

**United Nations High Commission on Refugees
(UNHCR)**

Background Guide



LFMUNC I

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*LONGFELLOW MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
(APRIL 17, 2021)*

Introduction:

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, commonly referred to as UNHCR, is a United Nations agency dedicated to upholding the rights of and building a brighter future for refugees. Having been formed in 1950 by a United Nations mandate, the UNHCR works to ensure that safety, education, and refuge are provided to those who have fled violence, persecution, or crisis. At the end of 2019, at least 79.5 million people around the world were forced to leave their homes, with nearly 26 million refugees among them, and 20.4 million of those refugees under the UNHCR's mandate. As of 2020, the UNHCR has employed personnel in 135 countries, providing essential protection, administration, education, and other services to refugees, ensuring that their basic rights would be upheld.

Topic A: Refugee Crisis in Syria and Palestine

Introduction:

Recently, with the increasingly concerning amount of conflicts taking place, the United Nations has struggled with refugee management due to multiple factors, particularly low funding and a consistent unwillingness to take in refugees by the developed world. Two particularly disastrous events, though, have transformed into humanitarian catastrophes never seen before: the Syrian War and the Palestinian occupation. According to UNRWA and the UNHCR, these two small geographical regions account for the majority of refugees worldwide.

With the ongoing war in Syria, only exacerbated by the disastrous dictatorship of Bashar Al-Assad, and the systematic persecution faced by the Palestinian people as a result of ongoing Israeli Apartheid, a mass exodus of refugees has commenced. Amidst the prolonged Syrian civil

war, nearly 91% of the current 438,000 Palestinian refugees are forced to stay within the country in extreme poverty. It is estimated that at least 438,000 Palestinians have been displaced from Syria since 2011, with the majority of them having been displaced multiple times. Nearly 280,000 Palestine refugees from Syria have been displaced within Syria, with an additional 120,000 displaced to neighboring countries, even traveling as far as to go to Europe. To make matters worse, increasing reports of violence have obstructed travel, making these migrations even more difficult. To Palestinian refugees that do manage to find refuge within another country, many are often pushed into marginalization, and face limited social protection, as they hold a delicate legal status. Because of this, nearly 95% of these refugees require constant humanitarian support and heavily rely on branches of the UNHCR for support. This migrant crisis has resulted in intense difficulty in responding in a systematic and orderly way, based on the European government obligations. In 2015, the European Commission initiated a 10-point plan to tackle the crisis—a plan creating a unified asylum system

Adding to these preexisting challenges is the ubiquitous appearance of the highly-contagious COVID-19 virus. This pandemic poses further obstacles amidst the current situation, threatening to reverse many years of progress. The effects of COVID, as seen around the world, are universally devastating, and the damages it has inflicted upon Syrian and Palestinian refugees are no exception. As of March 2021, over 200,000 cases of Coronavirus have been confirmed in Gaza and the West Bank, with an uncountable number in Syria. This number, while deadly already, is feared to be far greater, due to the lack of testing capacity within the country. Restrictive measures such as lockdowns, attempting to control the spread of COVID-19, have also limited access to employment, leaving those who rely on informal labor

struggling to get by. Meanwhile, the public health system, already struggling amidst the previously ongoing conflict, is now straining even harder to accommodate for the pandemic. With the economic crises sparked globally by the pandemic, refugees, as basic commodities' prices skyrocket, and living conditions plunge. Unemployment has increased rapidly, pushing many more into poverty, including refugees who already hold precarious employment. In short, Palestine refugees in Syria have never been so vulnerable, and within this crisis, it is vital to take action before all hope is lost, and the situation irreversible.

Possible Solutions

In the past, many solutions to this problem have been proposed—with the primary proposition consisting of a plan to open more refugee camps and expand UNHCR funding. The concern often expressed with this plan is that it doesn't eliminate the fundamental source of refugees; oppressive nations. Two less recognized propositions are, first, to endorse open borders to refugees in High Income Countries, and, second, impose international sanctions/embargoes on oppressive governments in order to prevent the creation of displaced populations. For delegates who choose to go along with an idea that reflects those two propositions, the most important thing is to get into the specifics of those ideas, including but not limited to: implementation practices, specified funding ideas (with real, legible numbers, not just speaking money into existence), achievability, and more.

Any refugee crisis brings forth the question of humanity, and the Syrian and Palestinian Refugee Crises are no exception. With COVID-19 exacerbating the situation in already-struggling refugee camps, humanitarian aid is a must, and though it would not be a

sustainable solution, international cooperation to send supplies, whether they be sanitation materials or tents, is one that is greatly needed. Meanwhile, turn towards rebuilding infrastructure in the host countries of both Palestine and Syria. It is not the fault of the civilians to suffer for a conflict that is not theirs, and their future should not be sacrificed for the sake of their country's political struggles. Consider rebuilding healthcare and education systems, both of which can become public safe spaces. The establishment of public water cisterns can provide a sustainable source of clean, safe drinking water.

Delegates, the resolutions you shall present within committee carry the potential to reverse this appalling situation. With hundreds of thousands of lives in jeopardy and oppression against refugees still in widespread occurrence, it is essential for one to carefully examine the effects of potential United Nations legislation, with COVID-19 and realistic funding capacity in mind. We strongly encourage delegates to develop creative and unique, yet effective solutions to protect Syrian and Palestinian refugees, as well as enforce consequences upon their oppressors.

Bloc Positions:

As Syria is engulfed by civil war, the United Nations has been struggling to support millions of displaced people, a third of which have fled the country.

Neighboring countries have supported 90% of refugees fleeing the crisis, with **Lebanon** taking significantly more than any other country, followed closely by **Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq.**

The UK, having partnered with a series of emergency programmes, has provided aid packages and hygiene kits to help both refugees in Syria and those that have fled to Lebanon. From repairing basic shelters to providing cash assistance, Britain has come forward to meet refugees' urgent needs. However, the UK has also cut their pledge to \$281 mil, as compared to \$411.8 mil last year, disappointing many. Other countries, such as Qatar and Germany, have also contributed in their own ways, from integrating refugees into their society to providing convoy drives to meet the needs of the refugees' humanitarian needs.

Recently, the European Union and the U.S., along with dozens of other nations have pledged to provide nearly \$6.4 billion USD to assist the refugees in Syria, including the Palestinians. Additional commitments to \$4.3 billion and \$596 million have been made for 2021, by the EU and the U.S., respectively.

Questions to Consider:

1. With political conflict and strife, among the urgent need for humanitarian aid, what should first be a priority?
2. How can a system be established to ensure individual countries' efforts can effectively culminate towards a common goal?
3. During the times of COVID-19, how can the increasing needs of Palestinian refugees be addressed?
4. Should aid rely more on federal and UN-funded aid, or should NGOs be enlisted to support? To what extent should individual organizations play a role?

Topic B: The Effects of COVID-19 on Refugees

Introduction

“If we ever needed reminding that we live in an interconnected world, the novel coronavirus has brought that home.”

These words, as stated by Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, remind the world of the fundamental crisis brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year, which has affected nearly all countries and endangers all humanity worldwide, regardless of geographic location, wealth, or status. With many basic services denied to them and with countries' borders closed to those seeking safety, refugees are among the most vulnerable minorities in this pandemic.

Refugee camps, many of which are overflowing with those rejected from an asylum, struggle to achieve social distancing protocols and are severely impacted by the losses their host countries suffer to their economy, food security, and healthcare. Undocumented refugees are also often excluded from national health services and other social welfare programs, putting them at an exponentially increased risk. Even those infected with COVID-19 often do not make the effort to seek health care, fearing deportation or government backlash. In a study conducted by the World Health Organization, more than half of refugees report that the novel coronavirus has brought about greater levels of depression, fear, and anxiety. One in five refugees also reported a decline in mental health and an increase in the use of drugs and alcohol. Additionally, limited access to information across language and cultural barriers, as well as discrimination against refugees, make refugees one of the hardest-hit populations to reach.

Possible Solutions

The disregarded human rights and opportunity brought upon by the appearance of COVID-19 within most refugee camps is one that should be addressed internationally, as a cumulative effort by all countries capable enough to help. Rather than fragmented efforts to provide humanitarian aid, it would be most efficient if capable nations could unite to provide aid collectively, possibly through the UNHCR. Aid can come in many forms, especially in the times of COVID-19, from funding to organizational support to supplies. No matter how small their contribution, should a union of nations work through the UNHCR to provide funding and aid to refugees across the world, help and relief can come quickly and efficiently to camps affected by COVID-19. Additionally, rather than simply address humanitarian aid, consider opportunities to also rebuild refugee camps' infrastructure, such as by establishing mental health programs, education systems, or by making public community centers. Stabilizing the COVID situation should still be a top priority, but as crisis abates, looking ahead to revising refugee camps' societies should also be something to look towards.

The singular power of UN task forces cannot dish out support and aid on its own. Consider the aid of [individual organizations](#) working to the same goal of helping refugees, backed by your nation's federal government. Take note that the role of these organizations should not be to be the sole backer of your plans' funding; they should be supporters for the implementation of your resolution, as well as advocates and researchers.

Bloc Positions:

Foreign aid given to refugees and developing nations during COVID has varied greatly among nations, with some increasing their aid budget, while others have cut their budget due to financial pressure. There may be an impression that rich countries, especially in the West, have been contributing more than enough to help refugees, but in reality, the international community has been failing to share the responsibility, failing to agree on a system to protect displaced people. Many wealthier states prioritize policies keeping refugees away, putting the pressure on lower and middle-income countries to do much more than their fair share.

As of June 2020, **Turkey, Colombia, Pakistan, Uganda, and Germany** host the top number of refugees globally, with **Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Myanmar** being the main sources of the refugee influx. However, due to the intensity of the situation and lack of national cooperation, refugees in host countries tend to be sidelined, or even completely forgotten.

As vaccines become more developed, so does its distribution. In the Asia-Pacific, **Nepal** has become the first country to vaccinate refugees as part of its national vaccination rollout.

For the Global Covid-19 Emergency response, the UNHCR had requested \$745 million USD in funding. Several countries have risen to donate, with the **United States** being the largest donor, followed closely by **Germany, the EU, the UK, and Japan**.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can your country plan accordingly to ensure relief can be sent to refugee camps?
2. What hygienic measures may you plan to take, in response to the situation in camps?
3. Realistically, how big of a priority would your country place upon helping refugees?
4. How can your nation implement your plans, and what support may you need?

Background Guide Written by Victoria Zhang

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