



UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES BACKGROUND GUIDE 2016

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2016 National Model United Nations Conference in Kobe (NMUN•Japan)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This year's staff is Director Tsesa Monaghan and Assistant Director Emily Johnson. Tsesa is currently pursuing her Master of Public Policy at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy in Erfurt, Germany. She has been on NMUN staff for four years, and is currently serving as an Under-Secretary-General at NMUN New York. Emily is currently a senior at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies, majoring in International Relations. She enjoyed attending NMUN NY 2016 as a delegate for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and has been involved with Model UN conferences in Japan.

The topics under discussion for UNHCR are:

- I. Protecting Children in Crisis and Conflict
- II. Addressing and Adapting to the Effects of Climate Change on the Environment

UNHCR is the agency with the primary purpose of protecting the welfare and rights of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. Considering the current global crisis of forced migration, UNHCR is a crucial committee within the UN system. However, the agency suffers from financial constraints that harm the effectiveness of its work. Taking this into account, it is paramount that delegates review carefully the mandate of UNHCR, as well as its governance and the work it carries out to understand how the body works and what actions it can realistically undertake in today's climate.

We hope you will find this Background Guide useful as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We highly encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in-depth, as well as use the Annotated Bibliography and Bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the conference, each delegation will submit a [position paper](#). Please take note of the [NMUN policies](#) on the website and in the [Delegate Preparation Guide](#) regarding plagiarism, codes of conduct, dress code, sexual harassment, and the awards philosophy and evaluation method. Adherence to these guidelines is mandatory.

The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#) are available to download from the NMUN website. This document includes the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure. It is thus an essential instrument in preparing for the conference, and a reference during committee.

If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the conference itself, feel free to contact the Deputy Secretary-General, Yvonne Jeffery, at yvonne@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations, and look forward to seeing you at the conference!

Sincerely,

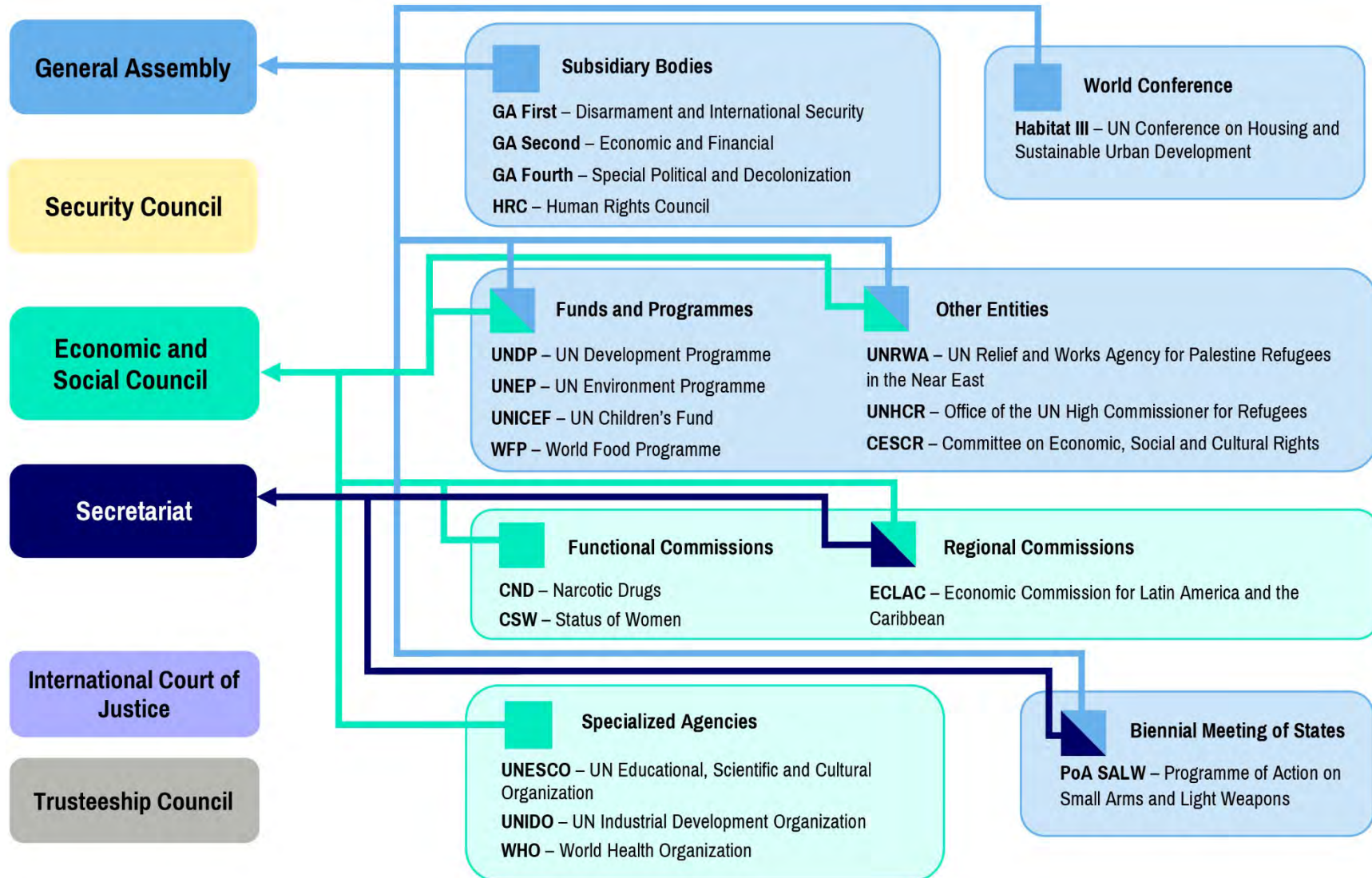
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United Nations System at NMUN

This diagram illustrates the UN System simulated at NMUN. It shows where each committee “sits” within the system, to help understand the reportage and relationships between the entities. Examine the diagram alongside the Committee Overview to gain a clear picture of the committee's position, purpose, and powers within the UN System.



Committee Overview

“While every refugee's story is different and their personal anguish, they all share a common thread of uncommon courage – the courage not only to survive, but to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives.”¹

Introduction

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the United Nations (UN) agency whose primary purpose is the protection of the welfare and rights of refugees.² It was established by the UN General Assembly (GA) in 1951 as a result of the aftermath of World War II.³ Initially, it had a three-year limited mandate to address the high number of Europeans who were displaced due to the war.⁴ At that time, UNHCR functioned with a 34-member staff.⁵ UNHCR faced its first significant emergency in 1956, following a violent Soviet intervention in Hungary, highlighting its essential role in delivering aid for all those fleeing the conflict and seeking refuge in neighboring countries.⁶ During the 1960s, the decolonization of Africa began, leading to involvement of UNHCR on several occasions, as was the case with crises in Asia and Latin America in the two following decades.⁷ Due to the necessity of UNHCR's continued work, the GA repeatedly extended UNHCR's mandate every three years until 2003, when it decided to prolong the mandate indefinitely, until the end of the refugee problem.⁸

The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a programme and fund of the United Nations, reporting to the Economic and Social Council and General Assembly.

Most of UNHCR's resources are dedicated to supporting operations at the field level, in order to address the needs of specific groups, such as refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and asylum seekers.⁹ A refugee is a person who, reasonably fearing to be persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political conviction, has left the country of their nationality or habitual residence.¹⁰ Further, the definition states that they are unable to or, because of such fear, are not willing to return to the sovereign territory of the country they fled.¹¹ IDPs are defined as individuals who have had to flee their homes, but have not crossed an international border.¹² Asylum seekers are those who look for protection in a different country, but whose claim for refugee status has not been ascertained; 2014 saw the highest number of asylum seekers ever recorded.¹³ All of these groups can be categorized as victims of “forced migration”.¹⁴

UNHCR provides humanitarian aid in a variety of forms, including food and nutritional supplements, basic shelter, as well long-term accommodation such as camps or other forms of housing, cash assistance, and legal services.¹⁵ The agency is also involved in efforts to integrate or, if refugees are able to return, to reintegrate them.¹⁶ UNHCR also works closely with other agencies to address the needs of individuals who have been displaced due to natural

¹ UNHCR, *High Commissioner António Guterres starts work at UNHCR*, 2005.

² UNHCR, *What We Do*, 2015.

³ UN General Assembly, *Refugees and Stateless Persons (A/RES/319 (IV))*, 1949; UNHCR, *History of UNHCR*, 2015.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ UNHCR, *History of UNHCR*, 2015.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ UN General Assembly, *Implementing actions proposed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to strengthen the capacity of his Office to carry out its mandate (A/RES/58/153)*, 2003.

⁹ UNHCR, *Executive Committee*, 2015.

¹⁰ *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1951; *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1967; UNHCR, *Refugees*, 2015.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² UNHCR, *Internally Displaced People*, 2015.

¹³ Phillips, *Asylum Seekers and Refugees: What are the Facts?* 2013, p. 2; UNHCR, *World at War. UNHCR Global Trends, Forced Displacement 2014*, 2015, p. 3.

¹⁴ Forced Migration Online, *What is forced migration?* 2012.

¹⁵ UNHCR, *Cash in Hand: Urban Refugees, the Right to Work and UNHCR's Advocacy Activities*, 2011; UNHCR, *Assistance*, 2015.

¹⁶ UNHCR, *UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps*, 2014; UNHCR, *Assistance*, 2015.

disasters, as was the case in 2010 with the floods in Pakistan and the earthquake in Haiti.¹⁷ A further concern are stateless individuals, who lack an official nationality due to discrimination, state succession, or conflict.¹⁸

UNHCR evolved over the decades and since there has been a dramatic shift in the dialogue surrounding the situation of refugees.¹⁹ From 1945 to 1985, UNHCR focused mainly on the resettlement of refugees; however, after this period, as the causes of displacement varied, the agency shifted towards the concept of repatriation as a possible solution.²⁰ In 1993, the idea of providing refugees with the possibility to return safely to their homes by providing temporary protective measures, including establishing basic material conditions, was solidified.²¹ From the mid-1990s, the number of cases related to refugees seeking to return home expanded, as measures to resolve Cold War conflicts increased.²² As a result, UNHCR's role in reintegration evolved to include infrastructure and community development, as well as a focus on the importance of reconciliation and peacebuilding in affected communities.²³

Governance, Structure and Membership

At present, UNHCR employs over 9,300 national and international staff members working in 125 countries, including in Geneva, Switzerland, where UNHCR's headquarters are located.²⁴ Additionally, UNHCR has increased its budget from \$300,000 in its first year to almost \$7 billion in 2015, and it now addresses the needs of over 46 million people worldwide.²⁵ UNHCR falls under the UN's Programmes and Funds, reports directly to the General Assembly (GA), and is governed by the Member States that make up its Executive Committee (ExCom).²⁶ The ExCom approves the agency's annual program priorities and budget.²⁷ Member States are elected by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to become members of the ExCom, and are selected according to equitable geographical allocation.²⁸ At its creation, the ExCom comprised 24 members; the membership has since grown to 98 Member States.²⁹ The ExCom reports directly to the GA Third Committee, and it must follow directives issued by either the GA or ECOSOC.³⁰ The ExCom meets once per year, usually in October, to review financial matters for the coming year, to give advice to the High Commissioner, to authorize appeals for funds, and to approve biennial targets.³¹ In 1995, the ExCom created a Standing Committee, which meets three times per year to discuss the work of the body as a whole, and any new conflicts to be addressed.³² The current High Commissioner, António Guterres, is in charge of the control of UNHCR and its steering; he must work in close collaboration with the Deputy High Commissioner and the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection and Operations to oversee the work of the agency's secretariat and its regional offices.³³

UNHCR's budget rests on four pillars: refugees, stateless people, reintegration programs, and IDPs.³⁴ This translates to a revised projected budget of over \$6.2 billion for 2015.³⁵ The budget stems almost entirely from voluntary donations by Member States, intergovernmental institutions, corporations, foundations, and individuals worldwide.³⁶ As a means of acquiring these donations, UNHCR releases an annual Global Appeal that provides detailed information regarding the major areas of concern for UNHCR, as well as supplementary appeals that address

¹⁷ UNHCR, *Internally Displaced People*, 2015.

¹⁸ UNHCR, *Stateless People*, 2015.

¹⁹ Chimni, *From Resettlement to Involuntary Repatriation: Towards a Critical History of Durable Solutions to Refugee Problems*, 2004, p. 54.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Macrae, *Aiding Peace...and War: UNHCR, Returnee Reintegration, and the Relief-Development Debate*, 1999.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ UN General Assembly, *Refugees and Stateless Persons (A/RES/319 (IV))*, 1949; UNHCR, *History of UNHCR*, 2015.

²⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global figures*, 2015; UN General Assembly, *Refugees and Stateless Persons (A/RES/319 (IV))*, 1949; UNHCR, *History of UNHCR*, 2015.

²⁶ New Zealand, *United Nations Handbook 2014-15*, 2014, p. 254.

²⁷ UNHCR, *Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, 2010, p. 2.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁹ UNHCR, *ExCom Members and How to Apply*, 2015.

³⁰ UNHCR, *ExCom Mandate and Statute*, 2015.

³¹ Ibid.; UNHCR, *ExCom Structure and Meetings*, 2015.

³² Ibid.

³³ UNHCR, *Governance and Organization*, 2015.

³⁴ UNHCR, *UNHCR's Finances and Budget*, 2014, p. 5.

³⁵ UNHCR, *UNHCR Global Appeal 2015 Update - Identifying needs and funding requirements*, 2015, p. 105.

³⁶ UNHCR, *Donors*, 2015.

specific situations worldwide.³⁷ Included in this budget are contributions from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF); it provides funding in the case of situations that require an immediate response, such as a natural disaster or violent conflict.³⁸ A major challenge for UNHCR's work is the ever-rising funding gap, which corresponded to 45% of the financial requirements in 2013; this means that 45% of the expenditure that is planned based on a needs-based approach cannot be financed.³⁹ In addition, humanitarian crises are not foreseeable in advance, which makes planning immensely difficult, especially as the exact amount of donations is also unknown at the beginning of each year.⁴⁰ Therefore, UNHCR applies a "phased approach", which adjusts planning and funding throughout the fiscal period.⁴¹ To address the growing difficulties in effectively and needs-based financing of humanitarian work, the High Commissioner has proposed another emergency response fund for large-scale crises and the inclusion of basic human security issues in development financing.⁴²

Mandate, Function and Powers

The basis for UNHCR's mandate is Article 14 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), which specifically recognizes the right of all individuals to seek asylum in another country.⁴³ The founding document of UNHCR is GA resolution 428 (V), known as the *Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (1950).⁴⁴ Here, UNHCR's mandate is defined as: "providing international protection, under the auspices of the United Nations, to refugees who fall within the scope of the present Statute and of seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees by assisting Governments and [...] private organizations to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of such refugees, or their assimilation within new national communities."⁴⁵

Other fundamental documents for UNHCR include the 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, which defines the term "refugee" as well as the rights and obligations of refugees; and the 1967 *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, which expanded the 1951 Convention and UNHCR's mandate to include refugees from conflicts occurring after 1951.⁴⁶ UNHCR's mandate also includes other groups, such as stateless people, as defined in the 1954 *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*, and the 1961 *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*.⁴⁷ While its mandate does not extend specifically to IDPs, UNHCR's expertise in displacement has resulted in the gradual inclusion of IDPs in its work.⁴⁸ The 1998 *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, adopted by ECOSOC, outline the rights and protections for IDPs.⁴⁹ They are paradigmatic for UNHCR.⁵⁰ In 2007, after a series of inter-agency consultations, the ExCom adopted the policy framework and implementation strategy on UNHCR's role in support of an enhanced humanitarian response to situations of internal displacement.⁵¹ The framework emphasizes the agency's primary responsibility to refugees and stipulates that aid to IDPs must be given in collaboration with national governments, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other UN agencies.⁵² The mandate of UNHCR was further expanded in the 2011 ExCom report entitled *UNHCR's role in support of an enhanced humanitarian response for the protection of persons affected by natural disasters*.⁵³ The report emphasizes UNHCR's primary focus on conflict-related disasters, and that its role in natural disaster relief

³⁷ UNHCR, *The Global Appeal and Supplementary Appeals*, 2015.

³⁸ UNHCR, *United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)*, 2015.

³⁹ UNHCR, *UNHCR Global Appeal 2015 Update - Identifying needs and funding requirements*, 2015, p. 96.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 102, 104.

⁴³ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948; UNHCR, *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 2010.

⁴⁴ UNHCR, *Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, 2010, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ UNHCR, *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 2010; UNHCR, *History of UNHCR*, 2015.

⁴⁷ UNHCR, *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*, 1954; UNHCR, *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*, 1961; UNHCR, *Stateless People*, 2015.

⁴⁸ UNHCR, *Internally Displaced People*, 2015.

⁴⁹ UN ECOSOC, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (E/CN.4/53/Add.2 (1998))*, 1998.

⁵⁰ UN OCHA, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, 2004.

⁵¹ UNHCR Executive Committee, *UNHCR's role in support of an enhanced humanitarian response to situations of internal displacement: Policy framework and implementation strategy*, 2007.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ UNHCR Executive Committee, *UNHCR's role in support of an enhanced humanitarian response for the protection of persons affected by natural disasters*, 2011.

should be limited to pre-existing refugee or displacement operations.⁵⁴ Notably, paragraph seven of this report draws attention to the framework's implications for state sovereignty, particularly when it comes to natural disasters.⁵⁵

UNHCR has adopted documents laying out policies to ensure that various refugee groups' needs are considered and that each individual has the right to participate in decisions that may affect their lives.⁵⁶ As the number of refugees has grown, UNHCR has increased its efforts to include a wide range of protective measures, including those set in place for the reintegration of refugees.⁵⁷ Reintegration is defined as being "virtually synonymous with 'sustainable' return, which implies a situation where a constructive relationship between returnees, civil society and the state is consolidated."⁵⁸ From this point, relief efforts have broadened to include sustainable development measures in regards to the reintegration of refugees, as well as a focus on conflict prevention and peacebuilding in areas of the world affected by internal and external conflicts.⁵⁹ It is in this context that the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in September 2015, are relevant for UNHCR, particularly Goal 10, which aims to reduce inequality within and among countries, and its Targets, especially Target 7 of Goal 10 on sustainable migration policies.⁶⁰ Other relevant Goals include Goal 5 on gender equality, Goal 11 on cities and human settlements and Goal 13 on climate change and its impact.⁶¹

Emergency response constitutes one of the key functions of UNHCR, which continually trains personnel to respond to situations as needed, and has the ability to mobilize over 300 skilled individuals in less than 72 hours.⁶² UNHCR has gathered stockpiles of required items in Copenhagen and Dubai that can be used in the event of an emergency.⁶³ UNHCR works through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to deliver humanitarian assistance in emergencies.⁶⁴ IASC's secretariat, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, coordinates relief efforts among major UN and non-UN humanitarian partners and seeks to effectively administer aid, as well as highlight areas of need in a given situation through the Cluster Approach.⁶⁵ Clusters consist of UN agencies and NGOs that deliver humanitarian aid according to their expertise.⁶⁶ UNHCR leads the clusters on shelter, protection, and camp coordination and management.⁶⁷

Partnerships with civil society are essential to providing the services and resources needed to address all aspects of UNHCR's mandate.⁶⁸ Local NGOs partner with UNHCR to ensure that aid is delivered effectively and in a timely manner.⁶⁹ UNHCR hosts an annual meeting that invites experts in the field, including national and international NGOs, to partake in a constructive dialogue on the topic of refugees.⁷⁰ Further, UNHCR participates in the Global Humanitarian Platform, a group of UN agencies and NGOs committed to the coordination of relief efforts, which endorsed the 2007 *Principles of Partnership*, outlining the importance of collaboration in responding to humanitarian crises.⁷¹ Partnerships facilitate funding and monitoring of situations through the pooling of resources.⁷²

⁵⁴ UNHCR Executive Committee, *UNHCR's role in support of an enhanced humanitarian response for the protection of persons affected by natural disasters*, 2011, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ UNHCR Executive Committee, *Age, Gender and Diversity Approach (EC/63/SC/CRP.14)*, 2012; UNHCR, *UNHCR Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Working With People and Communities for Equality and Protection*, 2011.

⁵⁷ Macrae, *Aiding Peace...and War: UNHCR, Returnee Reintegration, and the Relief-Development Debate*, 1999.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² UNHCR, *Emergency Response*, 2015.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)*, 2015; UNHCR, *UNHCR's Role in IASC Humanitarian Reform Initiatives and in the Strengthening of the Inter-Agency Collaborative Response to Internally Displaced Persons Situations*, 2005.

⁶⁵ Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)*, 2015

⁶⁶ UN OCHA, *What is the Cluster Approach?*

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ UNHCR, *Non-Governmental Organizations*, 2015. UNHCR, *Partners*, 2015.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ International Council of Volunteer Agencies, *Humanitarian Reform: Basic Information Leaflet Series Principles of Partnership*, 2010.

⁷² Ibid.

One example is the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, where several UN agencies work with local NGOs and governments to ensure that children can access educational services in times of crises.⁷³ UNHCR works with Member States to promote the effective application of existing international standards, as well as to enhance existing refugee policies, in areas that require improvement. One example is the *Ten-Point Plan of Action for Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration for Countries Along the Eastern and Southeastern Borders of European Union Member States*.⁷⁴ UNHCR also works closely with NGOs to change the way asylum seekers, migrants, and refugees are treated in host countries.⁷⁵

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

UNHCR held its 66th ExCom session between 5-9 October 2015.⁷⁶ Simultaneously, a meeting of the High-level Segment on the Afghan refugee situation occurred.⁷⁷ The ExCom mainly made decisions on financial matters, especially concerning adjustments due to rise in crises, particularly in Europe, and the fiscal gap of UNHCR; it also appealed for more generous donations by the international community.⁷⁸ Further, the issue of the “mega-crises” of Syria and Iraq, were debated; of note, the ExCom general debate was comprised of 125 delegates with 80 being active participants speaking on the floor.⁷⁹

The UN’s *Strategic Framework* for 2014-2015 highlights UNHCR’s goal in devising new strategies to work with Member States and organizations to find lasting solutions for persons of concern, as well as its objective of strengthening international protections, enhancing the capacity of host countries to receive asylum seekers, and further expanding and developing lasting emergency response capabilities.⁸⁰ The framework includes clear indicators of achievement in relation to its objectives, and enumerates UNHCR’s areas of focus for the 2014-2015 period.⁸¹ UNHCR has also established Global Strategic Priorities (GSPs) for 2014-2015, which provide a blueprint for how UNHCR will carry out its operations around the globe in accordance with international standards.⁸² The GSPs operationalize the *Strategic Framework*, detail the indicators assessing the impact of each area of focus, and draw attention to areas for global engagement and partnership possibilities.⁸³ GSPs for 2014-2015 include: reducing statelessness, improved birth registration, reducing discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence, as well as mortality, morbidity and malnutrition.⁸⁴ They also encompass improving shelter, the participation of people of concern, and building coexistence with hosting communities; all issues which touch upon the topics of this Background Guide.⁸⁵ UNHCR’s strategic planning considers every major area worldwide and gives detailed information on projected needs for refugee programs, statelessness programs, IDP help and reintegration projects.⁸⁶

The Middle East remain a geographic area of priority for UNHCR in 2015, while the situation in Europe has been given special emphasis.⁸⁷ Topical issues include, inter alia, improved emergency response protection, the registration of refugees and mixed migrations, preventing sexual and gender-based violence, and international-burden sharing and recognizing the contributions of host communities.⁸⁸ Furthermore, UNHCR launched a campaign in 2014 to end

⁷³ UNHCR, *Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies*, 2015.

⁷⁴ UNHCR, *Advocacy*, 2015; UNHCR, *Ten-Point Plan of Action for Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration for Countries Along the Eastern and Southeastern Borders of European Union Member States*, 2007; UNHCR, *Protection*, 2015.

⁷⁵ UNHCR, *Asylum and Migration*, 2015.

⁷⁶ UN General Assembly, *Report of the sixty-sixth session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme: Report of the Executive Committee (A/AC.96/1154)*, 2015, p. 9.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ UN General Assembly, *Proposed Strategic Framework for the Period 2014-2015*, 2012.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² UNHCR, *Global Strategic Priorities 2014-2015*, 2014.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁸⁶ UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2014-2015*, 2014; UNHCR, *UNHCR Global Appeal 2015 Update - Identifying needs and funding requirements*, 2015

⁸⁷ UNHCR, *Global Strategic Priorities 2014-2015*, 2014.

⁸⁸ UN General Assembly, *Report of the sixty-sixth session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme: Report of the Executive Committee (A/AC.96/1154)*, 2015, p. 10.

statelessness within a decade, as there are still 10 million people worldwide without citizenship.⁸⁹ Finally, UNHCR has set a priority of ameliorating the shelter and settlement situation of forcibly displaced people, and has developed nine guiding principles to this end.⁹⁰ It is in the context of this undertaking that more sustainable alternatives to refugee camps (for instance sustainable settlements that are closely linked with local hosting communities) are discussed, as camps often impose limitations on the rights and freedoms of their inhabitants.⁹¹ UNHCR has undergone major reform efforts in recent years to maximize efficiency and address gaps in areas that require attention.⁹² The *Age, Gender and Diversity Approach* has led to significant changes in the way in which UNHCR and its partners interact with individuals fleeing their homes.⁹³ Additionally, new areas of focus have been introduced, such as addressing the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and intersex refugees.⁹⁴

Conclusion

As the global community faces the worst crises of forced displacement in history, millions worldwide will continue to require the aid of UNHCR.⁹⁵ Only ten countries: Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, the Central African Republic, Iraq, and Eritrea, are the source of 77% of the world's refugee population.⁹⁶ UNHCR is continuously evolving to meet the needs of refugees, yet faces increasing challenges due to the dimensions of the task.⁹⁷ UNHCR plays a vital part in humanitarian affairs and remains essential in providing life-saving resources for individuals who have been forced to flee their homes.⁹⁸ While the responsibility to address IDPs remains primarily at the local and national level, the increasing number of IDPs around the world requires a collaborative effort by the international community to ensure their protection in the event of a conflict or immediate crisis.⁹⁹ A good example are the cases of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, displaced due to civil war.¹⁰⁰ Addressing the needs of refugees and stateless individuals necessitates a similar approach, given the limited resources available within many of the Member States receiving refugees.¹⁰¹ It is in this context that one of the challenges for UNHCR's future strategic management becomes apparent: the increasing number of protracted conflicts calls for more durable solutions than can be facilitated by two-year plans and insufficient financing.¹⁰²

⁸⁹ UNHCR, *A special Report. Ending Statelessness within 10 Years*, 2014; UNHCR, *UNHCR launches 10-year global campaign to end statelessness*, 2014.

⁹⁰ UNHCR, *Global Strategy for Settlement and Shelter. A UNHCR Strategy 2014-2018*, 2014, p. 11.

⁹¹ UNHCR, *UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps*, 2014, pp. 4, 12.

⁹² UN General Assembly, *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/67/12)*, 2012.

⁹³ UNHCR, Executive Committee, *Age, Gender and Diversity Approach (EC/63/SC/CRP.14)*, 2012.

⁹⁴ UNHCR, *The Protection of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Asylum-Seekers and Refugees*, 2010.

⁹⁵ UNHCR, *World at War. UNHCR Global Trends, Forced Displacement 2014*, 2015.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁷ UNHCR, *UNHCR Global Appeal 2015 Update - Identifying needs and funding requirements*, 2015; UNHCR, *What We Do*, 2015.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ UN ECOSOC, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, 1998.

¹⁰⁰ UNHCR, *World at War. UNHCR Global Trends, Forced Displacement 2014*, 2015.

¹⁰¹ UNHCR, *What We Do*, 2015.

¹⁰² Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network, *Synthesis report United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Executive Summary*, 2014, p. 3.

Annotated Bibliography

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2010). *Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* [Report]. Retrieved 15 August 2015 from: <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c39e1.html>

This document contains not only the Statute, but also a helpful introductory note on UNHCR's history and membership. Delegates should begin their research by reviewing the Statute, as it contains integral information in regards to the function of the committee. The Statute details the rules of procedure for UNHCR, its mandate and functions, and the structure of the organization. Through this source, delegates will gain a better understanding of why this body was created, as well as the intended work of the body and the constraints within which it must function.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2015). *Executive Committee* [Website]. Retrieved 15 August 2015 from <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c83.html>

This Website provides a detailed explanation of ExCom, its history, and its role. It also provides links to all major forms of documentation produced by ExCom, including documents that have been submitted by the Standing Committee. In addition, it provides a better understanding for delegates of the process Member States must undergo to become members of ExCom, as well as of the role of observers in the annual meeting.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2015). *Partners* [Website]. Retrieved 14 August 2015 from: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c296.html>

In order to adequately address the needs of millions of refugees around the world, UNHCR must work with a wide variety of partners. This resource will allow for a more in-depth understanding of the various partnerships utilized by UNHCR, including those with NGOs, private sector partners, and the European Union. Included in this source is an overview of the guidelines utilized for effective partnerships, as well as a comprehensive directory of all UNHCR partners.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2015). *UNHCR Global Appeal 2015 Update – Identifying needs and funding requirements*. Retrieved 16 August 2015 from: <http://www.unhcr.org/5461e5f30.html>

This resource should serve as a source of information regarding the current work of UNHCR. It is a periodic publication of UNHCR that notes all current projects underway worldwide, subdivided by region. Moreover, it contains an overview of the current budget, as well as detailed information regarding global strategic priorities. Finally, the Global Appeal Update explains how to begin addressing statelessness, the importance of self-reliance, and the means through which to establish durable solutions for refugees worldwide.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2015). *World at War. UNHCR Global Trends Forced Displacement 2014* [Report]. Retrieved 19 July 2015 from: <http://unhcr.org/556725e69.html>

This Report is essential in understanding the current situation and recent dramatic global changes in the populations of concern for UNHCR. It offers a compact overview on key figures and their geographical distribution, thus ensuring comparability. Demographic data and other information on the different concerned groups are also listed in detail. At the end of the report, delegates can find a table, which lists all people of concern for UNHCR by category and according to country or territory of stay. A second table lists the population of concern according to countries and territories of origin. By reading the report, delegates will get a more profound understanding of the dimensions of global forced migration, asylum seeking and statelessness. Further, it will enhance their factual knowledge through the detailed examples and case studies. Overall, the report presents, in a compact manner, all the challenges UNHCR is facing at the moment.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Executive Committee. (2011). *UNHCR's role in support of an enhanced humanitarian response for the protection of persons affected by natural disasters* [Report]. Standing Committee, 51st meeting. Retrieved 20 August 2015 from: <http://www.unhcr.org/4df08ba39.pdf>

This report highlights why it is important for UNHCR to focus on its existing mandate for refugees in conflict-related situations. It clearly outlines operating differences in IDP versus refugee situations, and the added complexity of engaging in natural disaster relief. The document establishes that UNHCR's intervention with IDPs and natural disasters will be limited and strictly in support of national governments or other agencies, in order to respect national sovereignty and

use its limited resources efficiently. Delegates will find this document useful to establish the scope of their discussion and ensure they understand existing protocol and UNHCR's unique role in the IASC Cluster Approach, as decided by its governing body.

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I. Protecting Children in Crisis and Conflict

Introduction

Worldwide, the number of people uprooted and displaced from their homes due to crisis and conflict has reached an all-time high of 60 million; almost half of these individuals are children.¹⁰³ At the same time, over 230 million children are additionally vulnerable, living in areas affected by conflict or at a risk of natural disaster or health epidemics.¹⁰⁴ Children represent the most vulnerable group of refugees and displaced persons, facing great risks to their safety and well-being. For girls, they face an increased risk of harmful practices, such as forced marriage, and sexual abuse and violence, while boys face a higher risk of being forced into child labor or joining armed forces.¹⁰⁵ Further, unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) are especially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

This issue has gained much attention recently as Europe hosts an unprecedented number of refugees and has demonstrated a lack of preparedness to protect children; however, this is a truly global issue impacting every member state that is home to refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) itself has also been criticized for its inadequate response to the needs of children refugees, particularly UASC.

Experiencing trauma at a young age has life-long effects on individuals, harming their cognitive and social-emotional development.¹⁰⁶ Further, as the average duration of displacement continues to increase, humanitarian responses will need to not only be strengthened for short-term emergencies, but also respond to the long-term needs of displaced children.¹⁰⁷ The need for international action is clear. This background guide will introduce the international and regional framework underpinning this issue, as well as the work of the international system thus far. The topics of protection and critical services will also be discussed.

International and Regional Framework

One of the most important international conventions when children are being discussed is the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989).¹⁰⁸ This document, signed and ratified by almost every UN Member State, is critical in that it elucidates the critical rights that children are entitled to as individuals. In regards to refugees, it focuses on the protection of children as the biggest priority, but also touches on such issues as legal status. The *Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* was also added in 2000.¹⁰⁹ The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are also an important framework for children's rights; for example, SDG 4 on the right to education must be achieved even in conflict and crisis.¹¹⁰

In addition to the CRC, a number of international and regional conventions underpin the UNHCR's response to children in crisis and conflict. The *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951) and its 1967 *Protocol* form the foundation of the work of the UNHCR, and define refugees, as well as their legal protections and the obligations of states.¹¹¹ The *Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* (1954) clarifies obligations of Member States to address the needs of stateless persons in order for them to live in security and dignity, and reinforces their rights.¹¹² Finally, the *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness* (1961) cites the importance of reducing and eventually eliminating statelessness.¹¹³

¹⁰³ World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat, *Restoring Humanity: Synthesis of the Consultation Process for the World Humanitarian Summit*, 2015, p. viii; UNHCR, *Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase*, 2015.

¹⁰⁴ World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat, *Restoring Humanity: Synthesis of the Consultation Process for the World Humanitarian Summit*, 2015, p. 37.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Sirin et al., *The Educational and Mental Health Needs of Syrian Refugee Children*, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Save the Children, *A New Deal for Every Forcibly Displaced Child*, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ UN GA, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989.

¹⁰⁹ UN GA, *Optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/RES/54/263)*, 2001.

¹¹⁰ United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 4*.

¹¹¹ *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1951; *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1967.

¹¹² *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*, 1954.

¹¹³ *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*, 1961.

Various regional frameworks exist as well, including the African Union's (AU) *Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa*, also referred to as the *Kampala Convention* (2012).¹¹⁴ The framework established in the Convention "legally binds governments to protect the rights and wellbeing of people forced to flee their homes by conflict, violence, disasters and human rights abuses" on the continent of Africa, specifically focused on including internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹¹⁵

Further, a number of guidelines offer advice to member states in responding to displaced children. This includes the Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, which are guidelines established in 2004 by various United Nations (UN) agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on how to best protect refugees who are unaccompanied minors.¹¹⁶ UNHCR also produced *Guidelines on Reunification of Refugee Families* in 1983.¹¹⁷ There are also the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*.¹¹⁸

Role of the International System

UNHCR is the main actor in the international system responsible for the protection of displaced people, including IDPs, asylum-seekers, refugees, and stateless people.¹¹⁹ As such, UNHCR devotes much its energy to protecting children in particular during crisis and conflict. UNHCR works closely with governments, NGOs, and IOs on many different facets of this issue, for example, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and Doctors without Borders.¹²⁰ For example, they work with governments to ensure that births are registered, even in conflict and crisis, as birth registration is critical to ensuring that children get the services and resources they need.¹²¹ Without being registered, it is difficult for children to have their human rights realized.¹²² Additionally, they work with these partners on family unification programs.¹²³

The main UN body responsible for children's issues is UNICEF. In addition to providing policy advice to governments, UNICEF offers direct services and supplies for children refugees, such as supporting the creation of schools in refugee camps, providing critical goods such as water and tents, and supporting refugee integration in host countries.¹²⁴ They encourage other agencies and organizations working to support refugees to put the needs of children first.¹²⁵

Various NGOs and IOs play a critical role in conducting research on the status of displaced children, both focused on specific country situations, as well as general research on the global situation. In countries, NGOs can offer such services as legal advice, or advocate on behalf of children displaced by crisis or conflict, such as the International Refugee Rights Initiative, based in the United Kingdom, or Refugees International, based in the United States.¹²⁶ In responding to humanitarian crises, the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Food Programme (WFP), IFRC, and the International Committee of the Red Cross all play particularly important roles in addressing the immediate needs of people.¹²⁷

Most recently, the international community came together to discuss humanitarian crises at the first World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in May 2016, with an unprecedented number of stakeholders convening, from

¹¹⁴ African Union, *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention)*, 2012.

¹¹⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *The Kampala Convention, Two Years On: Time to Turn Theory into Practice*, 2014.

¹¹⁶ International Committee of the Red Cross, *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, 2004.

¹¹⁷ UNHCR, *Guidelines on Reunification of Refugee Families*, 1983.

¹¹⁸ ECOSOC, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2)*, 1998.

¹¹⁹ UNHCR, *About Us*.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*; UNHCR, *Shelter*; Moboe, *More than 100,000 refugees vaccinated against cholera in Tanzania*, 2015.

¹²¹ UNHCR, Executive Committee, Sixtieth session, *Child protection including education*, 2014.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ UNICEF, *Children on the Move*.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Center for Gender and Refugee Studies et al., *A Treacherous Journey: Child Migrants Navigating the U.S. Immigration System*, 2014; International Refugee Rights Initiative, *Rights in Exile Programme*; Refugees International, *Our Mission*.

¹²⁷ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Working Partners*.

Member States, UN agencies, private sector, and civil society.¹²⁸ An education fund for children in emergencies and in protracted crises was launched, while children were also mentioned often as an especially vulnerable group.¹²⁹

Protecting Children Fleeing Conflict

Around the world, millions of children are fleeing from their homes, often times with families, but also many times alone.¹³⁰ Without a doubt, they are the most vulnerable group of people fleeing conflict and crisis, including in their countries of origin, transit countries, and host countries.¹³¹ Under international law, such as the CRC, they are entitled to protection. However, they face many dangers as they search for a new home, including the risk of being trafficked, abused, or exploited.¹³²

A factor that makes children especially vulnerable is their dependency on adults for their wellbeing and survival.¹³³ Amongst displaced children, certain groups are more likely to face higher vulnerability, including children with disabilities, orphaned children, and indigenous children or children from ethnic minorities.¹³⁴ Children and young people of all ages face large risks of violence and abuse, but the specific type of risk changes depending on the age.¹³⁵ One of the biggest challenges in protecting children is that very few cases of violence, abuse, and exploitation are reported and fully investigated, meaning that many perpetrators are never held accountable for their actions.¹³⁶

One strategy to protect children and give them the special attention required is creating Child Friendly Spaces (CFSs) in camps for refugees and IDPs.¹³⁷ Working with civil society partners, UNICEF has worked to implement such spaces around the world to respond to the immediate needs of children and young people during an emergency.¹³⁸ These spaces are intended to be respites for children who have experienced crisis and conflict, enabling them to “engage in education, psychosocial and recreational activities” with trained professionals such as social workers, teachers, and counsellors.¹³⁹ Unfortunately, the safety of such locations also cannot be guaranteed; recently, the bombing of a camp in Syria led to the destruction of a CFS that was visited by over 1,000 children regularly.¹⁴⁰ CFSs have the potential to ease children’s transitions into post-crisis recovery, and also empower families and communities to better care for their children.¹⁴¹

Unaccompanied and Separated Children

Amongst children and minors, UASC face especially heightened risks as they do not have adults looking out for them. Various UN agencies in partnership with civil society published guidelines in 2004 to provide policymakers and humanitarian actors with guidance on how to protect UASC throughout all stages of an emergency, with a focus on such priorities as preventing family separation and promoting family reunification.¹⁴² However, their implementation is far from universal.

There are various reasons a minor might end up fleeing or displaced as an UASC. For families living in places affected by conflict, children and young people can easily be separated from their parents or siblings in the immediate aftermath of an attack.¹⁴³ During chaotic moments while seeking safety in other countries, including while crossing the border or at transit points, families might get separated, but a lack of information and the general

¹²⁸ UN SG, *Chair’s Summary*, p. 1.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹³⁰ UNICEF, *Children on the Move*.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ UNHCR, *Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care*, 1994.

¹³⁴ UNICEF, *Protecting children from violence, exploitation and abuse*, 2011.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ UNICEF, *UNICEF-UNRWA condemn bombing of child friendly space in Khan Eishieh Camp in Syria*, 2016.

¹³⁸ Monier et al., *Child-friendly space helps protect young survivors of Haiti earthquake*, 2010.

¹³⁹ UNICEF, *UNICEF-UNRWA condemn bombing of child friendly space in Khan Eishieh Camp in Syria*, 2016; Monier et al., *Child-friendly space helps protect young survivors of Haiti earthquake*, 2010.

¹⁴⁰ UNICEF, *UNICEF-UNRWA condemn bombing of child friendly space in Khan Eishieh Camp in Syria*, 2016.

¹⁴¹ UNICEF, *Guidelines for Child Friendly Spaces in Emergencies*, 2011, pp. 2-4.

¹⁴² International Committee of the Red Cross et al., *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied Children and Separated Children*, 2004.

¹⁴³ Irwin, *Escaping violence in South Sudan: Lives uprooted, families torn apart*, 2016.

setting prevents them from being able to be reunited with all their family members.¹⁴⁴ Some minors have also been sent by their families to seek safety in safer countries, with the hope of bringing the rest of the family along later.¹⁴⁵

These children face extra challenges in every step of their way to safety. The issuing of protecting children fleeing from conflict has recently gained much attention in Europe as many European countries have agreed to host refugees and asylum seekers, but have been underprepared to meet the needs of minors in particular.¹⁴⁶ Estimates put the number of UASCs arriving in Europe in 2015 at 26,000.¹⁴⁷ However, reception facilities are often unable to cope with the large influx of refugees, and do not have enough services available to UASCs.¹⁴⁸ Many reception centers lack translators or staff trained in identifying victims of abuse and trafficking, and are often unable to offer these minors housing separated from adults that is adequate to meet their needs and guarantees protection.¹⁴⁹

UASCs are often at an extra risk to be smuggled due to their unfamiliarity with legal processes and difficulties navigating legal systems.¹⁵⁰ They are also especially vulnerable to being further taken advantage of by smugglers, including facing risks of sexual exploitation, coercion into committing criminal acts, or use in recruitment by smugglers.¹⁵¹ Currently, more than 10,000 displaced children who were registered are now missing in Europe.¹⁵² While some of these minors are likely safe with family, officials do not know how many of these children have been exploited by traffickers and criminal gangs, and cite a high risk of these minors being targeted.¹⁵³

Providing Critical Services to Child Refugees

Children have distinct needs that must be considered in humanitarian response to ensure that children can realize their human rights. Beyond the immediate concerns of safety and security, critical services that will ensure the long-term wellbeing of children should be emphasized.

Education

All children, including displaced children, have a right to education, as established in international law.¹⁵⁴ This has been further emphasized in SDG 4: “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.”¹⁵⁵ High quality primary education is critical in providing refugee children with a strong foundation on which to build further knowledge and can also promote peace.¹⁵⁶ Further, schools should provide physical protection for students, as children who are in safe schools are more protected from threats of exploitation, violence, and recruitment for armed forces.¹⁵⁷ Well-trained teachers can also help identify children who are vulnerable to these threats and can ensure they receive the needed services.¹⁵⁸ However, around the world, 426 million children, or one in four school-aged children, live in conflict-affected countries, and 75 million of them are being deprived of their right to education or are at great risk of missing out on education.¹⁵⁹

Providing education to displaced children has been one of the biggest priorities of UNHCR in its work with children, and has also been emphasized by the international community in discussing displaced children. For the past few years, the work of UNHCR in the field of education has been guided by its Education Strategy, which is grounded in the 1951 Refugee Convention and other relevant human rights documents.¹⁶⁰ Working with Ministries of Education

¹⁴⁴ UNHCR, *Europe Refugee Emergency Briefing Note: Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, 2015, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴⁵ Townsend, *10,000 refugee children are missing, says Europol*, 2016.

¹⁴⁶ UNICEF, *Protecting children from violence, exploitation and abuse*, 2011.

¹⁴⁷ Wintour, *Ministers urged to spell out details of UK plan to take in Syrian children*, 2016.

¹⁴⁸ UNHCR, *Europe Refugee Emergency Briefing Note: Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, 2015, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ UNHCR, *Europe Refugee Emergency Briefing Note: Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, 2015.

¹⁵¹ Europol-Interpol, *Report on Migrant Smuggling Networks*, 2016, p. 11.

¹⁵² Townsend, *10,000 refugee children are missing, says Europol*, 2016.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ UNHCR, *Education*.

¹⁵⁵ UN, *Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 4*.

¹⁵⁶ UNHCR, Division of Internal Protection, *Education Strategy*, 2012, p. 10; UNHCR, Executive Committee, Sixtieth session, *Child protection including education*, 2014, p. 7.

¹⁵⁷ UNHCR, Division of Internal Protection, *Education Strategy*, 2012, p. 14.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ UNICEF, *Education Cannot Wait: A Fund for Education in Emergencies*, 2016, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ UNHCR, Division of Internal Protection, *Education Strategy*, 2012, p. 7.

and civil society, UNHCR collects and interprets data to evaluate and measure educational attainment, and also works on informal education.¹⁶¹ UNHCR views education as a tool to promote human potential, but there are many challenges to realize these objectives and implementing their strategies.¹⁶²

At the recent WHS, civil society advocated for the goal that no child displaced by conflict or crisis should be out of school for more than a month.¹⁶³ The UN Special Envoy for Global Education also announced the creation of a new fund at the Summit to support the education of refugees around the world, entitled Education Cannot Wait.¹⁶⁴

Despite these advances and prioritizations, many challenges remain, such as how to provide education in an emergency and how to make education for refugees inclusive; many further marginalized groups are at an increased risk of not having their right to education realized, including “children and young people with physical and cognitive disabilities; overaged learners who have missed out on years of schooling; and children associated with armed forces.”¹⁶⁵ Further, for those displaced children who do have access to education, it is often low-quality and more represents a space place than a place of learning.¹⁶⁶ There is an extreme shortage of teachers for displaced children, with many lacking sufficient training, in spite of the fact that the quality of teaching staff is the most important factor in determining the quality of learning.¹⁶⁷ In some countries, tuition fees deter families from being able to enroll their children in school after a crisis.¹⁶⁸

Health Care

Women and children are most vulnerable to health risks while fleeing conflict and crisis.¹⁶⁹ Their health risks include malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, HIV/AIDS, measles, and acute respiratory infections; health risks are intensified due to the lack of access to food, clean water, and health and sanitation services, as well as overcrowding in refugee camps and the disruptions to or destruction of health care systems.¹⁷⁰ Children under the age of 5 “have the highest mortality rates in emergency situations,” with the majority of deaths being caused by communicable diseases.¹⁷¹

UNHCR has a number of priorities that they advocate for and support in the promotion of refugees’ access to primary health care, including “HIV prevention, protection and treatment, reproductive health services, food security and nutrition, and water, sanitation and hygiene services.”¹⁷² These objectives include ensuring that refugees’ access to primary health care is comparable to citizens of a country to the greatest extent possible, which also applies to children.¹⁷³

One of the greatest health care needs for refugee children is mental health care services.¹⁷⁴ Children fleeing conflict and crisis are likely to have experienced much trauma, having witnessed or experienced violence or experiencing the death of family members and loved ones.¹⁷⁵ According to one study, as many as half of Syrian refugee children have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹⁷⁶ Further, children fleeing conflict and crisis are at greater risk of exploitation and abuse, which in turn means that children’s physical and mental health can be harmed in both the short and long-

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁶³ World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat, *Restoring Humanity: Synthesis of the Consultation Process for the World Humanitarian Summit*, 2015.

¹⁶⁴ UNICEF, *Education Cannot Wait: A Fund for Education*, 2016; Brown, *We Cannot Let Humanitarian Crises Deny the World’s Children an Education*, 2016; UN SG, *Chair’s Summary*, p. 5.

¹⁶⁵ UNHCR, Division of Internal Protection, *Education Strategy*, 2012, p. 7.

¹⁶⁶ Dryden-Peterson, *Refugee Education: A Global Review*, 2011, pp. 6-7.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁶⁸ Monier et al., *Child-friendly space helps protect young survivors of Haiti earthquake*, 2010.

¹⁶⁹ UNICEF, *Health in Emergencies*, 2003.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² UNHCR, *Ensuring Access to Health Care: Operational Guidance on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas*, 2011; UNHCR, *Public Health*.

¹⁷³ UNHCR, *Ensuring Access to Health Care: Operational Guidance on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas*, 2011.

¹⁷⁴ Sirin et al., *The Educational and Mental Health Needs of Syrian Refugee Children*, 2015.

¹⁷⁵ Sirin et al., *The Educational and Mental Health Needs of Syrian Refugee Children*, 2015.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

term.¹⁷⁷ As discussed, CFSs in camps are one possibility to provide critical mental health resources to displaced children.¹⁷⁸

Long-term refugees

While providing critical services during humanitarian emergencies is highly important, an increasing challenge is providing services, including education and healthcare, to children and youth who are growing up as refugees.¹⁷⁹ This is referred to as a protracted refugee situation (PRS).¹⁸⁰ Today, the average duration of displacement a person faces is close to two decades.¹⁸¹ While their immediate needs of safety may be met, “their basic rights and essential economic, social, and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile,” and they are essentially living in limbo, with uncertain futures.¹⁸² While their needs are different than those of recently displaced children, they also must be addressed.

It is especially important to address the needs of children who are growing up in refugee camps; in some areas of the globe, second and third generations are being born and raised in refugee camps, to the great detriment of their human rights.¹⁸³ Some of these situations include the 4 million Palestinian refugees registered with the UN Relief and Works Administration (UNRWA) and excluded from the mandate of the UNHCR, Karen and Karenni refugees along the border of Thailand and Myanmar, and Somali refugees in Kenya.¹⁸⁴ PRSs push many families into poverty, as they find themselves without a way to provide for themselves economically.¹⁸⁵

Conclusion

UNHCR has underscored the importance of addressing the unique needs of children who are displaced from their homes. Due to their age and dependence on adults, they are especially vulnerable to such issues as violence, abuse, and exploitation. Among children, some groups are particularly vulnerable, including UASC, children with disabilities, and girls. UNHCR does much work to promote the safety and protection of displaced children and provide them with key resources and services, such as education and health care. However, many challenges remain in ensuring that children can fully realize their human rights and fulfill their potentials.

Further Research

While much work has been done on this issue so far, it is clear that the problems facing children fleeing crisis and conflict are not yet resolved. Delegates should think about how this issue impacts their Member State, and understand the situation of displaced children in their country, as well as the policies in place to support them. What are the biggest challenges in implementing the many international guidelines and agreements to protect children fleeing conflict? Where are current discussions and documents lacking? How does protecting displaced children fit into the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda?

¹⁷⁷ UNICEF, *Protecting children from violence, exploitation and abuse*, 2011.

¹⁷⁸ UNICEF, *Guidelines for Child Friendly Spaces in Emergencies*, 2011.

¹⁷⁹ Save the Children, *A New Deal for Every Forcibly Displaced Child*, 2016.

¹⁸⁰ UNHCR, Executive Committee, *Protracted Refugee Situations (EC/54/SC/CRP/14)*, 2004, p. 1.

¹⁸¹ Save the Children, *A New Deal for Every Forcibly Displaced Child*, 2016.

¹⁸² UNHCR, Executive Committee, *Protracted Refugee Situations (EC/54/SC/CRP/14)*, 2004, p. 1.

¹⁸³ Milner et al., *Responding to protracted refugee situations: Lessons from a decade of discussion*, 2011, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-7.

¹⁸⁵ Milner et al., *Responding to protracted refugee situations: Lessons from a decade of discussion*, 2011.

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International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees & World Vision. (2004). *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied Children and Separated Children*. Retrieved 23 May 2016 from:

http://www.unicef.org/protection/IAG_UASCs.pdf

These guidelines were created in partnership between various NGOs and UN agencies and overview important considerations for Unaccompanied and Separated Children. It is important that this group gets special protection as they are amongst the most vulnerable in crisis and conflict. These guidelines put forth recommendations for NGOs, governments, and IOs dealing with UASC. Delegates should familiarize themselves with this document to go into further depth on how to protect one subgroup of children in crisis, and understand what some of their most pressing needs are.

Save the Children. (2016). *A New Deal for Every Forcibly Displaced Child*. Retrieved 24 May 2016 from:

https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/A_New_Deal_for_Every_Forcibly_Displaced_Child.pdf

The international NGO Save the Children produced this report in preparation for the World Humanitarian Summit, highlighting which priorities and issues should be discussed that are affecting refugee children. It provides a lot of up-to-date information about the current challenges facing states and children around the world, as well as recommendations. Some of the topics discussed include education, safety and protection, and long-term displacement of children and youth.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Division of Internal Protection. (2012). *Education Strategy*.

Retrieved 24 May 2016 from: <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/5149ba349/unhcr-education-strategy-2012-2016.html>

This document overviews UNHCR's strategy in ensuring refugee children have access to education. It highlights the needs of especially vulnerable refugee children, including those with disabilities and children associated with armed forced, as well as highlighting the gender inequality that persists. UNHCR set targets for 2016, including improving learning in primary schools, which should be helpful in understanding the work of UNHCR on this topic in the past few years.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Executive Committee, Sixtieth session. (2014). *Child protection including education* [Report]. Retrieved 24 May 2016 from:

<http://www.unhcr.org/excom/standcom/53aa91099/child-protection-including-education.html?query=protecting%20children%20in%20emergencies>

This paper overviews the work of UNHCR in protecting children who are fleeing conflict or seeking asylum, including refugees and internally displaced children. It provides a concise overview of progress that the organization made in the two years since the previous report. It highlights the special risks that children face, the role of national systems in protecting children's rights, and areas that have been improved upon, such as providing refugee children with education. Delegates may find this source helpful in providing concrete examples of areas UNHCR works on for this topic, as well as areas needing improvement.

World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat. (2015). *Restoring Humanity: Synthesis of the Consultation Process for the World Humanitarian Summit*. Retrieved 22 July 2016 from:

<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Restoring%20Humanity-%20Synthesis%20of%20the%20Consultation%20Process%20for%20the%20World%20Humanitarian%20Summit.pdf>

This report is a summary of the consultative process with civil society leading up to the World Humanitarian Summit. It will be a helpful document for delegates to familiarize themselves with, as it provides insight into the role of civil society in international discussions, as well as what some of NGOs' current priorities are around the world. Children were discussed on multiple occasions, including highlighting the importance of age-appropriate humanitarian responses,

lifting children out of crisis, providing education in emergencies, and mainstreaming children's needs in humanitarian response.

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II. Addressing and Adapting to the Effects of Climate Change on the Environment

“The issue of equity is crucial. Climate affects us all, but does not affect us all equally. Those who are least able to cope are being hit hardest. Those who have done the least to cause the problem bear the gravest consequences.”
 - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon¹⁸⁶

Introduction

As global warming proceeds, the Earth’s climate is changing at a rapid speed, causing the Earth’s temperature and sea-level to rise, as well as drought and other extreme weather events that make places uninhabitable and displace people.¹⁸⁷ Since the 1990s, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been working to protect those displaced by natural disasters induced by climate change, and to build up resilience of communities and people considered vulnerable to the effects of climate change.¹⁸⁸ The number of people displaced by climate change-related disasters and violent conflicts has been increasing continuously, as people are 60% more likely to be displaced now than they were in the 1970s.¹⁸⁹ Since 2008, the average number of people being displaced from their homes due to natural disasters has been 26.4 million people per year, which is equivalent to one person being displaced every second.¹⁹⁰ More than 19.3 million people were displaced by disasters in 100 countries in 2014, and UNHCR expects the number to be between 250 and 1,000 million over the next 50 years.¹⁹¹

The worst case scenario of climate change-related displacement is for a whole community or state to be displaced by the rising sea-levels. It is estimated that 665,000 to 1.7 million people living in the Pacific countries could be displaced by 2050 due to rising sea-levels.¹⁹² The low-lying Pacific island countries of Tuvalu, Kiribati, and the Maldives could disappear within the next 30-60 years.¹⁹³ The disappearance of a whole country would also result in culture loss, which is a huge part of people’s identities; how to preserve their culture is another question that needs to be answered.¹⁹⁴

Climate change-related disasters also increase the risks of violent conflicts such as inter-group violence and civil war, driven by poverty and insufficiency of food, water, and materials such as fuel.¹⁹⁵ In 2007, the conflict in Darfur, Sudan was acknowledged as the first climate change conflict by United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, as its fundamental cause was scarcity of water.¹⁹⁶ Data shows that if temperature increases by 1%, the number of civil wars will increase by 4.5% in the same year; as the number of civil war increases, so does the number of refugees.¹⁹⁷

This background guide will provide delegates with information on important documents, conferences, and organizations to understand the actions taken from many aspects in addressing the effects of climate change and displacements induced by it. It also will illustrate UNHCR’s role and responsibilities in the international community by referring to its past work in protecting those displaced by climate change, and noting the further needed actions to be taken. In hopes to foster fruitful discussion during the conference, this background guide will also share the concerns, arguments, and unmet needs commonly discussed by the international community regarding the issue of climate change displacements.

¹⁸⁶ UNSSC, *Environmental Sustainability, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction*.

¹⁸⁷ National Geographic, *Climate Refugee*.

¹⁸⁸ UNHCR, *Climate Change and Disasters*.

¹⁸⁹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Estimates 2015 people displaced by disasters*, 2015, p. 8.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Casillas, *Could climate change cause mass human migration?*, 2016.

¹⁹² Tomkiw, *Kiribati Climate Change Relocation Refugee Crisis? Sinking Low-Lying Island Nations In Pacific, Indian Oceans Seeking Solutions Before It's Too Late*, 2015.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ IPCC Working Group II, *Human Security*, 2014, p. 758.

¹⁹⁵ UNHCR, *UNHCR, the Environment & Climate Change*, 2015.

¹⁹⁶ Notaras, *Does Climate Change Cause Conflict?*, 2009.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

International and Regional Framework

There are a variety of international and regional frameworks underpinning the discussion of this topic and its various facets, including refugee statuses, climate change, disaster risk reduction (DRR), and humanitarian response.

When a person is displaced from his or her own country and claims asylum to seek protection in another country, the other state has the responsibility to grant asylum only under specific circumstances as codified in international law. As per the *United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 (1951 Convention)*, UNHCR has the authority and the responsibility to ensure international protection of refugees.¹⁹⁸ Member States who have signed on to this convention are responsible for protecting refugees' social rights, providing refugees at least the same status given to other foreign nationals within the state, and cooperating with UNHCR. The *1951 Convention* is the core of the global refugee regime and clarifies the rights of refugees and the definition of people qualified to be protected as refugees.¹⁹⁹

The 197 Parties to the Convention who have ratified *The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)* adopted in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit, gather annually for the UN Climate Change Conference, also known as Conference of the Parties (COP).²⁰⁰ In 2010, at the 16th session of the COP, the Parties agreed on the *Climate Adaptation Framework in Cancun*, also known as the *Cancun Agreement*.²⁰¹ One of the main objectives of the *Cancun Agreement* is to assist the most-likely victims of climate change and to strengthen disaster resilience of Member States, especially in developing countries, by providing financial, technological, and capacity-building support.²⁰² At the most recent COP in December 2015 (COP21), the *Paris Agreement* was adopted and signed by 175 parties (174 Member States and the European Union) on 22 April, 2016.²⁰³ It is an international agreement signed by the largest number of Member States on a single day, and the first ever international climate change agreement. It acknowledges that climate changes leads to human mobility, emphasizes the rights of migrants, and calls for the creation of a task force that would develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize, and address displacement related to climate change.²⁰⁴

Preparing for disasters is critical to reduce the number of displacements from climate change induced disasters. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (SFDRR) is a guideline for states to build resilience against disaster and reduce the impact of disasters on their people; it also recognizes the increasing and intensifying effects of climate change-related disasters.²⁰⁵ It recommends states to improve disaster preparedness in order to take immediate response to disasters and related displacements, and adopt policies and programs to address the human mobility induced by disasters.²⁰⁶

The necessity of coordinated humanitarian responses to climate change induced displacements was discussed at the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), which took place in Istanbul, Turkey in May 2016.²⁰⁷ Issues of climate change and displacements related to it were discussed among the High-Level Leaders' Roundtables during the conference.²⁰⁸ Displacements due to disasters and climate change was recognized as a growing threat, as participants reaffirmed the current international protection standards and emphasized the need to develop an international mechanism and legal framework that protects those who are displaced.²⁰⁹ The *Platform on Disaster Displacement* was launched during this summit with the aim of implementing the outcome of a state-led consultative process of the *Nansen Initiative*; the *Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of*

¹⁹⁸ Betts et al., *UNHCR: The Politics and Practice of Refugee Protection*, 2012, p. 84.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁰⁰ UNFCCC, *First Step to a Safer Future: Introducing The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, 2014; UNFCCC, *Status of Ratification of the Convention*, 2014.

²⁰¹ UNFCCC, *Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC/CP/2010/7/Add.1)*, 2011, p. 1.

²⁰² UNFCCC, *The Cancun Agreements*, 2010.

²⁰³ *Record: 177 parties signed the Paris Agreement*, 2016.

²⁰⁴ UNFCCC, *Report of the Conference of the Parties on its twenty-first session, held in Paris from 30 November to 13 December 2015 (FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1)*, 2015, p. 8.

²⁰⁵ Guadagno, *Human Mobility in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction*, 2016, p. 30.

²⁰⁶ UN General Assembly, *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (A/RES/69/283)*, 2015.

²⁰⁷ World Humanitarian Summit, *World Humanitarian Summit*, 2016.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ World Humanitarian Summit, *Standing Up for Humanity: Committing to Action (Chair's Summary by the United Nations Secretary-General)*, 2016, p. 5.

Disasters and Climate Change (Protection Agenda) (2015) is a toolbox for Member States to build stronger resilience and preparedness against disasters and displacements caused by it.²¹⁰

Role of the International System

UNHCR is prepared to respond to emergencies efficiently and immediately, and also supports Member States and other international organizations to be well-prepared in case of emergency. As a part of the 4th edition of the UNHCR's *Emergency Handbook*, issued in 2015, UNHCR provides the Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies (PPRE).²¹¹ PPRE offers guidance for UNHCR offices in each state to be prepared for refugee emergencies with the cooperation of the host governments, the UN, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).²¹² UNHCR places great importance on collaborating with civil society, and holds an Annual Consultation with NGOs in Geneva to exchange information and maintain and develop partnerships with national and international NGOs, which in 2012 focused on discussing climate change displacement issues.²¹³

The Global Protection Cluster (GPC), which aims to assist and protect people who have been displaced due to climate change and natural disasters, is led by UNHCR.²¹⁴ It provides tools and guidance mainly through documents collected by GPC and documents created by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a forum that brings together UN and non-UN international organizations (IOs) working on humanitarian aid.²¹⁵ IASC was established in order to strengthen humanitarian assistance in emergency situations and share information and best practices.²¹⁶ The members of IASC are representatives of IOs, and NGOs, and UN agencies, including UNHCR, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and International Organization for Migrants (IOM).²¹⁷ They gather annually to agree on a set of priorities for the year.²¹⁸ GPC also provides training and learning programs to enhance people's awareness and knowledge about natural disasters, and to improve their emergency response skill capacity, in addition to ensuring the effectiveness of the protection methods of the GPC.²¹⁹

UNHCR is also a member of the Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility, along with 6 other IOs. These organizations are gathered as experts of climate change-related displacements to provide knowledge and technical support on disaster induced human mobility resilience to UNFCCC.²²⁰ In the most recent set of recommendations from the Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility for COP21, the Advisory Group stated why and how human mobility should be addressed in the *Paris Agreement* and what kind of actions should be taken once the agreement is decided upon.²²¹ One of the 6 other organizations that is a member of the Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility is IOM. IOM is a related organization to the UN, working with 162 Member States on migration issues, and has been working on environmental migration issues since the early 1990s by providing humanitarian support to those displaced, promoting international cooperation between Member States, and advising governments on migrant-related issues.²²² IOM and UNHCR work closely together, including co-chairing the Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, which focuses on ensuring Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) displaced by a natural disaster or conflict have a life that is above minimum standard in camps and camp-like settings.²²³

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) plays an important role as an advisor to Member States and IOs on how to reduce the effects of climate change by providing scientific information related to climate change to policymakers. In its report written by hundreds of leading scientists, it assesses scientific facts on how climate

²¹⁰ Platform on Disaster Displacement, *Our Response*, 2016.

²¹¹ UNHCR, *UNHCR Emergency Handbook*, 2015.

²¹² UNHCR, *Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies (PPRE)*, 2015.

²¹³ UNHCR, *Non-Governmental Organizations*.

²¹⁴ UNHCR, *UNHCR, the Environment and Climate Change*, 2015, p. 9.

²¹⁵ Global Protection Cluster, *Essential Protection Guidance and Tools*, 2016.

²¹⁶ OCHA, *OCHA on Message: Inter-Agency Standing Committee*, 2012.

²¹⁷ IASC, *IASC Membership*.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Global Protection Cluster, *Training and Learning*.

²²⁰ Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility, *Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change UNFCCC – Paris COP-21*, 2015, p. 2.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

²²² IOM, *About IOM*, 2015.

²²³ CCCM Cluster, *Who We Are*.

change impacts the ecosystem, projects the future consequences and make suggestions on how policymakers should respond to the future risks.²²⁴ In its fifth assessment report on Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability (2014), it projected for the first time that climate change will increase the displacement of people over the 21st Century.²²⁵

Definition of Refugee & Legal Status of Climate Refugees

The term “refugee” is defined in Article 1A (2) of the *1951 Convention* as a person who, “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 or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”²²⁶ This definition, however, does not apply to people displaced by climate change-related disasters.²²⁷ As a consequence, there is no universally accepted term or definition of people displaced by climate change induced disasters.

The topic of how to define such individuals has been highly discussed by the international community. In the World Migration Report 2008, published by IOM, people displaced by disasters related to climate change are referred as “Environmental Migrants” to avoid the term “refugee,” as it is misleading and could hinder them from receiving protection promised for refugees by the international legal regime.²²⁸ Since UNHCR uses the term “migrant” to define people who are displaced but do not fit the legal definition of a refugee because they moved by choice, the term “Environmental Migrant” may seem fitting.²²⁹ However, this raises the issue that migrants are considered under each state’s own immigration laws and have a higher possibility of being mistreated, whereas refugees are considered and protected under national and international law, which means states are obliged to assist the asylum-seekers and UNHCR is responsible in helping the states.²³⁰

The Global Governance Project, which primarily researches global environment change and governance for sustainable development, proposes referring to people displaced by climate change related disasters as “Climate Refugees” and defines this concept as “people who have to leave their habitats, immediately or in the near future, because of sudden or gradual alterations in their natural environment related to at least one of three impacts of climate change: sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and drought and water scarcity.”²³¹ They also propose a new legal instrument to meet the needs of “climate refugees” instead of simply extending the definition of “refugees” from the *1951 Convention*.²³²

Contrastively, the Nansen Initiative does not use the term “Climate Refugee,” stating that the concept does not exist in the international law, and uses the term “people displaced across borders in the context of disasters and the effect of climate change” instead.²³³ In addition, many of the Pacific Islanders in danger of being displaced oppose to be called “refugees” but instead have expressed the view that being labeled “skilled migrants” would better protect their dignity, as some see a negative connotation with the word “refugee.”²³⁴

Case Study: A Fisherman from Kiribati

The Republic of Kiribati, a low-lying Pacific island state composed of 33 atolls, is one of the first countries in danger of becoming uninhabitable due to the rising sea-level.²³⁵ If scientists’ predictions are correct, much of the islands will start disappearing by 2030 and will be completely underwater by 2100 if nothing is done.²³⁶ Kiribati has already seen increasing damage caused by flooding and storms, inducing displacements of people living on the

²²⁴ IPCC, *IPCC Fact Sheet: What is IPCC?*, 2013, p. 1.

²²⁵ UNHCR, *Second Preparatory Meeting of the 22nd OSCE. Session II: Cross-dimensional Impacts of Natural and Man-Made Disasters, Population movements in the context of natural disasters (EEF.IO/14/14)*, 2014, p. 1.

²²⁶ OHCHR, *Convention Relating to the Status of refugees*.

²²⁷ Betts et al., *UNHCR: The Politics and Practice of Refugee Protection*, 2012, p. 84.

²²⁸ IOM, *Migration, Climate Change and the Environment – Definitional Issues*, 2015.

²²⁹ Edwards, *UNHCR Viewpoint: ‘Refugee’ or ‘Migrant’- Which is Right?*, 2016.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ The Global Governance Project, *About the Project*.

²³² Biermann et al., *Protecting Climate Refugees: The Case for a Global Protocol*, 2008.

²³³ The Nansen Initiative, *About Us: Towards a Protection Agenda for People Displaced across Borders in the Context of Disasters and the Effects of Climate Change*, 2015.

²³⁴ Randal, *Climate Refugees? Where’s the Dignity in that?*, 2013.

²³⁵ Union of Concerned Scientists, *Rising Sea-level in the Republic of Kiribati*, 2011.

²³⁶ Mull, *Underwater Kiribati*, 2014.

coast.²³⁷ One of them is Mr. Ioane Teitiota, a local fisherman who took his family to New Zealand to seek asylum.²³⁸ He was to be the world's first "climate change refugee" if his claim was accepted by the New Zealand Supreme Court, but instead, he was deported back to Kiribati with his family in September 2015 for not meeting the criteria of a "refugee" defined by the *1951 Convention*.²³⁹ The case of Mr. Teitiota shows that without a coherent and clear international legal framework that protects those displaced due to climate change, especially the slow-onset effects of climate change such as the sea-levels rising, the response of the international community against the displacements will continue to be inadequate and irresponsible.²⁴⁰

Meeting the Need of People Displaced Due to Climate Change

One of the biggest problem of displacements caused by climate change is that people most often cannot go back to their own communities or countries.²⁴¹ The scale and the frequency of disasters induced by climate change will most likely continue to intensify in the future, thus making affected areas almost permanently inhabitable.²⁴² The low-lying Pacific islands could disappear completely, but other countries face such risks as desertification, floods, and continuous extreme weather events that limit the amount of livable land.²⁴³

UNHCR helps resettle those who are permanently displaced in a country other than their home country.²⁴⁴ However, out of 14.4 million refugees under the protection of UNHCR, only 1% are submitted to the resettlement program, and only a few Member States accept resettlement.²⁴⁵ If a refugee is resettled in a third country, they will receive legal and physical protection and greater security of their social and cultural rights, and will be integrated into society.²⁴⁶ However, in the case of climate change-related displacements, if individuals cannot be classified as refugees under the "refugee" definition set in the *1951 Convention*, they cannot appeal to UNHCR for a resettlement in another country.²⁴⁷ Even if they were successfully resettled to another country, they would still face issues such as ill-prepared resettlement sites, joblessness, and loss of community network and relationships, and would suffer from a huge amount of stress.²⁴⁸

Poverty

Most of the people expected to be displaced due to climate change are living in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS).²⁴⁹ Since approximately 78% of those living in extreme poverty globally live in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, this means the people who are considered most vulnerable to climate change are amongst the poorest in the world, although the lowest-income countries are often significantly less responsible for global warming and climate change.²⁵⁰ People with limited financial resources face many challenges in trying to relocate to a new community or country, and can also face legal challenges when seeking asylum but not gaining legal protection as a refugee.²⁵¹ In addition, those displaced are at a great risk of becoming even poorer, losing their homes, resources, and income sources due to disasters, especially since financial aid from resettlement programs are usually limited.²⁵² The people who do not have enough resources to move and are forced to stay within their community or country are accordingly under the responsibility of that country unless the government requests help of the international community.²⁵³ UNHCR deploys emergency teams, when requested, to provide support to those in need, including shelter, basic hygiene, and food.²⁵⁴

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Irvine, *Kiribati Climate Change Refugee rejected by New Zealand*, 2013.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Trent, *New Zealand High Court Rejects Kiribati Climate Refugee Appeal*, 2013.

²⁴¹ Howard, *New Climate Change Report Warns of Dire Consequences*, 2014.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ UNHCR, *Summary of Deliberations on Climate Change and Displacement*, 2011, p. 2.

²⁴⁴ UNHCR, *Resettlement*.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Lieberman, *Where Will the Climate Refugees Go?*, 2015.

²⁴⁸ Bartolome et al., *Displacement, Resettlement, Rehabilitation, Reparation, and Development*, 2000, p. 7.

²⁴⁹ The Global Governance Project, *About the Project*.

²⁵⁰ Bullard, *See What Climate Change Means for the World's Poor*, 2015; The World Bank, *Poverty Overview*, 2016.

²⁵¹ Randall, *Climate refugees? Where's the Dignity in that?*, 2013.

²⁵² Bartolome et al., *Displacement, Resettlement, Rehabilitation, Reparation, and Development*, 2000, pp. 5-6.

²⁵³ UNHCR, *Climate Change and Disaster*.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

Loss of Culture and Dignity

Protection and assistance of people displaced due to climate change must be provided with their consent, based on principles on humanity, human rights and dignity, and international cooperation between countries, communities, and IOs.²⁵⁵ The *UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People*, adopted by the UN General Assembly (GA) in 2007, affirms the fundamental rights of indigenous people, and especially emphasizes their rights to preserve and develop their cultures, traditions, and social communities.²⁵⁶ However, climate change induced displacements could result in the loss of cultural practices, community relationships, traditional knowledge, and identity of many indigenous peoples around the world.²⁵⁷ For example, the social structure and cultural community of the citizens of SIDS in the Pacific could be lost together with their inhabitation as water encroaches upon their homelands.²⁵⁸ UNHCR strongly values peace and emphasizes the dignity of each displaced person, and is continuously striving to find the best solution for them.²⁵⁹

Conclusion

Displacements related to climate change are projected to increase continuously, highlighting a need for the international community to respond quickly to mitigate future calamities.²⁶⁰ A new or extended definition of the term “refugee” codified in international law, or a universally accepted definition of people displaced by disasters related to climate change, is one of the biggest concerns that advocates for this issue have raised. Lack of universal ratification by all 175 signatory parties of the *Paris Agreement*, a first-ever agreement on climate change induced displacement, will also present a challenge.

Although there is no specific term or definition for people displaced due to disasters resulting from climate change, all individuals have a right to human rights and dignity. Accordingly, as human mobility in the context of climate change is discussed at events like the WHS, it is important to keep a focus on human rights and taking a human-rights based approach, as well as offering humanitarian support for people in need. UNHCR will continue to lead the UN, Member States, IOs, and communities to cooperate with each other and actively participate to diminish the number of people displaced, offer protection and assistance to those displaced due to climate change, and meet the needs of those people flexibly.

Further Research

Although this issue has been discussed recently by the international community, many questions remain. How should the UN and UNHCR call individuals displaced due to climate change and why? Is a new definition of the term “refugee” necessary? How should the Task Force called upon in the *Paris Agreement* operate? How could individual Member States assist in preserving and developing indigenous people’s culture and dignity despite climate change? What are other special needs of those displaced due to climate change, compared to refugees from other crises and conflicts? How could UNHCR encourage more states to accept resettlements?

²⁵⁵ UNHCR, *Summary of Deliberations on Climate Change and Displacement*, 2011, p. 5.

²⁵⁶ UN General Assembly, *The UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People (A/RES/61/295)*, 2007.

²⁵⁷ IPCC Working Group II, *Human Security*, 2014, pp. 75-762.

²⁵⁸ Zelletin, *Climate Justice, Small Island Developing States & Cultural Loss*, 2015, p. 1.

²⁵⁹ UNHCR, *Solutions*.

²⁶⁰ Casillas, *Could climate change cause mass human migration?*, 2016.

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Guadagno, L. (2016). *Human Mobility in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction*. International Journal of Disaster Risk Science. Retrieved 30 June 2016 from: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13753-016-0077-6>

This article provides easy-to-understand information on how human mobility is addressed in SFDRR by examining the texts and highlighting where human mobility is referred to in the framework. As DRR is one of the things UNHCR focuses on to reduce the number of people vulnerable to climate change and disaster induced by it, SFDRR is a key document. It is critical to understand how climate change-related displacement is addressed in the SFDRR.

The Nansen Initiative. (n.d.) *About Us* [Website]. Retrieved 2 July 2016 from:

<https://nanseninitiative.org/secretariat/>

This website is essential for the delegates to fully comprehend what the Nansen Initiative is and how its work was important in handling displacements caused by disasters and the effects of climate change. Although the Nansen Initiative's work was replaced by Platform on Disaster Displacement, launched in 2016, it established an important foundation for discussing displacements caused by climate change and can boast many successes.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2015). *Report of the Conference of the Parties on its twenty-first session, held in Paris from 30 November to 13 December 2015 (FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1)*. Retrieved 2 July 2016 from: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/10a01.pdf>

This report of the COP21 held in 2015 contains Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, a historical agreement signed by the Parties to the Convention to address climate change. It allows delegates to read the full text of the Paris Agreement in this report. Delegates should pay special attention to Clause 49, as it is the only clause that states the issue of displacement induced by climate change and how the Parties decided to resolve it, while most of the agreement is on reducing greenhouse gases emission.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (n.d.) *Climate Change and Disasters* [Website]. Retrieved 2 July 2016 from: <http://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

This website illustrates how detrimental the effect of climate change on displacements and the work of the UNHCR will be, by providing basic information on the numbers of climate change-related displacements, as well as visual depictions of climate change and relevant news sources. It helps delegates understand that UNHCR works not only to protect people displaced by disasters and environmental changes, but also to increase the resilience of people whose habitats and lives are particularly endangered because of climate change.

United Nations Secretary-General. (2016). *Chair's Summary by the United Nations Secretary-General*. Retrieved 2 July 2016 from:

<https://consultations2.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/e49881ca33e3740b5f37162857cedc92c7c1e354?vid=569103&disposition=inline&op=view>

This document is a summary of the outcomes of the first-ever WHS by the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. It states the importance of humanitarian action and humanitarian organizations, and explains the details of the topics discussed at the WHS. It allows delegates to clearly comprehend the prospects of the WHS and the critical points of the discussion happened during the summit. Summary of one of the topics: Leave No One Behind, is where displacement issues were discussed, including climate change induced displacements.

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