, families have suffered under brutal conflict, which has killed thousands of people, torn the nation apart, and regressed the standard of living by decades. There are about 6.8 million Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers, and another 6.7 million internally-displaced people within Syria.<sup>74</sup> In total, 13.5 million Syrians have been forcibly displaced, which is equivalent to more than half of the country's population.<sup>75</sup> About half of the people affected by this crisis are children.<sup>76</sup> These refugees are not

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> "Palestinian Refugees - Where We Work." Anera, February 24, 2022. <https://www.anera.org/where-we-work/>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Reid, Kathryn. "Syrian Refugee Crisis: Facts, Faqs, and How to Help." World Vision, June 16, 2022.

<https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts#:~:text=About%206.8%20million%20Syrians%20are,in%20Syria%20need%20humanitarian%20assistance.>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

internally displaced, but rather forced to migrate to other nations. The top 4 countries that refugees migrate to are Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. More than 3.6 million Syrian refugees are in Turkey, the largest refugee population worldwide.<sup>77</sup> In Lebanon, about 831,000 Syrian refugees make up more than 14% of Lebanon's population.<sup>78</sup> There are 675,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan<sup>79</sup> and over 260,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq.<sup>80</sup>

While nearly 11.1 million people in Syria need humanitarian assistance, it is extremely difficult;<sup>81</sup> healthcare centers and hospitals, schools, utilities, and water and sanitation systems have been destroyed or damaged. Several historical landmarks and once-busy market places have been reduced to rubble, and war has severed the social and business ties found within communities.<sup>82</sup> This lack of resources and continued conflict has created economic despair. Many families have been strained in their ability to secure basic food rations and household items. Consequently, this economic impact continues to drive serious child protection concerns, such as negative impacts on education. Many parents are forced to remove their children from school due to their inability to pay fees, as well as teachers not receiving their salaries.<sup>83</sup> While some children can go to schools in displacement camps, they must walk miles and miles to attend.<sup>84</sup> Many girls who drop out of school are severely impacted by child marriage.<sup>85</sup>

## ***Yemen***

Yemen, located at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula, remains the world's worst humanitarian crisis.<sup>86</sup> Eight years of war have driven more than 4 million people from their homes and resulted in 20.7 million people in dire need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>87</sup> The violence broke out

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> "Yemen Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News: USA FOR UNHCR." Yemen Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News . United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Accessed July 3, 2022. <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

in late March of 2015, and Yemen, an already poor country in the Middle East, has continued to deteriorate. Half of Yemen's health facilities are shuttered up or destroyed.<sup>88</sup> Years of economic decline and institutional collapse have pushed the country to the brink of a large-scale famine, with nearly 50,000 people living in famine-like conditions.<sup>89</sup> In addition, 5 million more are facing significant risk of going hungry as of 2022.<sup>90</sup> For Yemen refugees, they are not internally displaced, but rather forced to migrate to other nations. The largest acceptors of Yemeni refugees have been the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom.<sup>91</sup> The most successful have been the refugees in Jordan and in Canada.<sup>92</sup>

Internally-displaced Yemenis are most at risk of food insecurity, with more than 2.6 million of the 4 million currently facing life-threatening food shortages.<sup>93</sup> Studies have shown that displaced families are four times more at risk of falling into famine than the rest of the Yemeni population.<sup>94</sup> This situation has been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and outbreaks of preventable diseases, such as cholera, diphtheria, and measles. However, despite being in conflict, Yemen hosts 137,000 refugees and asylum seekers from Somalia and Ethiopia, making it the world's second largest host of Somali refugees and a hub for refugees around the world.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> "Refugees from Yemen: Figures and Development." Worlddata.info. Accessed August 30, 2022.

<https://www.worlddata.info/asia/yemen/asylum.php#:~:text=The%20most%20destination%20countries%20hereof,new%20applications%20have%20been%20accepted.>

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> "Yemen Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News: USA FOR UNHCR." Yemen Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News . United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Accessed July 3, 2022.

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

## Past Actions

Though the concept of a refugee is relatively new on the global stage, since the creation of the UNHCR, the UN agency assigned to help refugees, tireless efforts to help refugees displaced by violence, conflict, and more have been undergone. The UNHCR now has a staff of nearly 20,000 individuals, which are dispersed throughout the world but concentrated heavily in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Although every country and region is different in terms of population and conflict, all UN workers are trained to protect and assist refugees, those internally displaced, and stateless people.

### *Syria*

The nation of Syria and its refugee crisis is one of the best examples of the type of work that the UNHCR does for refugees and vulnerable individuals on a standard basis. When refugees relocate to different countries, the UN has been instrumental in connecting them with job resources and employment opportunities while also ensuring that their basic needs are met through the provision of medicine, stoves and fuel for heating, thermal blankets and winter clothing, and direct cash for food and medicine.<sup>96</sup> In addition, for the individuals who have been displaced but remain in Syria, the UNHCR has done its best to locate people in the most dire of situations and safely provide shelter for kids, food items, hygiene products, and psychosocial support, with a specific emphasis on young children.<sup>97</sup>

### *Afghanistan*

The nation of Afghanistan is also experiencing a humanitarian and displacement crisis. In the face of insecurity and economic challenges, which have been widespread for several years, the UNHCR has remained committed to taking a vigilant approach to aid. The UN body has utilized its emergency support, which relies on donations and aid from UN nations, to assist Afghans with life-saving

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<sup>96</sup> "UNHCR - Syria Emergency," UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency, 2022), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/syria-emergency.html%255C>.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

shelter, insulation for homes, water and health facilities, and core relief items.<sup>98</sup> Thousands of household items like blankets and clothing are shipped to Afghanistan and the neighboring countries,<sup>99</sup> which have absorbed a large number of refugees, but the UNHCR continues to plead with the world to ramp up and contribute more to its humanitarian efforts.

## ***Iraq***

Similarly to Syria and Afghanistan, the UNHCR has provided humanitarian support to Iraqi refugees, but in addition, one of the most important pieces of action that the UNHCR has taken is to obtain civil documentation for the refugees.<sup>100</sup> An identity or civil document can mean the difference between accessing healthcare or becoming ill, going to school or remaining illiterate, and for any refugee who has entered the country, it can mean the difference between remaining safe in Iraq or being deported to his or her home country, where violence continues to terrorize lives.<sup>101</sup> Many countries have seen a strategic advantage in helping the nation of Iraq, but Japan, in particular, has been instrumental in supporting the displaced people and refugees. With Japan's continued monetary support, the UNHCR now has the tools and resources to further offer its registration services to refugees and to be able to help them have their rights fully recognized and fulfilled.<sup>102</sup> Not to mention, the UNHCR can provide free legal assistance to refugees, which is especially important if individuals want to file cases with law enforcement and judicial authorities.

## ***The Global Compact on Refugees***

In December of 2018, the UN passed the Global Compact on Refugees, a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, recognizing that a sustainable solution to refugee

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<sup>98</sup> "Afghanistan Emergency," UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency, 2022), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/afghanistan-emergency.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Firas Al-Khateeb, "UNHCR Is Grateful for Government of Japan's Renewed Commitment to Support Thousands of Displaced Persons, Returnees, and Syrian Refugees in Iraq in Iraq," United Nations Iraq (United Nations, May 18, 2022), <https://iraq.un.org/en/182431-unhcr-grateful-government-japans-renewed-commitment-support-thousands-displaced-persons>.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



situations cannot be achieved without international cooperation.<sup>103</sup> The compact has four main parts:<sup>104</sup>

1. An introduction that outlines the background and objectives of the Global Compact
2. The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework: adopted by all 193 member states of the United Nations, it includes historic and wide-ranging commitments to respect the human rights of refugees and migrants
3. Plan of action:
  - a. Arrangements to share burdens and responsibilities through a global refugee forum
  - b. National and regional arrangements for specific situations
  - c. Tools for funding, partnerships, and data sharing
  - d. Highlighting areas in need of support and what can be done to provide aid
4. Arrangements for review and follow-up (every 4 years)

Although the Global Compact on Refugees is not legally binding, the hope is that it will broaden the base of support available to refugees and the communities that host them.

### ***Refugee Camps***

Refugee camps are often where refugees live when they flee their home countries and move to a neighboring host country.<sup>105</sup> Each camp is often staffed with UN peacekeepers who are responsible for protecting the surroundings and the individuals that seek safety within the confines. When refugees do not have access to basic necessities such as food, water, and healthcare, the UN will

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<sup>103</sup> "The Global Compact on Refugees," UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency, 2022), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> "Refugees," United Nations (United Nations, 2022), <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/refugees#:~:text=UN%20peacekeepers%20are%20often%20there,United%20Nations%20humanitarian%20action%20machinery>.

provide support through the United Nations humanitarian machinery.<sup>106</sup> Specifically the inter-agency standing committee (IASC) brings together all major humanitarian agencies and connects with humanitarian NGOs for a coordinated approach and action. However, at the end of the day, the UNHCR is the primary organ responsible for protecting refugees and the internally displaced, along with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and emergency organizations such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies.<sup>107</sup>

### ***Maintaining International Peace***

While the UN uses its agencies and resources to directly help refugees, it must also address why these refugee crises are occurring in the first place. For many refugees, they had no choice but to flee their home countries in order to ensure their safety and well-being. There are so many conflicts that the UN tries to address with regard to the Middle East, but the following are just some examples of the methods it utilizes to uphold international peace, safety, and security:<sup>108</sup>

1. UN Bodies

- a. The Security Council: calls upon the disputing parties to settle it by peaceful means and recommends methods of adjustment or terms of settlement
- b. The General Assembly: provides a forum for Member States to express their views to the entire membership and find consensus on difficult issues

2. Peacekeeping: facilitates political processes, protects civilians, assists in disarmament, protects and promotes human rights, and restores the rule of law<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> "Maintain International Peace and Security," United Nations (United Nations, 2022), <https://www.un.org/en/our-work/maintain-international-peace-and-security>.

<sup>109</sup> "Advancing Political Solutions to Conflict," United Nations Peacekeeping. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/advancing-political-solutions-to-conflict>; "Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration," United Nations Peacekeeping. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>; "Promoting Human Rights," United Nations Peacekeeping. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/promoting-human-rights>; "Building Rule of Law and Security Institutions," United Nations Peacekeeping. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/building-rule-of-law-and-security-institutions>.

3. Peacebuilding: Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Fund and the Peacebuilding Support Office<sup>110</sup>
4. Terrorism: The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2016); Eighteen universal instruments against international terrorism have been elaborated within the framework of the United Nations
5. Disarmament: the pursuit of the abolition of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, as well as the regulation of conventional weapons

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<sup>110</sup> "United Nations Peacebuilding Commission," United Nations Peacebuilding. <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/commission>.; "The United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund," United Nations Peacebuilding. <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/fund>.

## Possible Solutions

### ***Repatriation***

Most refugees leave their home countries without a choice but would love nothing more than to return home to their place of origin. The UNHCR and larger UN organizations can assist with return, but in order to even start the process, it is absolutely crucial for conditions to be safe and secure. It is not easy for countries to rebuild and repair infrastructure and to restore safe and legal systems of governance after extended periods of violence and conflict, but the UN and other nations can help incentivize and guide nations down the right path.

One of the ways to ensure that armed conflict has ceased in the areas of return is to require a peace agreement from the origin country before any one is allowed to return or repatriate.<sup>111</sup> Then, once individuals do return, it could be beneficial for nations to offer assurances of social, physical, and legal protection to their people to ease the process of reintegrating back into their communities.<sup>112</sup> It might also be helpful to think about the possibility of group organizations and outreach, where individuals can connect with people who have similar stories and that can help them come to terms with the changes involving their transition back home.

### ***Resettlement***

Resettlement is the organized movement of refugees from refugee camps and other temporary situations to a third country where they can live permanently.<sup>113</sup> In many instances, resettlement may be the only way to guarantee the protection of a refugee who is at risk of a forcible return or who faces serious issues and danger in the country where they sought asylum. In the past, the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom have been popular places for the resettlement of refugees.

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<sup>111</sup> "Refugee Settlement." Roads to Refuge. State of New South Wales. Accessed June 29, 2022. <https://www.roads-to-refuge.com.au/settlement/settlement-global-response.html#repatriation>.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

Any nation that signed and ratified the UN Refugee Convention is obliged to grant the same human rights and assistance to refugees that they grant their own citizens, which is why resettlement can seem like a beneficial option for many.<sup>114</sup> However, gaining access to offshore resettlement programs in developed countries is difficult for refugees, and the implementation of these programs is in desperate need of greater oversight.

## ***Integration***

For many refugees, life moves so quickly and abruptly due to the inability to live safely in their home country that they do not have the time or resources to organize a sufficient plan for their future. As a result, many refugees are unable to access refugee camps and, instead, are forced to make a permanent home for themselves in another country, as long as it comes with the opportunity to find shelter, safety, and employment.<sup>115</sup>

Local integration is when refugees seek to attain status similar to those enjoyed by the citizens of the country in which they have sought refuge.<sup>116</sup> However, many struggle to gain citizenship, as there are challenges and tensions that not only refugees but the receiving communities face, since refugees often end up competing with locals for scarce resources or jobs. In Europe, many countries have strict immigration laws, where governments will announce that if an individual is not a citizen of a European Union country and is planning to stay for longer than 6 months, they must have a residency permit.<sup>117</sup> There are also rules, often times, where people will have to wait up to years before they can even fill out the application process. In addition, immigrants and refugees will need to submit a large number of documents, including proof of income and plans for accommodation, but most refugees lose their documents along the journey or do not have the exact answers the authorities are looking for when they arrive in a new place.<sup>118</sup> There are definitely countries that make it easier to receive citizenship, but many countries are still not very flexible with their rules. However, to improve the situation, steps must be taken to support all parties involved, for if a steady

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Michael J Boyle, "5 Of the Hardest Countries for Obtaining Citizenship," Investopedia (Dotdash Meredith, April 20, 2022), <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/personal-finance/121114/5-hardest-countries-getting-citizenship.asp>.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

and stable life can be built, integration can be a successful course of action for refugees in need of assistance.<sup>119</sup>

Finally, at the end of the day, the rights of refugees are part of a larger human rights crisis, and there are many ways that the international community can take a greater part in addressing the refugee crisis:

1. Open up safe routes to sanctuary<sup>120</sup>
  - a. Allow people to reunite with relatives
  - b. Provide cheap visas so people can afford to relocate
2. Prioritize human rights over financial and political entities
  - a. Offer search and rescue operations on the borders
  - b. Increase protection and support for refugee camps
3. Investigate and prosecute instances of trafficking and discrimination<sup>121</sup>
4. Change the conversation around refugees to demonstrate that refugees are not responsible for economic and social problems
5. Promote and spread the word about the crisis<sup>122</sup>
  - a. Organize ways in which individuals can get involved (donations, volunteering, fundraising, etc.)
  - b. Share refugee stories and keep people informed on the issues
6. Work together with other nations<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> "Refugee Settlement." Roads to Refuge. State of New South Wales.

<sup>120</sup> "8 Ways to Solve the World Refugee Crisis," Amnesty International (Amnesty International, June 18, 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2015/10/eight-solutions-world-refugee-crisis/>.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Paul Ireland, "Four Steps towards Ending the Refugee Crisis," NRC (Norwegian Refugee Council, June 29, 2021), <https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2021/three-steps-towards-ending-the-refugee-crisis/>.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.



- a. Currently, only a small number of countries take responsibility for most of the world's refugees
  - b. Middle-to-high-income countries must do their part by increasing the number of refugees allowed through their borders
- 7. Increase support for humanitarian appeals through the expansion of funding mechanisms
  - 8. Tackle the root causes of the crisis by addressing issues of violence, corruption, war, etc.
  - 9. Guarantee **Asylum as a Human Right**<sup>124</sup>

Everyone deserves to have a place to call home. As refugees escape situations of persecution and danger, they are forced to rebuild their lives in new places. This can be extremely scary and uncertain times for individuals, which is why it is crucial for you as delegates, and your nations, to find a way to uphold the rights of refugees and guarantee all individuals' safety and security on their path to a greater future.

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<sup>124</sup> "8 Ways to Solve the World Refugee Crisis," Amnesty International.

## Bloc Positions

### *Middle East and North Africa*

Across the Middle East, there are about 365,000 stateless people, over 12 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and over 3 million refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>125</sup> Consequently, the Middle East is a place where the refugee crisis is most pertinent. For instance, in Turkey, there are over 3.6 million refugees from Syria, Iraq, and other nationalities, which make up the largest refugee population ever hosted by one country.<sup>126</sup> In addition, Jordan has been housing refugees from Palenstine, Iraq and Syria for decades.<sup>127</sup> However, it is not only Middle Eastern countries that house refugees. For more than a decade, North African countries have sheltered millions of Syrians.<sup>128</sup> Consequently, these countries have been at the forefront of the large-scale conflict and misfortune of the refugee countries.

For these countries, inclusion is the best solution for solving this crisis. Inclusion means refugees will have a better chance of survival through access to schools, health care and other social services.<sup>129</sup> With more schools, classrooms, teachers, clinics, doctors, and nurses within the health sector, countries will be able to help their own as well as accommodate other refugees.<sup>130</sup> These services are best provided by international communities, NGOs, and international financial institutions (IFIs). In order for these services to work, countries must see this aid as a “refugee dividend”—rethinking humanitarian aid as urban water and sanitation infrastructure (WASH) investments.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Moneer, Zeina, Chris Kubecka, and Neeshad Shafi. “Addressing the Refugee Crisis.” Middle East Institute, August 16, 2022. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/addressing-refugee-crisis#:~:text=The%20situation%20in%20Syria%20remains,the%20country%20remains%20in%20ruins>.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Moneer, Zeina, Chris Kubecka, and Neeshad Shafi. “Addressing the Refugee Crisis.” Middle East Institute, August 16, 2022. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/addressing-refugee-crisis#:~:text=The%20situation%20in%20Syria%20remains,the%20country%20remains%20in%20ruins>.

<sup>128</sup> Connor, Phillip. “Most Displaced Syrians Are in the Middle East, and about a Million Are in Europe.” Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, September 27, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/29/where-displaced-syrians-have-resettled/>.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

## ***Europe***

Since the end of 2016, nearly 5.2 million refugees and migrants have reached European shores, undertaking treacherous journeys from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries torn apart by war and persecution.<sup>132</sup> For many, this journey was their last, as thousands of people have lost their lives or homes missing since 2015, and an increasing number of women and unaccompanied children continue to take perilous journeys in search of safety. In 2021, more than 114,000 people risked their lives trying to reach Europe by sea; over 3,200 of them are dead or missing.<sup>133</sup>

Thus, Europe must act. Europe consists of many countries that are among the wealthiest in the world and has a unique opportunity to significantly support and help the lives of less fortunate refugees. The European Union (EU) plays a leading role in protecting refugees in Europe and abroad, including by supporting the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, but it has the capacity to do more.<sup>134</sup> In addition, implementing effective border and migration controls and helping vulnerable people avoid hazardous journeys are legitimate goals if safe and orderly alternatives are provided to people seeking international protection.<sup>135</sup> However, EU governments must also ensure that Europe's response to this crisis matches its legal responsibilities and stated values.<sup>136</sup> In a world characterized by rising displacement, conflict, and human rights abuse, EU leadership is more important than ever.

## ***North America***

While most Middle Eastern refugees are seeking asylum in Europe and other parts of the Middle East, North American countries, specifically the United States and Canada, have a legal and moral duty to help those displaced. Currently, there are U.S. humanitarian assistance efforts occurring, channeled through non-governmental organizations on the ground, which supports lifesaving

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<sup>132</sup> "Refugee Crisis in Europe: Aid, Statistics and News: USA FOR UNHCR." Refugee Crisis in Europe: Aid, Statistics and News | USA for UNHCR. Accessed August 21, 2022. <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/refugee-crisis-in-europe/>.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> "What Can the European Union Do to Better Protect Refugees?," UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency), accessed August 8, 2022, [https://www.unhcr.org/europeanunion/wp-content/uploads/sites/70/2020/01/UNHCR-EU\\_refugees-ENG-V2-screen.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/europeanunion/wp-content/uploads/sites/70/2020/01/UNHCR-EU_refugees-ENG-V2-screen.pdf).

<sup>135</sup> "Europe's Refugee Crisis." Human Rights Watch, September 9, 2016. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/11/16/europes-refugee-crisis/agenda-action>.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

programs and helps meet the basic needs of displaced persons, including food, water, shelter, health care and education.<sup>137</sup> However, more can be done.

The United States must step up and continue to rebuild and expand the U.S. refugee admissions program.<sup>138</sup> For instance, resettlement is a critical and necessary long-term solution in aiding the refugee crisis. In addition, it is necessary that the United States expands its legal aid for climate refugees, such as scholarship programs and access to work permits.<sup>139</sup> These legal pathways can offer opportunities for refugees to be able to leave their homes and succeed through access to education and earning a livelihood.<sup>140</sup>

All in all, the living conditions many refugees have experienced are unacceptable as they violate the natural rights of human life, and the journey refugees take in search of safety and a new life are extremely difficult and perilous.<sup>141</sup> Until the United States starts enacting change, which can address the multiple obstacles refugees face and provide necessary resources, refugees will continue to risk their lives in order to seek safety in the United States.

## ***Asia***

While Asia is a region of rapid growth, entrepreneurial innovation, and wealth, countries located in this region have not done enough to help solve the Middle East refugee crisis.<sup>142</sup> Asian countries currently have few policies on refugees and limited ability to build refugee capacity, both of which are necessary to transform the region into a place that can host and assist refugees.<sup>143</sup> Therefore, as Asian countries continue to grow economically and politically, it is necessary that national and regional efforts expand so they can become a partner and place of safety for refugees.

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<sup>137</sup> Rosenhauer, Joan, and Dan Corrou. "America Has a Duty to Help Middle Eastern Refugees. Withdrawing from Afghanistan Didn't Change That." *America Magazine*, February 3, 2022. <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2022/02/03/jrs-middle-east-refugees-belarus-242256>.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Moon, Katharine H.S. "Why Is Asia Mia on Refugees?" *Brookings*. Brookings, March 9, 2022. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/09/22/why-is-asia-mia-on-refugees/>.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

## Glossary

**Asylum:** the protection granted by a nation to someone who has left their native country as a political refugee.

**Asylum seekers:** a person who has left their home country as a political refugee and is seeking asylum in another.

**Civil document:** items such as a birth certificate, marriage and divorce certificates, and police certificates

**Disarmament:** the reduction of armed forces and armaments, as to a limitation set by treaty.

**Displacement:** the moving of something or someone from its place or position.

**Displaced Person:** a person who is forced to leave their home country because of war, persecution, or natural disaster; a refugee.

**Humanitarian:** a person promoting human welfare and social reform

**Integration:** the practice of uniting people from different races in an attempt to give people equal rights racial integration

**Inter-Agency Standing Committee:** the longest-standing and highest-level humanitarian coordination forum of the United Nations system

**Refugee:** a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

**Refugee camps:** a temporary accommodation for people who have been forced to flee their home because of violence and persecution

**Relocation:** the action of moving to a new place and establishing one's home or business there

**Repatriation:** the return of someone to their own country

**Resettlement:** the settlement of people in a different place

**Sanctuary:** a place of refuge or safety

**Safe haven:** temporary refuge given to a persecuted person or group

**Xenophobia:** dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries

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## TOPIC B: CLIMATE REFUGEES

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### Statement of the Problem

As climate change increases globally, living conditions are becoming more precarious around the world. Climate change refers to extreme weather, rising sea levels, damaged ecosystems, environmental changes, and anything that is impacting people's lives with the potential to cause massive upheaval on a global scale.

According to the UNHCR, an annual average of 21.5 million people have been forcibly displaced by weather-related events, such as floods, storms, wildfires, and extreme temperatures, since 2008.<sup>144</sup> In addition, the UNHCR pointed out that while sudden disasters are a cause of climate refugees, "climate change is a complex cause of food and water shortages, as well as difficulties in accessing natural resources."<sup>145</sup> The number of displaced people due to climate disasters or "climate refugees" is expected to surge in the upcoming decades. The Ecosystem Threat Register (ETR) released in September 2018 by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), an Australian international think tank, predicts that at least 1.2 billion could be displaced globally by 2050 due to climate change and natural disasters.<sup>146</sup> Thus, it is necessary that climate refugees become a primary concern when discussing climate change and the solutions needed across the world.

#### ***Who are climate refugees?***

The term "climate refuge" has been used since 1985, when UN Environment Programme (UNEP) expert Essam El-Hinnawi defined climate, or environmental, refugees as people who have been "forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of marked

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<sup>144</sup> Zurich. "There Could Be 1.2 Billion Climate Refugees by 2050. Here's What You Need to Know." Zurich.com, May 26, 2022. <https://www.zurich.com/en/media/magazine/2022/there-could-be-1-2-billion-climate-refugees-by-2050-here-s-what-you-need-to-know>

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ida, Tetsuji. "Climate Refugees – the World's Forgotten Victims." World Economic Forum, June 18, 2021. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/climate-refugees-the-world-s-forgotten-victims/>.

environmental disruption.”<sup>147</sup> It was coined to describe the increasing large-scale migration and cross-border mass movement of people that were partly caused by such weather-related disasters.<sup>148</sup> However, the extent of this definition still causes confusion around the world.

In November of 2020, when two category 4 hurricanes hit Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, people poured across the border into Mexico and headed towards the U.S. as torrential rains and landslides destroyed their homes, livelihoods, and access to clean water.<sup>149</sup> In this case, the cause and effect of climate change and climate refugees is quite clear. It is easy to see how unlivable conditions in one’s home country caused by extreme weather can push people to cross borders as climate refugees. But, according to Amar Rahman, Global Head of Climate Change Resilience Services at Zurich Insurance Group, the definition should apply to a broader range of people, namely “anyone who has been impacted by disruption in their society that could somehow directly or indirectly be related to short- or long-term change in the environment.”<sup>150</sup> Consequently, this means acknowledging that climate change does not solely pose a threat by causing immediate harm to people and infrastructure, but also has a long-term danger that can slowly destabilize societies and economies, making them more vulnerable to other threats.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Zurich. “There Could Be 1.2 Billion Climate Refugees by 2050. Here’s What You Need to Know.” Zurich.com, May 26, 2022. <https://www.zurich.com/en/media/magazine/2022/there-could-be-1-2-billion-climate-refugees-by-2050-here-s-what-you-need-to-know>

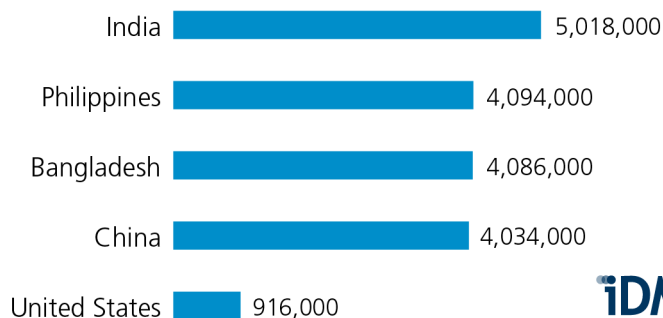
<sup>148</sup> National Geographic. “Environmental Refugee.” National Geographic Society. Accessed August 20, 2022. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/environmental-refugee>.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

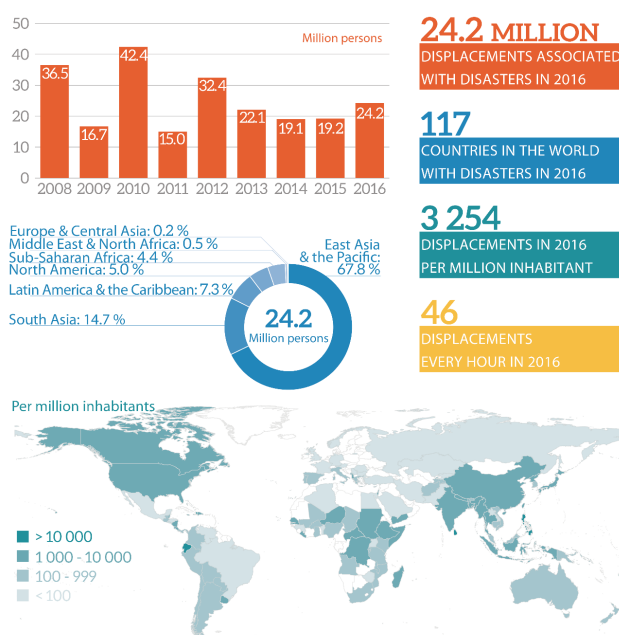
<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

## Five countries with the most new displacements by disasters in 2019

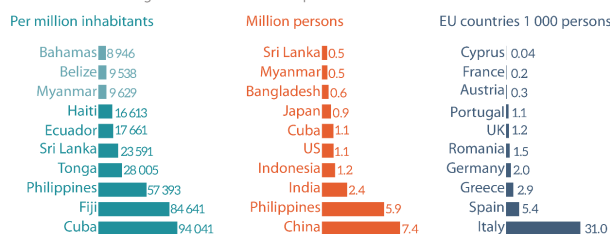


**IDMC** Internal displacement monitoring centre

## Internal displacement of persons due to natural disasters



## Countries with the highest number of new displacements



**Internally displaced persons (IDPs):** persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of natural disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border. Natural disasters refers for instance to earthquake, hurricane, typhoon, flood, volcanic eruption, tsunami, tornado, landslide, extreme temperature, etc.

Figures 3 and 4: Summary data on internally displaced persons<sup>152</sup>

<sup>152</sup> "Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020," IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020), <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>.

## ***Reasons for Climate Refugees***

### **Sea Level Rise**

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that sea levels will rise to a total of 0.18 to 0.6 meters (7 inches to 2 feet) between 1990 and 2100.<sup>153</sup> Rising sea levels have already caused problems in low-lying coastal areas of the world. Over the past 30 years, the number of people living in coastal areas at high risk of rising sea levels has increased from 160 million to 260 million, 90% of whom are from poor developing countries and small island states.<sup>154</sup>

For instance, about half the population of Bangladesh lives less than 5 meters (16.5 feet) above sea level.<sup>155</sup> In 1995, Bangladesh's Bhola Island was half-submerged by rising sea levels, leaving 500,000 people homeless.<sup>156</sup> Scientists predict that 17% of Bangladesh will be submerged by 2050, and 20 million people living there will lose their homes.<sup>157</sup> The U.S. state of Louisiana loses about 65 square kilometers (25 square miles) to the sea every year.<sup>158</sup> Most of this land is eroding near the Mississippi Delta, which puts the productive fisheries around the delta at risk as the wetlands continue to submerge.<sup>159</sup> The loss of these wetland ecosystems will push fishermen to go further from shore to pursue fish. The loss of wetlands also makes damage from storms like Hurricane Katrina more likely.

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<sup>153</sup> National Geographic. "Environmental Refugee." National Geographic Society. Accessed August 20, 2022. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/environmental-refugee>.

<sup>154</sup> Zurich. "There Could Be 1.2 Billion Climate Refugees by 2050. Here's What You Need to Know." Zurich.com, May 26, 2022. <https://www.zurich.com/en/media/magazine/2022/there-could-be-1-2-billion-climate-refugees-by-2050-here-s-what-you-need-to-know>

<sup>155</sup> National Geographic. "Environmental Refugee." National Geographic Society. Accessed August 20, 2022. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/environmental-refugee>.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

## Maldives

Maldives, an island nation in the Indian Ocean, is one of the countries most threatened by sea level rise. The Maldives rises only 2.4 meters (8 feet) above sea level at its highest point.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, the rising sea levels will create climate refugees because of changes in both economy and habitat.

Tourism supports more than 25% of the Maldivian economy.<sup>161</sup> As the islands slowly continue to sink underwater, they can support fewer tourists and tourist facilities, such as hotels. Fishing is also the nation's second-largest industry, which means the environment and economy of the Maldives are threatened as sea levels rise and become less salty.<sup>162</sup> The melting of polar ice caps increases the amount of freshwater in the ocean, which results in an increased amount of freshwater in the marine environment, threatening the delicate ecosystem of coral reefs that surround the islands.<sup>163</sup> Consequently, these tampered ecosystems may not be able to support as many fish, threatening the fisheries around the Maldives, as other fish may not be able to adapt to a less-salty environment. Without income generated from tourism or fishing, many Maldivians will be forced to migrate to seek new jobs.

Lastly, the rising sea levels may sink all 1,200 islands of the Maldives, which would force all Maldivians to find new places to live.<sup>164</sup> As a result, Maldives leaders have worked with leaders in Australia, India, and Sri Lanka to plan an evacuation program should the Maldives become uninhabitable.<sup>165</sup>

## Venice

The urban area of Venice, Italy is also threatened by sea level rise. Venice is an ancient city built in a series of islands in a lagoon on the coast of the Adriatic Sea. The city has always been threatened by storms and storm surges. Instead of main streets, Venice consists of canals and small waterways. Thus, as the tides come in, entire town squares are put under several centimeters of water. In the

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.



past century, flooding has become more frequent. In 1900, the city's main *piazza* was underwater seven times.<sup>166</sup> In 1996, it flooded 99 times.<sup>167</sup>

Like the Maldives, Venice depends on tourism to support its economy. Consequently, as the city floods more often, fewer tourists will visit, and tourism facilities will be harder to maintain. Flooding and mold will threaten popular tourist sites, such as St. Mark's Basilica and the Doge's Palace. Venetians may be forced to migrate as their city and economy sink. Many other coastal cities throughout the world are in low-lying areas vulnerable to sea level rise: Manhattan, New York; London, England; Shanghai, China; Hamburg, Germany; Bangkok, Thailand; Jakarta, Indonesia; Mumbai, India; Manila, Philippines; and Buenos Aires, Argentina.<sup>168</sup>

## ***Drought***

Drought is another climate change effect that forces climate refugees inland. When people are unable to grow crops on the land where they live, they are forced to move somewhere else to survive. For example, the Gobi Desert in China expands more than 3,600 square kilometers (1,390 square miles) every year.<sup>169</sup> Farmers and merchants in the area surrounding the Gobi migrate to China's crowded urban areas as grasslands are overtaken by desert.<sup>170</sup>

In addition to China, Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya each lose more than 1,000 square kilometers (386 square miles) of productive land every year to desertification.<sup>171</sup> These residents on the edge of the Sahara Desert may move to cities in the Maghreb, a region of northwest Africa. Others move to more developed countries of Europe.<sup>172</sup>

Residents near the Horn of Africa are also especially vulnerable to drought and desertification. Most rural residents in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea engage in subsistence agriculture.<sup>173</sup> Subsistence

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

agriculture means the farmers produce enough crops for themselves, their families, and communities; they do not sell their produce on the national or international markets.<sup>174</sup>

Unfortunately, years of severe drought have prevented crops from growing, which also prevents livestock from being raised. This is extremely detrimental to subsistence farmers, as they depend on their crops to feed their livestock.

Thousands of Somalis and Ethiopians, threatened by starvation and poverty, have already fled to refugee camps in Kenya. Camps that were designed to provide temporary shelter for 90,000 people are now home to twice that number.<sup>175</sup>

## ***Conflict***

The correlation between conflict and climate crisis has also resulted in an increase of climate refugees. This domino effect can be felt in Syria, where the desertification of formerly fertile farming land between 2006 and 2010 meant crop yields were cut. This resulted in 800,000 people losing their income and 85% of the country's livestock dying.<sup>176</sup> As people lost their livelihoods, food prices soared, and 1.5 million rural workers moved to the city to find jobs.<sup>177</sup> Those left behind to face poverty become easy targets for recruiters from the Islamic State.

Though it would be reductive to attribute the cause of the Syrian Civil War entirely to environmental causes, climate change related problems exacerbated tensions that ultimately contributed to the Arab Spring and increasingly strict restrictions from the Syrian government.<sup>178</sup> As a result, this conflict fueled the world's worst refugee crises in decades, with around 6.6 million Syrians, roughly a quarter of the population, forced to flee their country.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Zurich. "There Could Be 1.2 Billion Climate Refugees by 2050. Here's What You Need to Know." Zurich.com, May 26, 2022. <https://www.zurich.com/en/media/magazine/2022/there-could-be-1-2-billion-climate-refugees-by-2050-here-s-what-you-need-to-know>

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

Unfortunately, the experience in Syria is not unusual, as there is a strong correlation between countries most vulnerable to climate change and those experiencing conflict or violence. According to the UNHCR's report *Global Trends in Forced Displacement 2020*, 95 percent of all conflict displacements in 2020 occurred in countries vulnerable or highly vulnerable to climate change.<sup>180</sup>

### ***Climate Refugee Effort***

While climate refugees continue to increase, the international government has begun to recognize climate migration as an issue that needs to be tackled. In November 2021, U.S. President Joe Biden released the *Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration*. This White House report represents the first time the U.S. Government has officially recognized a link between climate change and migration.<sup>181</sup> In addition, the report recognizes that climate migration can have significant implications for international security, instability, conflict, and geopolitics.<sup>182</sup> In addition, it calls for the development of strategies that would allow the humane, safe, and proactive management of climate migration flows.<sup>183</sup> All in all, while efforts to help climate refugees are in motion, there is still much work to be done.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

## History of the Problem

The term “climate refugees” is relatively new to the international community. In the 1970s, Lester Brown, an environmentalist activist, coined the term “environmental migrant” to describe a broad category of people choosing or being forced to migrate due to environmental factors.<sup>184</sup> However, the UN was initially reluctant to adopt the term into their vocabulary, as it lacks ground in international refugee law and could potentially deter from the mission of the UNHCR. However, as climate change increased as a contentious topic in the media and people started to worry about the effects of temperature changes on their way of life and habitats, the UN was forced to address the rising number of people displaced due to environmental factors.

Recall, it was in 1985 that Essam El-Hinnawi of the UNEP defined “environmental refugees” as “those people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption... by ‘environmental disruption’ in this definition is meant any physical, chemical, and/or biological changes in the ecosystem that render it temporarily or permanently, unsuitable to support human life.”<sup>185</sup> Individuals affected started to receive greater recognition and support for their difficulties. However, even though conversations linking climate change and human migration surfaced and expanded into the 1990s, the momentum did not last.

In 1990, the IPCC published its First Assessment Report with scientific reports on the causes and effects of climate change, warning the international community of potential environmental and social impacts.<sup>186</sup> In that report, the IPCC warned that “the greatest single impact of climate change could be on human migration” due to displacement caused by environmental catastrophes such as severe droughts and shoreline erosion. Then, in 1992, the International Organization for Migration and the Refugee Policy Group published a report titled “Migration and Environment” warning that the number of global migrants “could rise substantially as larger areas of the earth become uninhabitable as a result of climate change.”<sup>187</sup> There was concrete evidence that outlined the effects of climate change on migration and the rising refugee crisis in countries around the world, but

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<sup>184</sup> “Climate Refugees,” Othering & Belonging Institute (University of California, Berkeley), accessed July 19, 2022, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/climate-refugees-7>.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

continued disagreements over what defined a “climate refugee” and their status within the larger refugee population left many questions.

### ***The Great Climate Migration***

Today, 1% of the world lives in an unlivable hot zone, but by 2070, that number is estimated to increase to 19%.<sup>188</sup> For most of human history, people lived with a very narrow range of temperatures and they were able to support themselves due to the abundant food production as provided by the land. However, the planet could see a greater temperature increase in the next 50 years than it did in the last 6,000 years combined.<sup>189</sup> As a result, the land where humans have previously thrived for thousands of years will soon be susceptible to temperatures so high that people will be sent into a frenzy of heat, hunger, and desperation.

This leaves residents with no choice but to flee. In Southeast Asia, where increasingly unpredictable monsoon rainfall and drought have made farming more difficult, [the World Bank points to](#) more than eight million people who have moved toward the Middle East, Europe and North America.<sup>190</sup> In the African Sahel, millions of rural people have been streaming toward the coasts and the cities amid drought and widespread crop failures.<sup>191</sup> In Mexico and Central America, drought and food insecurity have driven rural residents out of the countryside. Migrants move for many reasons, but nearly 5% of all refugees are driven from their homes primarily due to climate and environmental concerns.<sup>192</sup> Millions seek relief in neighboring cities and countries, and the overwhelming urbanization affects everyone.

### ***Sub-Saharan Africa***

Sub-Saharan Africa has historically contributed the least to global warming, yet the region has the most to lose when it comes to climate change. The Lake Victoria Basin, home to Kenya, Tanzania,

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<sup>188</sup> Abrahm Lustgarten, “The Great Climate Migration,” New York Times (The New York Times, July 23, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html>.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> “Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration,” World Bank, 19 March 2018. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2018/03/19/groundswell---preparing-for-internal-climate-migration>.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

Rwanga, Uganda, and Burundi, has a long and rich history of trade and livelihood diversification. The tropical freshwater lake is a part of the social fabric of the people, but due to rising temperatures and an increasing sea level, the area has been a victim of prolonged drought periods and widespread flooding.<sup>193</sup> This change in the environment affects agriculture, food production systems, and water resources. To counteract the negative effects, thousands of people have fled their homes and flocked to nearby cities, but the urban areas are becoming overcrowded and stricken with disease, poverty, and crime. By 2050, it is estimated that up to 38.5 million people could be compelled to move away from the basin countries due to climate factors.<sup>194</sup>

In addition, West Africa is notorious for being one of the most mobile regions in the world, but due to the pressures of climate change, citizens of Nigeria and Senegal have been forced to flee inland to avoid the dangers of coastal flooding.<sup>195</sup> In some instances, their entire homes have been flooded with water and debris, and for many, their entire livestock, the food they depend upon to support themselves and their families, has washed away in one large, unpredictable storm. It is estimated that by 2050, the West African countries could see up to 32 million people moving within their own countries due to climate factors.<sup>196</sup> For many of the displaced individuals, they will choose to partake in international migration and relocate to Europe or the United States.<sup>197</sup> Norway and Switzerland have become popular destinations for their student programs and resettlement packages, and thousands of individuals have been granted access to the United States due to family ties or through diversity visa programs.<sup>198</sup>

## ***South Asia***

For South Asia, climate change poses a deadly and terrifying humanitarian crisis, as the intense heat waves bring further uncertainty to a region of the world that is already politically unstable. Two of the areas most affected are India and Pakistan, where the highest temperatures are unprecedented.

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<sup>193</sup> "Climate Migration in Africa: How to Turn The Tide," World Bank (World Bank Group, January 5, 2022), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/publication/climate-migration-in-africa-how-to-turn-the-tide>.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> "At Least a Million Sub-Saharan Africans Moved to Europe Since 2010," Pew Research (Pew Research Center, May 31, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/03/22/at-least-a-million-sub-saharan-africans-moved-to-europe-since-2010/>.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

Temperatures in major cities have reached nearly 120 degrees Fahrenheit (50 degrees Celsius), and there have been months on end without an inch of rainfall.<sup>199</sup> The dangerous temperatures have created extreme catastrophes in these highly populated areas. People have been unable to live in their homes, work during the day, or receive access to a healthy supply of water. Electricity has become scarce, with the number of air-conditioners and refrigerators slowly dwindling.<sup>200</sup> In addition, temperatures directly affect the environment. The Pakistan meteorological department reported that the heat has impacted agriculture, human and animal health, and has triggered the melting of ice and snow in Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The heatwave has also resulted in India's yield of wheat dropping by as much as 50% in some regions.<sup>201</sup>

Unfortunately, India and Pakistan are not the only ones affected as a result of climate change. A changing climate not only brings higher temperatures but a longer monsoon season and increased droughts. Over 750 million people have experienced one or more climate-related disasters over the past 20 years, and the numbers are only increasing with every passing year.<sup>202</sup> Entire cities are flooded, people have been run out of their homes, overpopulated cities and their supplies have been burdened, and regional and community tensions have increased. For those people who cannot flee, climate change leads to food and water insecurity. For the ones that can escape, their journeys are often perilous, and the stress and anxiety over facing another climate-induced disaster is always at the forefront of their minds. While some migrate to North America or Europe, the majority of climate refugees will remain on the continent and in the same sub-region.<sup>203</sup> Unlike in many other cases, females are often the first ones to move, as there is a rising demand for domestic and care work in Asia and beyond that allows them to get settled, make basic income, and provide assistance for their families back on the homefront. Popular host countries include Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Myanmar.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Chris Fitzgerald, "Why Climate Change Spells Danger for South Asia," Asia Times (Asia Times, June 1, 2022), <https://asiatimes.com/2022/06/why-climate-change-spells-danger-for-south-asia/>.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> "Migration Data in South-Eastern Asia," Migration Data Portal (Global Migration Data Analysis Centre, February 15, 2022), <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/south-eastern-asia>.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

## ***Latin America***

The climate of Latin America is rapidly changing. The two great oceans that lie along the continent, the Pacific and the Atlantic, are warming and becoming more acidic while the sea level simultaneously rises to unprecedented levels. The IPCC reports that 613 extreme climate and hydro-meteorological events occurred between 2000 and 2013.<sup>205</sup> These hydro-meteorological events include typhoons and hurricanes, thunderstorms, hailstorms, tornados, blizzards, heavy snowfall, avalanches, coastal storm surges, floods, including flash floods, drought, heatwaves and cold spells. Further, in 1998, Hurricane Mitch alone affected and displaced nearly 600,000 people, mostly due to its heavy floods and landslides from heavy rains.<sup>206</sup>

For Latin America, the main problem is the rising sea level and the threat it poses to the population. The majority of the population lives on the coast, so by contaminating the freshwater and eroding the shorelines, they are at increased risk of storm surges and heavy flooding.<sup>207</sup> Many of these countries have spent years trying to address their other issues of poor governance and corruption, poverty, and unequal land distribution. Although the negative effects of climate change have historically been researched and evaluated, the people affected are often pushed to the backburner as the government and UN bodies choose to prioritize the other issues plaguing the Latin American region. Due to its proximity, most Latin American refugees will relocate to Mexico or the United States, but these immigrants are not easily integrated into the political, social, and economic lives of their new host countries.<sup>208</sup> A positive welcome is not always extended to people of Latin American descent, making resettlement difficult.<sup>209</sup>

Climate change will affect every region of the world. However, since the term “climate refugees” was first introduced, the international efforts spearheaded by the United Nations have been unable to take sufficient action; even something as simple as a rigid definition of climate refugee has remained elusive. In 2009, an International Organization for Migration report titled “Migration, Environment,

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<sup>205</sup> “Climate Change Impacts in Latin America,” WWF (World Wide Fund For Nature, 2021), [https://www.wwfca.org/en/our\\_work/climate\\_change\\_and\\_energy/climate\\_change\\_impacts\\_la/](https://www.wwfca.org/en/our_work/climate_change_and_energy/climate_change_impacts_la/).

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Christopher Sabatini and Jon Wallace, “Migration in Latin America,” Chatham House (The Royal Institute of International Affairs, March 28, 2022), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/10/migration-latin-america>.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.



and Climate Change on Assessing the Evidence” attributed neglect of the topic to “little consensus over the years among researchers about whether or not environmental migration is a distinct form of migration worthy of special study.”<sup>210</sup> Since there are many reasons why people are displaced, with a variety of economic, social, and political factors, environmental reasons have often seemed less important to governments and international leaders. In addition, due to the confusion over the term, two schools of thought have emerged to try and create a cohesive definition, often confusing people even further.

*The Maximalist School* sees the link between migration and climate crisis as causative and direct.<sup>211</sup> They support their case with findings from the scientific community that continue to generate consensus on the scale and inevitability of environmental change and migration driven by the climate crisis.

*The Minimalist School* focuses on the complex interaction between environmental and social issues, questioning any supposedly direct causal link between environmental change and migration.<sup>212</sup> Focused less on predicting the number of current and future people displaced but instead interrogated the relationship between the environment, migration, and refugeehood itself. They often neglect to use the term “climate refugee.”

The tensions between the two schools have spiraled onto the world stage. Since climate change is often intangible at the day-to-day level, it is often neglected. As a result, international climate change assessments and agreements have shifted toward a minimalist perception. After the First Assessment Report in 1990, the IPCC demonstrated reluctance to use the term “environmental refugee” altogether, changing their tone from alarming accounts and calls to action to nuanced treatments of environmental change and human migration.<sup>213</sup> Then, in 2001, the IPCC report did not even mention the link between climate change and human migration.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Climate Refugees,” Othering & Belonging Institute (University of California, Berkeley).

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

There are many reasons, both financial and political, why the international community is opposed to the term “climate refugee.” However, their inability to recognize the link between the climate crisis and displacement not only invalidates the feelings and experiences of the victims, but it also evades discussion of international accountability and possible avenues toward a legally binding framework for climate-induced displaced persons.

Climate change may be caused by natural events, but the most prevalent dangers are caused by human activities. Global warming has been exacerbated by the burning of fossil fuels and the cutting down of forests, which releases greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere that trap heat near the surface and increase the surface temperature. Environmental refugees include immigrants forced to flee because of natural disasters, such as volcanoes and tsunamis, whereas climate refugees, a subset of environmental refugees and the focus of our committee’s discussions, are those who cannot stay and live in their homes any longer due to flooding, droughts, desertification, and other effects of climate change.<sup>215</sup> Climate refugees were forced to flee due to gradual changes in the environment related to the impact of climate change, including sea level rising, extreme weather problems, or drought or water insecurity. The UNHCR says 36 million people were displaced by natural disasters in 2009, and scientists predict this number will rise to at least 50 million by 2050. Some say it could be as high as 200 million.<sup>216</sup>

Climate migration is not a new phenomenon. Since the beginning of time, individuals and their communities have migrated from place to place in response to environmental factors. However, the impact of climate change, which has become worse in the past two decades, increases the risks of extreme weather conditions, making them more unpredictable, frequent, and intense.<sup>217</sup> At the same time, rising sea levels, droughts, and drastic changes in rainfall patterns that arise as a result of global warming are destroying crops and killing livestock, thus threatening livelihoods and exacerbating food insecurity.<sup>218</sup> Many refugees are located in climate change hotspots, which means

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<sup>215</sup> Diane Boudreau et al., “Environmental Refugee,” National Geographic (National Geographic Society, May 20, 2022), <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/environmental-refugee>.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> “How Climate Change Impacts Refugees and Displaced Communities,” UN Refugees (UNHCR, September 21, 2021), <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/how-climate-change-impacts-refugees-and-displaced-communities/#What%E2%80%99s%20the%20relation%20between%20climate%20change,%20conflict%20and%20displacements>.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

that their home towns are susceptible to a heightened level of climate-induced disasters. Due to the instability and insecurity of their home environments, they are forced to flee. Historically, many individuals move to neighboring countries or nearby communities where they have cultural and ethnic ties. However, many of these situations do not end up being much safer and are also at risk for extreme weather patterns. Every day, vulnerable people are forcibly displaced due to the impacts generated by climate change. This is not something that *will* happen; this is something that has happened and is happening *now*. According to the 2015 White House national security strategy, “climate change is an urgent and growing threat to our national security, contributing to increased natural disasters, refugee flows, and conflicts over basic resources like food and water.”<sup>219</sup>

### ***The Biggest Historical Problem***

Although we refer to climate refugees, the term does not actually exist in international law. This has been a widely debated topic in the past and into the present, but despite the conversations, those who leave their countries in the context of climate change or disasters still do not qualify for protection under international law.<sup>220</sup> The 1951 Refugee Convention offers protection to those fleeing war and conflict who face persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.<sup>221</sup> Yet, there was no mention of climate or environmental concerns.

The climate crisis is reshaping our world and the fate of refugees on a global scale. In recognition of this, on February 9, 2021, U.S. President Biden signed Executive Order (E.O.) 14013, “Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration,” in which he directed the National Security Advisor to prepare a report on climate change and its impact on migration.<sup>222</sup> The link between climate change and migration is there, but now a path to a solution must be carved out.

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> “The Problem - Climate Refugees,” Climate Refugees (Climate Refugees, 2022), <https://www.climate-refugees.org/why>.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration,” ReliefWeb (OCHA, October 22, 2021), <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/report-impact-climate-change-migration-october-2021>.

## Past Actions

### *Global Response*

In 2018, the UN adopted the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. This compact addressed the global crisis of migration and vowed to protect migrants forced to flee their homes.<sup>223</sup> Within this compact, it is stated that one of the factors causing large-scale movements of people is “the adverse impacts of climate change and environmental degradation,” which includes natural disasters, desertification, land degradation, drought, and rising sea levels.<sup>224</sup> For migrants who are forced to leave their countries of origin due to environmental degradation, the compact clearly stated that governments should work to protect climate refugees in the countries of their arrival by devising planned relocation and visa options if adaptation and return is not possible in their countries of origin.<sup>225</sup>

Earlier, in March 2018, the UN Human Rights Council adopted an outcome document that discussed the issue of cross-border movement of people due to climate crises from the perspective of human rights protection. In addition, this document addressed that there are many people who do not fit the definition of “refugees” among those who are forced to migrate long distances and cross borders due to climate impacts, and that the legal system to protect their human rights is inadequate.<sup>226</sup> This is because this system does not follow the “non-refoulement principle,” which states that people who have crossed borders should not be deported or repatriated to their original countries against their will.<sup>227</sup> The document continues by urging governments to “incorporate the concept of human rights protection into the planning and implementation of climate change measures,” including preventing large-scale displacement by allowing people to live in conditions that protect their human rights, including the right to life, the right to water, and the right to food, and further promoting human rights-conscious planned relocation as a means of adapting to climate change.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Ida, Tetsuji. “Climate Refugees – the World's Forgotten Victims.” World Economic Forum, June 18, 2021. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/climate-refugees-the-world-s-forgotten-victims/>.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

A decision made by the UN Commission on Human Rights in January 2018 also attracted a great deal of attention from those concerned, as it acknowledged that “the effects of climate change,” such as rising sea levels, “pose a serious threat to the right to life of people living in countries [who are at-risk].”<sup>229</sup> Thus, this acknowledgement concluded that national courts and others must take this into account when challenging the repatriation of migrants to their countries of origin. The decision held that people facing climate change impacts that violate their right to life cannot be repatriated to their country of origin.<sup>230</sup> The decision has been hailed as “a decision that opens the door to climate change-related refugee claims.”<sup>231</sup>

Lastly, the UNHCR is continuing to step up its ambition to meet the humanitarian and protection challenges being amplified by the climate emergency, through the creation of the office of the Special Advisor on Climate Action. This office was established in January 2020 to inspire, coordinate, and support action around climate refugees in collaboration with a wide range of partners. Thus, guided by the Strategic Framework for Climate Action, UNHCR aims to better protect and strengthen the resilience of displaced and stateless people in the face of climate change, and to reduce our own environmental footprint around the world.<sup>232</sup>

### ***Government Action***

Besides global responses, government action is also crucial in solving the climate refugee crisis. In 2015, before the adoption of the Paris agreement, the president of the European Union, Jean-Claude Juncker, brought climate change and climate refugees to the limelight. In his policy speech, he stated that “climate change is one [of] the root causes of a new migration phenomenon,” and “if we do not act swiftly,” the climate refugee crisis will only worsen.<sup>233</sup> As a result of his empowering and forceful speech, discussion regarding climate refugees began in the European Parliament.

Recently, more change has occurred to resolve the climate refugee crisis. In February 2021, United States President Joe Biden issued an executive order. This order called on national security to

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

examine types of protection and support the US government can provide to climate refugees, while also discussing with relevant federal departments and agencies about creating ways to identify climate refugees who have been displaced by climate change.<sup>234</sup>

Nonetheless, while action has been taken, the international community and government are not doing enough to help promote real change in the climate refugee crisis. There are many reasons as to the lack of action regarding climate refugees. One is due to the ambiguity surrounding the definition of climate refugees as well as the lack of official data on climate refugees.<sup>235</sup> Another reason is due to the absence of international organizations and institutions, which are necessary in addressing and clarifying the issue at hand.<sup>236</sup> In addition, climate refugees are not covered underneath the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which “protects people who have a well-founded fear of persecution on racial, religious, or other grounds, nor are they eligible for protection under the Convention.”<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

## Possible Solutions

Climate refugees are not protected by international laws. They face greater political risk than refugees who flee their homes due to conflict or political oppression. Therefore, as the problem of climate refugees continues to worsen, change must occur.

### *Economic Solutions*

One way to tackle climate migration is to create more economic opportunities in societies that are threatened by environmental change. For example, in Bangladesh, cyclones have caused floods, which have increased the salinity of 53% of farmland.<sup>238</sup> This means farmers are no longer able to grow their normal crops, which poses a deadly threat to communities who rely on agriculture to survive.<sup>239</sup> However, farmers have been able to adapt to the new conditions due to support given from the Dutch research project, The Salt Solution. ICCO Cooperation Bangladesh is a lead partner within the project. ICCO Cooperation is a global, non-governmental organization, which gives people the opportunity to connect to sustainable agribusiness value chains, acquire income and produce sufficient and quality food for a balanced diet.<sup>240</sup> ICCO has trained 5,000 farmers in the coastal areas of Bangladesh to start growing salt tolerant crops.<sup>241</sup> These are natural varieties of crops that are able to grow on saline soil. This will improve their food security, as well as their income. In addition, local NGOs are teaching farmers to grow different crops, such as potatoes, carrots, cabbages, and coriander, which can better adapt to the soil. So far, 10,000 farmers have received training, resulting in two to three extra harvests per year.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Zurich. "There Could Be 1.2 Billion Climate Refugees by 2050. Here's What You Need to Know." Zurich.com, May 26, 2022. <https://www.zurich.com/en/media/magazine/2022/there-could-be-1-2-billion-climate-refugees-by-2050-here-s-what-you-need-to-know>

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> 2nd Chapter- Zuidstraat 56, 2225 GX Katwijk - 0714072027 - [contact@2ndchapter.nl](mailto:contact@2ndchapter.nl) - [www.2ndchapter.nl](http://www.2ndchapter.nl). "Our Projects - Salt Farm Foundation." Saline Agriculture Worldwide. Accessed August 21, 2022. <https://www.salineagricultureworldwide.com/our-projects>.

<sup>241</sup> "The Salt Solution." ICCO EN, January 16, 2020. <https://www.icco-cooperation.org/en/project/salt-solution/#summary>.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

In addition, Bangladesh is also home to an estimated 950,000 Rohingya refugees from neighboring Myanmar, many of whom live in refugee camps.<sup>243</sup> To prevent these political refugees becoming climate refugees, the UNHRC is working with local partners to plant fast-growing trees in parts of refugee camps that are prone to landslides during monsoon storms to stabilize the ground.<sup>244</sup>

The White House report says that climate financing, from U.S. foreign aid and international financial institutions, is key to supporting vulnerable communities to respond to, prepare for, and adapt to climate and migration risks.<sup>245</sup> This report urges the U.S. government to establish an interagency working group on climate migration to coordinate its efforts to address the challenge. This interagency group would oversee the drafting of U.S. policy, strategies, and budgets to help those impacted by climate change and migration, either domestically or internationally.<sup>246</sup>

### ***Protected status for climate refugees***

In addition to economic change, experts argue that climate change refugees need access to the same protected status offered to other refugees, such as those who have escaped conflict. In March of 2018, the UNHRC found that many people forced from their homes because of climate change do not fit the definition of 'refugees' and called them "the world's forgotten victims."<sup>247</sup> This means they cannot access legal protections to their human rights, which could protect them from threats like deportation.<sup>248</sup>

To rectify this, governments and legal bodies must reframe conditions caused by climate change as a threat to human rights and recognize the deadly threat that climate refugees face – even if that threat is not always as immediate as the dangers faced by refugees fleeing war.<sup>249</sup> Furthermore, there is an urgent need to clarify the definition of climate refugees, including comprehensive data on

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<sup>243</sup> Zurich. "There Could Be 1.2 Billion Climate Refugees by 2050. Here's What You Need to Know." Zurich.com, May 26, 2022. <https://www.zurich.com/en/media/magazine/2022/there-could-be-1-2-billion-climate-refugees-by-2050-here-s-what-you-need-to-know>

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.



internally displaced persons (IDPs), and create an international mechanism to protect them.<sup>250</sup> It may also be desirable to further discuss how to tackle this issue under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Even the White House report on climate refugees admits that the current legal instruments used to protect refugees “do not readily lend themselves to protect those individuals displaced by the impacts of climate change, especially those that address migration across borders.”<sup>251</sup> One of its key legislative suggestions is for the U.S. to expand use of its migrant protection program, known as Temporary Protected Status.<sup>252</sup> However, the ultimate solution to climate refugees is to curtail climate change by achieving the goals set out in the Paris Agreement to limit temperature increase to well below 2 degrees Celsius (°C) and ideally to 1.5°C.<sup>253</sup>

All in all, countries need to collectively act to manage this crisis. This requires team effort, starting from governments through to civil institutions, academia, and companies. Even as individuals, it is crucial that we carefully consider our responsibilities as consumers, voters, and global citizens. If people come together with change as their goal, change is possible.

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<sup>250</sup> Ida, Tetsuji. “Climate Refugees – the World's Forgotten Victims.” World Economic Forum, June 18, 2021. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/climate-refugees-the-world-s-forgotten-victims/>.

<sup>251</sup> Zurich. “There Could Be 1.2 Billion Climate Refugees by 2050. Here’s What You Need to Know.” Zurich.com, May 26, 2022. <https://www.zurich.com/en/media/magazine/2022/there-could-be-1-2-billion-climate-refugees-by-2050-here-s-what-you-need-to-know>

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

## Bloc Positions

### *Central Asia, Middle East, and Northern Africa*

These regions are at the highest risk of climate change and are suffering extreme consequences as a result. Whether it is monsoon weather patterns, rising sea levels, severe storms, increased drought, or more, countries are often left without options. For their citizens, the overall higher temperatures are affecting their daily lives and their ability to raise healthy, happy children. In addition, many of these nations are simultaneously facing other problems, especially poverty, which makes it that much more difficult for governments to provide for their people on all fronts.

For the countries in these regions, they are desperate to receive support for their citizens hit the hardest by climate-induced disasters. They would like to collaborate with neighboring countries to provide safe refuge for people and are always open to aid in the form of food, water, clothing, shelter, etc. While stopping climate change, or at least slowing it, is always the primary goal, there must be immediate systems in place to help those affected right now in the present moment. Those fleeing disasters deserve protection, and they deserve an opportunity to eventually return to their home countries when it is proven safe and secure.

### *Island Nations*

Climate change poses a major risk to island nations in the Pacific and Atlantic as it affects the normal flow of fisheries and agriculture. As the temperature warms and the sea levels rise, island nations are at an increased risk of losing coastal arable land due to degradation and salinization.<sup>254</sup> In order to protect the people displaced by climate change, they are seeking many of the same support systems and individual protections as the other regions (stated above). However, their approach to climate change varies slightly, as they have taken the general approach of developing nature-based

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<sup>254</sup> "Effects of Climate Change on Island Nations," Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, July 30, 2022), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effects\\_of\\_climate\\_change\\_on\\_island\\_nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effects_of_climate_change_on_island_nations).

solutions, or ecosystem-based adaptation, which uses ecosystems and biodiversity to build resilience to climate change.<sup>255</sup>

## ***Europe***

Europe is the least affected by climate change, but many countries are contributing to the problem on an enormous scale. On a positive note, western Europe specifically has done more to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions over the past three decades than any other region in the world. It has vastly expanded solar and wind power, introduced carbon taxes and other policies to direct companies away from “dirty” energy, and it has constantly been at the forefront of conversations on climate progress and climate intervention.<sup>256</sup>

In terms of climate refugees, Europe, consisting of many countries that are among the wealthiest in the world, has a unique opportunity to significantly support and help the lives of less fortunate climate refugees. The European Union (EU) plays a leading role in protecting refugees in Europe and abroad, including by supporting the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, but it has the capacity to do more.<sup>257</sup> It has the capacity to engage in more conversations and to work with poorer countries to improve their infrastructure and resiliency efforts. Not to mention, it is always a highly controversial and debated topic as to whether the European nations, mandated or not by the EU, should allow a greater number of refugees within their borders.

## ***North America***

When people think of climate refugees, they often do not consider those impacted in North America. For many of these countries, they are no strangers to the dangers of climate change and rising global

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<sup>255</sup> “Pacific Islanders Work with Nature to Combat Climate Change,” GCCA+ (European Commission, September 4, 2019), <https://gcca.eu/stories/pacific-islanders-work-nature-combat-climate-change>.

<sup>256</sup> David Leonhardt, “Western Europe, Climate Leader,” The New York Times (The New York Times, July 20, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/20/briefing/europe-heatwave-global-warming-climate.html#:~:text=It%20has%20vastly%20expanded%20solar,Australia%20or%20other%20affluent%20countries>.

<sup>257</sup> “What Can the European Union Do to Better Protect Refugees?,” UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency), accessed August 8, 2022, [https://www.unhcr.org/europeanunion/wp-content/uploads/sites/70/2020/01/UNHCR-EU\\_refugees-ENG-V2-screen.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/europeanunion/wp-content/uploads/sites/70/2020/01/UNHCR-EU_refugees-ENG-V2-screen.pdf).

temperatures, as millions of individuals face the aftermath of and fall victim to flash floods, prolonged heat waves, and natural disasters, including hurricanes and tornadoes.

For North America, the nations are primarily focused on retreat and relocation, in addition to centering their attention on the vulnerability of regions and countries of origin.<sup>258</sup> They are interested in tracking and recording the characteristics and motives of migrants so they can better understand how to help families that are forced to relocate. In addition, they would like to support the wide variety of individuals that the term “climate migrants” encompasses and develop creative ideas and strategies to offer relief after a traumatic event, mitigate hazards before they even happen, and implement in-depth climate adaptation programs.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Carlos Martín, “Who Are America's ‘Climate Migrants,’ and Where Will They Go?,” Urban (Urban Institute, October 22, 2019), <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/who-are-americas-climate-migrants-and-where-will-they-go>.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

## Glossary

**Climate Change:** long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels which produces heat-trapping gasses

**Climate Crisis:** Rising temperatures are fueling environmental degradation, natural disasters, weather extremes, food and water insecurity, economic disruption, conflict, and terrorism

**Climate Refugee:** people who have been “forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of marked environmental disruption

**Crop Yield:** amount of agricultural production harvested

**Degradation:** the wearing down of rock by disintegration

**Desertification:** type of land degradation in drylands in which biological productivity is lost due to natural processes or human activities whereby fertile areas become increasingly arid

**Environmental Migrant:** people who are forced to leave their home region due to sudden or long-term changes to their local or regional environment

**Erosion:** action of surface processes that removes soil, rock, or dissolved material from one location on the Earth's crust, and then transports it to another location where it is deposited

**IPCC:** The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, an intergovernmental body of the United Nations responsible for advancing knowledge on human-induced climate change

**Maximalist:** person who holds extreme views and is not prepared to compromise

**Minimalist:** a person advocating minor or moderate reform in politics

**Monsoon:** seasonal reversing wind accompanied by corresponding changes in precipitation

**Repatriation:** the return of someone to their own country

**Salinization:** increasing the salt content in the soil by the gradual withdrawal of an ocean

**Storm Surge:** tsunami-like phenomenon of rising water commonly associated with low-pressure weather systems, measured as the rise in water level above the normal tidal level

**Subsistence Agriculture:** farmers produce enough crops for themselves, their families, and communities; they do not sell their produce on the national or international market

**Typhoon:** mature tropical cyclone that develops between 180° and 100°E in the Northern Hemisphere

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