

MUN

UNHCR - BACKGROUND GUIDE

AUSMUN 2021



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF SHARJAH

DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH WELCOME LETTER



Dear Delegates and Faculty Advisors,

It is my utmost pleasure to welcome you to the American University of Sharjah Model United Nations (AUSMUN) 2021. As an organization led by the students of AUS, AUSMUN has had the privilege of hosting some of the biggest and most diverse MUN conferences in this region. Our 2020 conference saw over 1000 delegate registrations from more than 45 national and international institutions!

Adapting to a New Normal, Promoting Resilience: given the turbulent year of 2020, there was no other theme which could have fit our present conditions better. A small outbreak in Wuhan exactly a year back has now trickled down into a global catastrophe which has two million dead, leaving a trail of broken lives in its wake. Looking at the severely distorted life that has become our 'new normal', some may question whether it could all have been avoided. Whether we could have been better prepared. And the broader goal of our conference is to do exactly that: teach the upcoming generation to question current policies in the hopes of preventing another similar global catastrophe.

This background guide has been formulated by your chairs along with the research team to provide you with a concise overview of the topics chosen.

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The guide is initially divided into two sections based on the two topics and is further split into logical components. Firstly, the Summary and History section acts as an introduction to the issue. Secondly, the Discourse on the Issue section establishes a link between the issue, its implications, significance, and the United Nations Charter. Lastly, the Past International Organization (IO) Actions and Latest Developments section elaborates on the previous actions that have been taken, which can be used by delegates as a stepping stone to come up with their own solutions to the issues. At the end of each topic, delegates will find sections of questions and suggestions that aim to guide the process of research.

Delegates are greatly encouraged to expand beyond the guide and research about their country and topics in order to construct well founded arguments during debate. The delegate handbook contains a number of tips on how to research and addresses a vast array of common concerns. Finally, let me use this opportunity to extend my gratitude to all those who have helped create the document you are reading right now: Your wonderful moderators, the AUSMUN Research Team, and not to mention the AUSMUN Media team who have done an incredible job in designing and formatting the Background Guides.

I wish you the very best in preparing for the conference. If you have any queries at all, or need any specific help in researching for your topics, do not hesitate to contact research@ausmun.com

Sincerely,
Julia Jose
Director of Research
AUSMUN 2021

MODERATORS



Noorzada Darwish

Rama Hamarsheh

Samarth Rai

Sameera

Mohammed

DEAR DELEGATES,

Welcome to AUSMUN 2021!

It is our honor and greatest pleasure that we welcome you all to the fourteenth annual American University of Sharjah Model United Nations Conference (AUSMUN) and specifically our committee, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). We, as your chairs, are looking forward to virtually meeting you all and hopefully, making the most out of this experience by interacting, communicating and cooperating efficiently. We understand that with this pandemic we are unable to physically attend the conference but we hope that nonetheless, this experience allows you to strengthen your skills in public speaking and debating in addition to enhancing your teamwork and leadership abilities!

During the aftermath of World War 2, in 1950, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established to support millions of Europeans who had escaped or were misplaced. It is an organization founded with the aim to save lives, protect rights and build a better future for refugees, displaced groups, and asylum-seeking individuals. Key issues that the UNHCR faces that hinders their response to refugee crises are the rising numbers and complexity of irregular and mixed migration movements, as well as the urgent need for change in the structure of humanitarian response. International action to protect refugees and to address refugee issues worldwide is led and organized by the Committee. Furthermore, the UNHCR acknowledges the need for international collaboration to resolve refugee conflicts and seeks to bring nations together to establish better conditions for refugees across the globe. Its primary aim is to protect the rights and health of refugees.

The UNHCR has one of the most vital messages at the AUSMUN conference and we are honored to be representing this committee. As your chairs, we are thrilled to be part of your AUSMUN experience and are looking forward to moderating this committee discussion ensuring that this experience is as pleasant as possible for both of us! Finally, the best advice we can give you is to start your research as soon as possible and draft your position papers referring to the background guide. Should you have any concerns or inquiries, please do not hesitate to contact us on the following email: unhcr2021@gmail.com. We believe in you and we wish you a fruitful and lively debate!

AUTHORS OF THE BACKGROUND GUIDES
NOORZADA, MOUJ, AND RAMA



Summary & History

In simple terms, displaced people are individuals who due to natural, technological or intentional incidents have had to leave their homes, which also includes internally displaced people (people who stay within their own nation) and refugees (people who cross international borders) (WHO, n.d.). Currently, as per the latest estimates, there are 79.5 million people forcibly displaced by conflict in the world, including 45.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 26 million refugees and 4.2 million asylum seekers (SSHAP, 2020). Despite international requests for a temporary truce in ongoing disputes to permit COVID-19 disease management, most wars in the Middle East have not ceased. Even though the introduction of travel bans and border restrictions to minimize the transmission of COVID-19 has significantly delayed migration internationally, within conflict-affected states and across borders, forced displacement continues. Furthermore, the need to provide humanitarian protection and support to refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs and stateless persons still persists.

When considering the Middle East region, displaced populations and individuals in Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon are especially vulnerable. Approximately 9 million people have taken shelter from wars and disputes between Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Lebanon. Refugee movements have also contributed to displaced people overflowing into neighboring countries, across common borders and along unstable migration routes. It is crucial to acknowledge that international institutions, public bodies and local entities often exempt refugees, internally displaced people and other groups of significance from crisis and outbreak prevention preparations (Osmandzиковic, 2020). It can be very difficult for the defenseless and hard-to-reach communities to access interventions as basic as knowledge sharing, public awareness

on potential epidemic preparedness, and precautionary response, particularly in cases of prolonged conflict. In addition, the media has instigated propaganda in refugee-hosting nations in the more industrialized parts of the world that depicts asylum-seekers and displaced people as possible carriers of the virus and a health hazard to the respective countries, causing prejudice (Osmandzиковic, 2020). The Middle East region continues to be poorly prepared for COVID-19 despite having significant expertise with health crises, mainly in places that host displaced persons and populations of risk who are at a higher average health threat (Osmandzиковic, 2020). The transmission of COVID-19 is a first security threat that can weaken war zones further and contributes to a growing number of displaced persons who at border crossing points and in states receiving refugees could bring additional strains on neighboring nations' health systems.

The UN has already appealed for a \$33 million fund at the beginning of 2020 to protect refugees, asylum seekers and other concerned communities in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak. The funds are intended to improve preparedness, mitigation and proactive programs to meet the urgent public health needs of COVID-19-induced populations of concern (U.N., 2020).

Discourse on the issue

With continuous rising conflicts in the Arab region, the area is now home to 55.7 million people who need humanitarian assistance, including 26 million forcibly displaced people (refugees, asylum-seekers, internally-displaced and stateless persons). Conflicts that have been inflicted due to the COVID-19 pandemic significantly revolved around the loss of income that struck the region. The Middle East region is home to the largest number of displaced populations globally (UNHCR, 2020). Healthcare systems in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, countries with more than 13 million IDPs, have been decimated by war and were barely able to

respond to pre-pandemic health demands. The healthcare systems in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, hosting more than 7 million Syrian and other refugees, are already overstretched. The spread of the pandemic is expected to be devastating, especially to conflict-affected populations, given that many of them live in inadequate and overcrowded shelters or camps, with insufficient access to clean water (Danish Refugee Council, 2020, p.16). Poverty and inequality in Arab countries were already on the rise prior to the pandemic. Inequality and discrimination have undermined the region's progress in all the SDGs, while impinging on human rights and threatening peace and social cohesion (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2020, p.14). Other such armed conflicts led to massive economic losses in the region over the past decade, and such responses during the COVID-19 pandemic has placed individuals in far more troubling situations from the health, humanitarian, human rights and socioeconomic perspectives. Prolonged confinement and stretching economic stress has provoked gender based violence with women and children sitting at the receiving end.

The Arab region, prior to the pandemic, had not been on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and currently with the ongoing situation, SDGs such as Gender Equality is likely to be violated in terms of domestic violence, and the already high rates will be exacerbated. Recovery will require a new approach to development and a whole-of-society strategy guided by a collective commitment to peace and stability and by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Sendai Framework (UNHCR, 2020, p.4).

Past Actions by International Organizations

The Arab region can seize the opportunities of COVID response and recovery to make progress on human rights, reconciliation, displacement, humanitarian challenges, the root causes of conflict, and sustainable peace and, in so doing, make tangible progress towards growth, prosperity, equity and social justice for all (UNHCR, 2020, p.21). The United Nations secretary General has addressed the matter and places a vague outline to tackle the issue: slow the spread of the disease, build back better by strengthening vulnerable groups, boosting economic recovery, prioritize human rights (Guterres, 2020).

As a result, governments in the MENA region were quick to respond and take appropriate actions. Public health preparedness activities across humanitarian settings in the Middle East and East Africa have consisted of COVID-19 education, training of staff and equipping health facilities to improve infection control and COVID-19 case management capabilities, and construction, renovation or conversion of existing structures into COVID-19 quarantine or isolation units (SSHAP, 2020).

NGOs have also taken charge to address the matter. The spread of COVID-19 has put migrant workers at even greater risk. Along with other organisations, Amnesty International has already raised its concerns about the impact of the pandemic on protection of migrant workers in the Gulf, where common issues like overcrowded accommodation now present a public health risk. (Amnesty International, 2020). With approximately 2000 staff, the DRC has operational presence in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Yemen and Iraq, providing: protection, basic need assistance, economic recovery, and WASH. (DRC, 2020). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees also took response by community outreach, cash assistance, health support, mental health and psychological support, and employment support.

Questions and suggestions for further research

1. How can nations make the refugee camps more hygienic?
2. How can nations ensure that the displaced populations receive proper healthcare? Who would fund such expenses?
3. How can the UNHCR ensure that the nations are indeed following proper precautions and protecting the displaced communities?
4. How to limit the disease impacts on refugees, especially in camps with large refugee populations?

Suggestions for further research

- How the representatives' nations are reacting to COVID-19 and their own displaced populations.
- The steps needed to ensure the safety of the displaced communities against COVID-19.
- The effectiveness of healthcare facilities in the representatives' nations while combating COVID-19.
- The measures taken (if any) during the pandemic to ensure the safety of the refugees.
- Solutions to protect the rights of the refugees and displaced persons.
- External sources that are needed for aid when providing shelter, nutrition and basic necessities for the refugees and displaced communities.

Summary and History

“The family is universally recognized as the fundamental group unit of society and as entitled to protection and assistance from society” (Jastram & Newland, n.d.); it is a right to all individuals regardless of their status as a citizen. When people escape oppression and war, the separation of families can have disastrous effects for the well-being of relatives and their ability to recover their lives. They could be pressured to evacuate at the time of the departure without being able to guarantee or know whether their families are secure. In order to find protection in another nation, others have to make tough choices about abandoning their family to find proper shelter. When finally safe, refugees and other international protection recipients are frequently unaware of their family's locations. As stated in global and domestic law, the right to family life and family unity extends to everyone including refugees (Nicholson, 2018). It should apply through the various stages of displacement: the stage of admission, in reception, in detention and during the refugee status determination process (Nicholson, 2018). Among the most important issues of asylum seekers, refugees, and recipients of complementary forms of foreign security may be locating and reconnecting with family members. The only way to maintain the protection of their rights to family life and family unity is family reunification in the country of migration. It has become much harder for them to exercise this basic and necessary right in an exceedingly repressive atmosphere in many countries.

At least 300,000 unaccompanied and divided children traveling across borders were reported in 80 countries in 2015-2016, a rise of almost fivefold from 66,000 in 2010-2011. Globally, it is likely that the overall number of unaccompanied and separated children on the move is far greater (UNICEF, n.d.). Although there are no global statistics on family reunification, in countries where data exists, it is one of the most

important immigration networks. On average family migration accounts for 40 percent of the overall immigration flow in the countries within the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development alone (UNICEF, n.d.). A recent framework that addressed this issue is the Global Compact on Migration (GCM), from 2018, which is a structure for a more stable and fair sharing of responsibility recognizing that a permanent solution to refugee crises cannot be accomplished without global collaboration. The GCM presents an opportunity to overcome and eradicate current legal and practical obstacles to maintaining and achieving family unity. The pledges agreed in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) provide a remarkable possibility for children, parents, society and states to overcome these obstacles and enjoy the privileges that family unity entails, which need to be applied to achieve their purpose.

Discourse on the issue

When fleeing persecution, war and conflict, the separation of families can have a permanent influence on children's mental health which disrupts their ability to restore and rebuild their lives. It is therefore important to establish that for refugees who are no longer under the protection of their own countries, family separation can result in major distress and dysfunction. Specifically to the most vulnerable of individuals (children and elderly) family protection is crucial as they require a certain standard of physical and more importantly - emotional support. The executive committee of the UNHCR has consistently highlighted the importance of family unity and support particularly for refugees as they are forced to endure extreme psychological distress and trauma.

According to the legal framework set by the international human rights law, everyone, including refugees, asylum-seekers and anyone in need of international protection has a right to family unity and the right to be protected and respected as a "group" while maintaining a family life together. In addition, refugees are to be protected from "unlawful interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence" as per the Article 17(1) of the ICCPR (UNHCR, 2018, p.3). After the war in Syria, as

many as “2.2 million people were forced to seek refuge” elsewhere leaving many children separated from one or both of their parents (UNHCR, 2011) The UNHCR has registered at least 3760 children separated from their parents due to the war in Syria and were forced to relocate unaccompanied in countries like Lebanon and Jordan (UNHCR, 2011). The UNHCR argues that this is an unrepresentative number and therefore, thousands of separated children refugees are at risk of violence and neglect due to mass displacement. The CRC, Convention on the Rights of the Child, highlights that children have the right to remain with their families without unlawful interference and requires, as per Article 10, "inter alia" which emphasizes the importance of dealing with family reunification applications in a "positive and humane manner" (UNHCR, 2018, p.5). In addition, the CRC also requires States Parties to provide the appropriate assistance to unaccompanied children while attempting to trace members of their families in order to eventually reunite them (UNHCR, 2018, p.6).

Past Actions by International Organizations

A family's right to unity is protected by the international human rights and humanitarian law which requires respect, support and assistance to refugee families specifically. According to the international humanitarian law, Geneva Conventions of 1949, these include "people related by blood or have been living together in the same household" (UNHCR, 2018, p.18). Furthermore, under the 1951 Status of Refugees Convention, the country sheltering the refugee is responsible for protecting the individual while providing support for family reunification, considering the refugee is no longer under the protection of their own country (UNHCR, 2018). The Member states of the UNHCR's Executive Committee highlights that all unaccompanied refugee children are to be guided by the principle of "the best interests of the child as well as the principle of family unity" (UNHCR, 2018). The UNHCR further calls on all states to diminish the practice of detaining refugee children but rather focus on providing the needed support for family reunification. The EU family Reunification Directive states that EU Member States 1) are required to authorize the residence of separated family members for family reunification which include: the sponsor's spouse (where polygamy and early marriage are

not recognized by the EctHR), and minor children (including adopted children) 2) "may authorize the entry and residence of first degree ascendants in the direct line" (UNHCR, 2018). Specifically in regards to Syrian unaccompanied child refugees, The UNHCR and UNICEF are currently working with the Jordanian Government in order to provide for these children seeking asylum in Jordan (UNHCR, 2011). This involves providing the required assistance needed to reunite and trace family members in Jordan or abroad all while ensuring the children are safe and provided with their basic human rights.

Questions the discussion and resolution must address

1. What procedures can the UNHCR implement in order to trace family members of refugees seeking asylum, specifically in cases of unaccompanied refugee children?
2. What solutions can the UNHCR take towards ensuring families are not separated after fleeing persecution, war and conflict?
3. How can the UNHCR ensure that the solutions placed are followed through by every nation?
4. What are some measures and ways to ensure the people currently displaced are properly sheltered and receive all their rights?

Suggestions for further research

- Countries' policies and efforts in easing the immigration process for separated family members and their reunification.
- The psychological and mental effects of family separation and reunification especially on unaccompanied children.
- Benefits of facilitating therapy for children with conditions such as PTSD.
- Importance of family unity, especially for refugees.
- Methods to ensure the success of solutions in the long term.
- Effectiveness of the resolutions in combating this issue.

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