

GApln Background Guide

Institutional Background

The General Assembly is one of the six main organs of the United Nations, the only one in which all Member States have equal representation: one nation, one vote. All 193 Member States of the United Nations are represented in this unique forum to discuss and work together on a wide array of international issues covered by the UN Charter, such as development, peace and security, international law, etc. In September, all the Members meet in the General Assembly Hall in New York for the annual General Assembly session.¹ The General Assembly consists of one president and 21 vice presidents and is empowered to discuss all international issues covered by the Charter of the United Nations. The resolutions that arise from such discussions generally require a simple majority to pass, unless the questions of interest are considered important questions, such as those concerning international peace and security, the election of members to other organs, etc., where 2/3 majority is required to pass the resolution.²

In 1950, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created to help with the human displacement as a result of the Second World War. Empowered by the 1951 Refugee Convention, the agency has since helped over 50 million refugees and won two Nobel Peace Prizes.³ The General Assembly has continued to aggregate the global goodwill to further the work of UNHCR and issued the New York Declaration in Sept. 2016. As a follow-up, the UNHCR proposed a new global compact on refugees in his annual report to the General Assembly in 2018, which seeks to ease the pressure on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand access to third-country solutions, and support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.⁴

The Global Refugee Crises

When the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created in 1950, the original purpose was to help displaced Europeans find new homes. However, this office continued to operate for another 68 years, mainly providing aid during crises in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Today, there are 68.5 million forcibly displaced individuals worldwide, with 25.4 million classified as refugees. Around 44,000 people are forced to flee their homes due to persecution and war every day, and 85% of these displaced individuals are from developing countries. There are also around 10 million people without a state to call home.⁵

Contrary to popular perceptions, the developing countries have been shouldering most of the burden as hosts for the displaced people. Of all countries, Turkey sheltered the greatest number of refugees, hosting 2.8 million by mid-2016. It was followed by Pakistan (1.6 million),

¹ United Nations. "About the General Assembly." Accessed March 1, 2019. <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/>.

² United Nations. "About the General Assembly."

³ UNHCR. "History of UNHCR." Accessed February 19, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/history-of-unhcr.html>.

⁴ United Nations. "Global Compact on Refugees." Accessed March 1, 2019. <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/refugees-compact>.

⁵ United Nations. n.d. "Figures at a Glance." UNHCR. Accessed February 19, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

Lebanon (1 million), Iran (978,000), Ethiopia (742,700), Jordan (691,800), Kenya (523,500), Uganda (512,600), Germany (478,600) and Chad (386,100).⁶

Current Challenges

In 2016, the General Assembly issued the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.⁷ In 2018, the General Assembly endorsed the Global Compact on Refugees. The Global Compact is a landmark document whose goal is to enhance the international response to large scale migration and current refugee situations.⁸ There are three solutions proposed by the UNHCR with regard to the relocation of refugees: voluntary repatriation, resettlement, and local integration.⁹

As of 2018, there are 68.5 million displaced persons in the world. Around 25.4 million of these people are refugees while over half of those are under the age of eighteen. For those who were granted asylum, the integration into the host society is often a challenging process. One report issued by Cyprus in 2018 cited unemployment, underemployment, barriers to citizenship, and the consequences of separated families as some of the more prominent obstacles to successful integration.¹⁰ Refugees who failed to integrate put greater strains on their host societies. A research paper published by the World Refugee Council in 2018 examined the political, social, economic, and security concerns that could arise as a result of the sudden population increase.¹¹ The local school systems, hospitals, and infrastructure were particularly at risk with the abrupt influx of refugees.

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

According to the U.N., since the conflict started in 2011, more than 12 million Syrians have been displaced from their homes — enough people to fill roughly 221 Yankee Stadiums. This includes about 5.6 million refugees who have been forced to seek safety in neighboring countries, out of a total 6.3 million Syrian refugees worldwide — almost one-third of the world's total refugee population.¹² As the refugee crisis mounted, even the lofty ideals of Europeans began to subside when by the end of 2015, more than a million migrants had entered the EU. In a deal, the EU paid Turkey roughly \$3 billion to accept deportees and better patrol its coast to

⁶ UNHCR. "Poorer countries host most of the forcibly displaced." Last modified Feb., 27, 2017. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2017/2/58b001ab4/poorer-countries-host-forcibly-displaced-report-shows.html>.

⁷ Assembly, UN General. "New York declaration for refugees and migrants." *UN Doc. A/71/L 1* (2016): 13.

⁸ Assembly, UN General. "Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Global Compact on Refugees." *UN Doc. A/73/L2* (2018).

⁹ UNHCR. "Solutions." Accessed February 20, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/solutions.html>.

¹⁰ United Nations High Commissioner. "Towards a Comprehensive Refugee Integration Strategy for Cyprus." *UN Doc.* (2018).

¹¹ Miller, Sarah Deardorff. "Assessing the Impacts of Hosting Refugees." (2018).

¹² Mercy corps. "What you need to know about the Syria Crisis." Accessed March 1, 2019. <https://www.mercycorps.org/articles/iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria-turkey/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria-crisis>.

prevent more migrants from entering Europe. It also promised to fast-track EU visas for Turks and expedite Turkey's EU membership process.¹³

Future Outlook

One major question that has arisen as a result of the recent Syrian refugee crisis is how to lessen the burden faced by host countries. This is also particularly applicable to the so called “frontline countries”, which due to their geographical locations, took the brunt of the refugee crisis.¹⁴ For example, both Spain and Greece received over one million migrants in 2015.¹⁵ Furthermore, EU guidelines stipulate that those seeking asylum must file their applications in the first EU country that they reach, therefore creating additional stresses on these countries.¹⁶ Such a large number of refugees would put strains on any society, affecting its local economy, infrastructure, education system, and healthcare system among others, and as one can imagine, more so on gateway countries due to the lopsided distribution of responsibilities.

This committee would like to pose the following challenges to its delegates at the PCMUN conference on March 29, 2019:

1. How to adequately address future refugee crises and human migration in general?
2. How to equitably distribute responsibilities among countries that are signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention?
3. How to devise social programs to help refugee families acclimate so that they become productive and contributive members of the host societies?
4. How to prevent xenophobic sentiments from arising among the local population?

¹³ NPR. “‘Europe does not see us as human’: Stranded Refugees Struggle in Greece.” Last modified March 9, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/03/09/589973165/europe-does-not-see-us-as-human-stranded-refugees-struggle-in-greece>.

¹⁴ UNHCR. "Europe Situation." Accessed March 02, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/europe-emergency.html>.

¹⁵ "Migration to Europe in Charts." BBC News. September 11, 2018. Accessed February 20, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44660699>.

¹⁶ "REGULATION (EU) No. 604/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast)". *Official Journal of the European Union*. L (180/31). 29 June 2013. Accessed March 2, 2019.