United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees
Background Guide

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Letters from the Secretariat

Dear Delegates,

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to EagleMUNC V! My name is Kerianne DiBattista, and I am the Secretary-General of EagleMUNC V. I am a senior at Boston College in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences majoring in International Studies with a concentration in Economics. I am originally from Long Island, NY, and I have been participating in Model UN conferences since I was in tenth grade, rising to become Head Delegate and Secretary-General of my high school conference. At BC, I travelled to several conferences with our MUN team and I have participated EagleMUNC since my freshman year. As you begin your EagleMUNC V experience, I implore you to explore the conference theme, "The Interplay of Power and Ethics," and make your EagleMUNC experience the best it can be! Thank you, and I'll see you at EagleMUNC!

Best Regards,
Kerianne DiBattista
Secretary-General, EagleMUNC V

Dear Delegates,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to EagleMUNC V! My name is Jack Massih and I am the Under Secretary-General of Political Affairs. I am a senior at Boston College studying Political Science and Economics. I began participating in MUN my sophomore year of high school and have been hooked ever since. I joined the EagleMUNC team as a freshman for the first year we moved off BC’s campus and into Boston, and it has been a joy to witness the conference continuously grow and evolve since then. The Political Affairs team has been working incredibly hard to prepare for the most innovative and exciting conference in EagleMUNC history. I am looking forward to seeing all of your creative and thoughtful responses to the diplomatic predicaments and crises you confront over the weekend.

Best,
Jack Massih
Under Secretary-General Political Affairs, EagleMUNC V
Chair letter

Welcome Delegates,

Welcome to Eagle MUNC V! My name is Avita Anand, and I will be your chair for The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I am a sophomore in the Morrissey College of Arts of Science, majoring in International Studies with a concentration in Global Business. I am also really interested in Gender Studies and Finance and hope to minor in at least one if not both. I am from Dallas, Texas and have an unreasonable amount of state pride. From an early age, I had the privilege of being able to travel with my family and explore many cultures and countries. From those experiences grew a deep fascination with world politics and what it means to be a global citizen. As a result, I joined Model UN my freshman year of high school and competed all four years, travelling to conferences and finally serving as Secretary General my senior year. I can honestly say that some of my favorite high school memories were from attending conferences similar to Eagle MUNC, and I cannot wait to make this weekend equally meaningful and fun for all of you.

As I am sure you are all aware, what we will be discussing has been very relevant and important in today’s world climate. The refugee crisis has been a rapidly growing world issue, one that countries are still grappling to solve. As a humanitarian crisis at its core, the refugee problem has no clear cut answer or solution. It blurs the lines between moral obligations, political self-interest, national sovereignty, and international relationships. The conversations we will have mimic those happening during sessions of the United Nations, as real diplomats have yet to come up with an acceptable solution to this growing crisis. There are no wrong ideas and creative thinking is encouraged. I hope you will consider the myriad of facets around this problem as you delve into your research, using the information here as your starting point. It is important to acknowledge that the refugee crisis is a world crisis and, though your country might not be directly impacted, how the global community reacts now will set the stage for international politics for years to come and that is something everyone can and should contribute to.

Model UN is exactly what you make it, so I hope to see everyone participate and get excited about our topic. Whether you are new to Model UN or a seasoned veteran, I know a large General Assembly can be intimidating, but I would love to see everyone participate and take initiatives with creative solutions. We have a lot of really interactive and immersive events planned and I am so excited to share them with you. Please reach out with any and all questions and I can’t wait to meet each and every one of you!

Best,

Avita Anand
Background Information

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created in 1950 to aid the great number of Europeans displaced by World War II. In 1951, they defined a refugee as someone who was “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” Upon its creation, the UNHCR had an ambitious plan of assisting 400,000 displaced people within three years and then disbanding. It quickly became clear that the scope of the problem was much greater than what could be solved with the resources provided to the UNHCR in just three years. This led to the establishment of a long term legal framework for the assistance of refugees. Since then, the UNHCR has continued to

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expand in order to further support displaced persons who are in need of aid. Due to the general success of its work in Europe, the committee was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1954, making it a recognized world organization. However, this was just the start of their role in working with refugees, a crisis that would and continues to grow into a worldwide phenomenon.

In 1956, during the Hungarian Revolution, UNHCR led an effort to re-settle the 200,000 refugees that fled to Austria. Their response to this uprising and the displacement set an important precedent for how humanitarian organizations would deal with refugee crises in the future. Since then, starting with the decolonization of Africa, the UNHCR has helped with major refugee crises in Africa, Latin America, Middle East, and Asia. In 1981, the UNHCR received a second Nobel Peace Prize for their worldwide assistance to refugees. The UNHCR has also used its expertise in order to help many others who are internally displaced by conflict, and expanded its role to help stateless people. Due to its work in assisting millions of refugees around the world, UNHCR has become one of the most reputable humanitarian organizations. However, the plight and number of displaced persons have only dramatically increased in scale. The refugee crisis is the largest it’s ever been, as countries face major political unrest and displacement. Another hugely growing problem that the UNHCR will have to face in the coming decades is the steady rise of nationalism across the world, as countries have begun to close their doors, wary of the risk of terrorism. This new challenge will be something the UNHCR will have to tackle as they continue to have to place refugees
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and promote integration, and while UNHCR is a very effective organization, it still has much work to do.

UNHCR defines the term “refugees” in a very strict manner. In general, a refugee is “someone who because of fear of persecution arising from his race, creed, or political philosophy, is living outside his former home country and is unable or unwilling to avail himself of that country's protection.” UNHCR therefore provides the refugees with international protection which meets the provisions of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which is designed to promote international legal instruments that benefit the refugees. This ensures that entering refugees are treated in a fair manner and given the right to work, social security, and access to travel facilities.

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UNHCR acts in a promotional manner and not operational manner, through coordinating actions with international actors. They can also assist by giving emergency aid, promoting rural settlement projects, providing counseling and education, and giving training of some sort in different areas.

The funding target of UNHCR is determined by the Executive Committee with the advice of the High Commissioner. This means that the budget of this organization fluctuates according to the various needs of the time. They can also obtain funding for current programs from individual governments and private sources through the permission of the High Commissioner. Currently, the UNHCR is in the midst of debate over the central areas of concern in which their aid should be concentrated.

Current Issues

Topic 1: Determining the critical areas
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There are millions of people who suffer due to displacement, as this not a phenomenon limited to one region. As seen on the chart above, in 2012, there were refugees from China, Myanmar, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Colombia, and it was mostly the surrounding countries that took these refugees in. Refugees came from 10 different countries within the course of only one year, that being 2012. Today, the list of countries where refugees come from has only grown and surrounding countries have begun to express hesitation in admitting more refugees. UNHCR does not have the resources to focus on all of these areas at once. Consequently, a system to determine where the critical areas most in need for aid are must be implemented. Refugee crises have been predominant in Eastern Europe, Middle East, Africa, and Asia, but attempting to address all these areas at once is nearly impossible. Therefore, the UNHCR must prioritize the order in which different regions are addressed, as well as create precautions to make sure that the minimal amount of support is still provided to all other regions, despite having a main focus. UNHCR must also make a collective decision regarding which regions or groups with large populations of refugees should be addressed first. Planning is additionally required in order to respond to future refugee crises in an effective manner. Whether this is determining which regions have specific countries ready to take in refugees, or creating a better plan to allow travel for refugees, UNHCR must create policies that allow for effective and immediate support for the refugees.

Currently, however, the largest sources of displaced peoples and refugees have been from the Middle East and North Africa. A series of political revolutions, civil wars,
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and a general era of unrest and violence has created a highly concentrated humanitarian crisis in the last several years. Between the nine civil wars spanning from Pakistan to Nigeria, over 10 million Syrians, close to half of their nation’s population, have been uprooted. Other countries affected by this wide spread political turmoil include Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, south-east Turkey, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and north-east Nigeria. While all problems of war and displacement are important and difficult to address, the religious nature of this expanding crisis has made it especially critical for the global community to address. Many of the refugees that are fleeing these regions are victims of religious persecution, war, and violence. The religious nature of the conflict, changes the dynamic of the refugees as many of them will never be able to return to their homes as the demographics and laws of their nation change around their religious beliefs. This has become particularly true of those who have been displaced by the growing Islamic State (ISIS) and its presence in this area. Multi-faceted and religiously diverse regions are being homogenized violently with large consequences for its existing population.

The determination of critical areas where the displacement is occurring is not the only important decision that must be made. UNHCR must also appeal to regions not affected by displacement to help the ones that have been. This requires specifying certain regions most fit for taking in refugees, and creating a process in which refugees can be taken in without creating too many negative consequences within the regions they are relocated to. Methods to support countries actively taking in refugees must be put in place, and new methods of incentivizing these countries to take in refugees must
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be considered. Again the religious aspect of today’s current crisis requires more from the countries that host the refugees, as they have to accommodate their own populations and demographics. Europe, in particular, as one of the largest recipients of refugees in the last decade has been dealing with their own populations reacting harshly to the changing political climate of refugees.

Topic 2: Promoting rights of refugees:

With the ever-increasing number of refugees, protecting the rights of those who do decide to leave their homes in order to create a new life also becomes important. UNHCR must agree upon and promote policies that protect refugees from discrimination, inequality, statelessness and lack of opportunities. They must ensure that these refugees can find shelter, employment, education, and social security, and obtain other basic necessities in order to start their new life in a different location. Refugee placement becomes more than finding new citizenship for populations, but becomes a very important process in preventing future conflict. Though there have been conventions and laws created to ensure these rights, the current reality does not always reflect the protection that they promise.

Articles twelve through thirty of the Refugee Convention created a list of rights that refugees are entitled to when recognized as a conventional refugee. All refugees must be given identity papers and travel documents that allow them to travel to outside countries. Refugees also must receive the same or most favorable treatment as
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nationals or aliens of the receiving country. The existing 1951 refugee convention also provides some basic framework for protecting the rights of refugees by disallowing the forceful return of refugees to countries where they will face serious threats to their freedom or lives. With the change in the current trend of displacement, new ways to secure the rights of the refugees must be considered. Because laws are already in place and rights have been defined, the proper way to ensure that these rights are respected is to find methods that make it difficult to violate these rights. UNHCR must deliberate upon additional clauses to the rights already in place, and determine better methods to make sure these rights are being provided.

Topic 3: Climate Refugees:

The earth’s climate has been changing at an alarming rate, and effects caused by the climate change are enormous yet hard to quickly address, due to lack of definitive forecasts. The rising sea levels, increasing temperatures, changing atmospheric pressure, and other effects caused by climate change have already begun to affect some families and communities. Due to disasters caused by the effect of climate change, some of the areas that had previously been home to many people are becoming inhabitable. Many of those living in affected areas are forced to leave their homes in order to find more sustainable land. While some people attempt to adapt to the situation, the continued change in climate forces these people to move from one place to another, causing conflicts with other communities, creating insufficient resources, and making them vulnerable. Currently, it is estimated that at least one
person is forced to leave their home due to disaster every second.\textsuperscript{3} On average, about 22.5 million people have been displaced by climate-related effects since 2008.\textsuperscript{4} Many of these disasters leave people not only devoid of their homes, but also traumatized and lacking in basic needs such as food and water.

UNHCR must explore new ways to prevent further environmental degradation within areas that are most vulnerable, and must consider implementing policies and methods to protect those who have already been displaced due to this reason. Moreover, the UNHCR must also determine what methods can be taken to make sure that aid provided to these regions promotes sustainability and allows the refugee agency to dictate their own lives.


\textsuperscript{4} ibid
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Bloc Positions

Similar to other United Nation committees, the countries in the UNHCR have various positions on policy and enforcement. “Bloc positions” are the different stances that your countries might assume during this conference. However, it is important to keep in mind that as delegates you are constantly going to be reevaluating your countries’ global priorities and best interests. These groupings serve as a baseline to begin the conversation, but in no way should limit your discussion or creativity.

Countries that Host Refugees
(Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Ethiopia, Kenya, Colombia, Chad, Ecuador, Thailand, Uganda, UAE, Brazil)

These are the countries that historically have taken in the most refugees and will be prioritizing an increase in resources and programs for the dislocated populations. These countries have experienced overpopulation and a lack of general resources for accommodating the refugees. Most recently, these countries are also facing tensions as their own populations tackle nationalizing governments and prejudice from within. These countries will be most concerned with procuring resources for their own refugee camps and for stemming the flow of refugees into their nations.

Countries that Provide Aid
(USA, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Australia, Japan, United Kingdom)
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These nations, among others, contribute to the refugee crisis through resources and humanitarian aid. Similar to the countries that host refugees, they will be primarily concerned with the growth and allocation of UNHCR resources. While these countries are usually more developed and equipped to host refugees, they are less inclined to, as less developed nations host 80% of the world’s refugees. However, they are quick to donate to the troubled regions and will focus their attention towards encouraging more countries to donate, and will want to turn the attention of the conference towards the allocation of funds.

Countries affected by violence and political turmoil
(Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, Nigeria)

These countries are the ones most affected by civil wars and political unrest. They will be focusing their attention on turning global attention to their local violence and stopping the flow of refugees. These countries will not be very open to accepting any new refugees, but rather will be encouraging incentives for other nations to continue accepting dislocated populations. They will also be concerned with the flow of UNHCR resources and directing them towards themselves as the source of the refugee crisis.

Questions to consider

While continuing to grow in resources and effect, the UNHCR still faces many challenges in enforcing its policies and meeting its goals. The most prominent being:
the accelerating scale of the global crisis, humanitarian obligations to refugees pre and post placement, and now the growing concern of safety for both refugees and nation states.

1. Which region needs the most aid in order to protect the refugees?
2. Which regions/countries can afford to take in more refugees?
3. How can incentives for taking refugees be increased?
4. What is the best way to make sure that refugees are receiving the rights they are entitled to?
5. How can response time to large amounts of displaced people be improved?
6. How can UNHCR prevent environmental degradation that creates many climate refugees?
7. How should UNHCR build sustainable aid programs?
8. How can UNHCR protect current refugees displaced by environmental disasters?
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Works Cited


