



34th Annual

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE

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Esteemed Delegates,

SECRETARIAT

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Human Rights Council

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Commissioner for Refugees*

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Welcome to the 34th annual Brigham Young University Model United Nations (BYUMUN) Conference! My name is Benjamin Marr, and I will be the director of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). I am currently a senior studying International Relations with minors in History and Asian Studies. This spring I represented India on the UNHCR at the National Model United Nations (NMUN) Conference in New York. I am excited to lead this committee and help you gain a greater appreciation for the issues that refugees face throughout the world.

This year, the UNHCR will discuss the following topics:

- I. Promoting Educational Opportunities for Refugees
- II. Clean Water for Refugees

Natural disasters, new and ongoing conflicts, and continued effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have increased the number of displaced people globally and have worsened many challenges that they face. The UNHCR plays a crucial role in protecting and supporting refugees globally and must continue to develop new and innovative solutions.

This Background Guide is intended to provide a basis for your own research into these important topics, as well as both your assigned Member State's and the international community's policies on them. By developing a deeper understanding of these issues, you will be able to produce effective and sustainable solutions. I trust that as you go through this process of research you will better understand the situations of displaced persons throughout the world and the UNHCR's place in helping them.

If you have any questions regarding the upcoming conference, the UNHCR, or the two topics, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. I am looking forward to working with you all and seeing the results of your preparation.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Marr
Director, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
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Committee History

“Refugees represent the very best of the human spirit. They need and deserve support and solidarity – not closed borders and pushbacks.”

António Guterres, UN Secretary-General

Introduction

The United Nations was founded in 1945 following the end of the Second World War. Designed as an organization in which the nations of the world can work together to develop comprehensive solutions for global issues, it is now made up of 193 Member States.¹ The UN is guided by its founding charter which establishes its purpose as maintaining international peace as well as building relations and encouraging cooperation between Member States.² It is made up of six principal organs: the General Assembly (UNGA), the Security Council (UNSC), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the UN Secretariat.³ Each of these organs have a number of subordinate bodies and agencies that fulfill specific roles and tasks, including UNHCR.

UNHCR, often referred to as the UN Refugee Agency, was established in 1950 on a three-year mission to help the millions of displaced Europeans following the war.⁴ In 1951, the UN signed the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, commonly referred to as the 1951 Refugee Convention. This treaty, along with the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees that supplements it, established the UNHCR as a permanent UN agency and provides the legal framework for the UNHCR’s efforts.⁵ The UNHCR today is one of the UN’s largest agencies with over 20,000 personnel and is active in 135 separate countries.⁶

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

The UNHCR’s mandate is to “protect and safeguard the rights of refugees” and develop sustainable solutions for displaced persons.⁷ Within this mandate, UNHCR generally works in cooperation with other organizations such as Member States, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and other UN agencies to provide humanitarian aid, oversee the development and employment of programs, and assist Member States to create legislation.⁸ It does not, however,

¹ UN, “About Us.”

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ UNHCR, “About UNHCR”

⁵ UNHCR, “The 1951 Refugee Convention”

⁶ UNHCR, “History of UNHCR”

⁷ UNHCR, “About UNHCR”

⁸ UNHCR, “UNHCR’s Mandate for Refugees, Stateless Persons and IDPs”

have the authority to require any other organizations to enact policies or enforce the implementation of these policies; it also does not have an exclusive mandate for internally displaced people (IDPs), though the UNGA can authorize UNHCR to become involved in operations relating to IDPs.⁹

UNHCR is led by the High Commissioner for Refugees, currently Filippo Grandi, who is supported by a Senior Executive Team.¹⁰ The UNHCR Executive Committee (ExCom) is made up of representatives from 108 Member States and meets annually to advise the High Commissioner and review UNHCR programs and budget, while ExCom's Standing Committee meets several times each year to oversee the work of the body.¹¹ UNHCR's operations are funded primarily through voluntary contributions, with 75 percent of its budget coming from governments and the European Union (EU) and 21 percent from the private sector; only one percent of UNHCR's funding comes from the UN budget.¹² This lack of financial dependence on the greater UN allows UNHCR greater autonomy in deciding what projects to fund but increases the risk of underfunding: in 2022, UNHCR's budget was approximately US\$10 billion, which falls short of the amount needed to fully fund all of its programs.¹³

Recent Sessions and Priorities

UNHCR's current priorities are laid out in its Strategic Directions for 2022-2026, established by the High Commissioner. These priorities were initially created in 2017, then renewed in 2022 and act as the foundation of all UNHCR actions and programs.¹⁴ According to the Strategic Directions, the five core priorities of UNHCR are as follows:

1. *“Protect, secure, and defend the rights of people of concern to UNHCR – refugees and asylum-seekers, returnees, internally displaced people, and stateless persons;*
2. *Respond rapidly and effectively in emergencies and beyond;*
3. *Promote inclusion and self-reliance;*
4. *Empower the people we serve to determine and build their futures; and*
5. *Pursue solutions to address the consequences of displacement and problems of statelessness.”*¹⁵

⁹ UNHCR, “UNHCR’s Mandate for Refugees, Stateless Persons and IDPs”

¹⁰ UNHCR, “The High Commissioner”

¹¹ UNHCR, “2022 Executive Committee Session”

¹² UNHCR, “Figures at a Glance”

¹³ UNHCR, “Global Focus”

¹⁴ UNHCR, “Strategic Directions 2022-2026”

¹⁵ Ibid.

The 2022 meeting of UNHCR’s ExCom applied these priorities in strengthening protections for refugees, including by emphasizing the importance of mental health and psychological support.¹⁶ Much of UNHCR’s work is done outside of meetings, however, as the majority of its focus is on programs and actions carried out in the field.¹⁷ These programs are too numerous and varied to list here, but specific examples will be provided in the following sections to provide context for current issues and help develop an understanding of UNHCR’s practical activities.

Conclusion

There are over 108 million forcibly displaced persons in the world today including approximately 35 million refugees, with 76 percent of these refugees being hosted in least-developed-countries.¹⁸ Natural disasters, conflicts, and persecution all contribute to these amounts, while the number of refugees who are able to return to their homes each year has fallen by nearly 75 percent since the 1990s.¹⁹ UNHCR acts as the UN’s primary instrument in responding to the ongoing refugee crisis by working with Member States, IGOs, and other UN bodies to develop durable solutions.

¹⁶ UNHCR, “2022 Executive Committee Session”

¹⁷ UNHCR, “Figures at a Glance”

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ UN, “Global Issues: Refugees”

Annotated Bibliography

“About Us.” United Nations. Accessed 12 June 2023. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us>

A general overview of the history of the United Nations and its charter. The page also includes links to several other pages and articles related to the history and organization of the UN and may be very useful in understanding the broader system in which UNHCR works. The UN has developed and evolved over its 78 years of existence, so it is imperative to learn its history.

“About UNHCR.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations. Accessed 13 June 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr>

A broad summary of the UNHCR’s mandate and purpose. Its subpages, several of which are listed in this bibliography, provide greater detail on elements of the UNHCR. The mandate of any UN agency is the foundation of all of its actions and decisions as it provides the agency’s responsibilities and capabilities. Understanding UNHCR’s mandate is crucial in developing realistic, achievable solutions.

“The 1951 Refugee Convention.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations. Accessed 15 June 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/1951-refugee-convention>

An explanation of the core principles of the 1951 Convention, including a link to the full text of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. This Convention is the primary document on the legal protection and rights of refugees, including the definition of the term “refugee”. This document also serves as the basis of all of UNHCR’s efforts, making it a vital part of understanding the committee and its responsibilities.

“Calling for Greater Support in World Day Message, Secretary-General Says More Than 100 Million Refugees ‘Not Numbers on a Page’, but Represent Best of Human Spirit,” UN Press Release, 12 Jun. 2023, United Nations. Accessed 18 Jun. 2023. <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21831.doc.htm>

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’ message for World Refugee Day 2023, representing his vision for the future of refugee relief. Given the Secretary-General’s position as head of the entire UN, this message can be seen as a general overview of the UN’s stance on refugees for 2023. All current solutions to refugee issues should be made in accordance with this vision.

“History of UNHCR.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations. Accessed 18 June 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/history-unhcr>

Provides a brief history of the development of UNHCR’s mandate, including links to archives of notable documents. Understanding the history of refugee challenges and UNHCR responses is a vital part of comprehending the full scale of the current situation. Many issues that refugees face today are similar to those of the past, so researching UNHCR’s previous activities may help in developing ideas for effective solutions now.

“UNHCR’s Mandate for Refugees, Stateless Persons and IDPs,” UNHCR Emergency Handbook. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations. Accessed 19 June 2023. <https://emergency.unhcr.org/protection/legal-framework/unhcrs-mandate-refugees-stateless-persons-and-idps>

A section of the UNHCR Emergency Handbook that provides excellent information on the agency’s mandate and capacities. Because this document is a part of a handbook specifically designed for in the field response to refugee crises, it contains information useful in developing realistic, actionable solutions. Any solutions developed for this conference must be actually implementable, so making sure that they work

“The High Commissioner.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations. Accessed 15 June 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/high-commissioner>

An overview of Filippo Grandi, the current High Commissioner for Refugees, and his vision for UNHCR. This page also includes links to his speeches and to UNHCR’s strategic directions, the current goals of the agency. As this committee’s entire purpose is supporting the High Commissioner and assisting him in his duties of protecting refugees, understanding who he is and what he sees as the vision of the committee is paramount.

“Global Issues: Refugees.” United Nations. Accessed 19 June 2023. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/refugees>

This page provides relevant statistics on refugees and the UN’s actions in providing relief for them, including UNHCR and other agencies. It also includes links to several other useful resources including UNHCR’s Global Trends Report and Figures at a Glance page. These statistics are helpful in gaining a broad view of refugee challenges and can help determine possible problem areas to focus on.

“Figures at a Glance.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Accessed 19 June 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/figures-glance>

A collection of data from UNHCR regarding refugees and other displaced people, including information on demographics, locations, and the change in numbers over the last 30 years. It also includes information regarding UNHCR’s budget and personnel. This information can help to isolate specific situations and areas to study in more depth

“Global Focus.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Accessed 20 June 2023. https://reporting.unhcr.org/?_gl=1*110uwdv*_rup_ga*NTk1MzYwNjEwLjE2ODY5NzkzMzc.*_rup_ga_EVDQTJ4LMY*MTY4NzI3ODUxOS4xMC4xLjE2ODcyNzg1NjcuMC4wLjA.#_ga=2.71202773.451046975.1686979337-595360610.1686979337

A collection of UNHCR reports on current operations in various regions, including information on programs, risks, and funding. Especially notable is the Global Report which provides an overview of UNHCR’s goals and results, summaries of its work in different regions, and developments in refugee issues in the last year. These reports are extremely useful in developing an understanding of the global context in which UNHCR works as well as its specific activities.

“Strategic Directions 2022-2026.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Accessed 11 July 2023. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/unhcr-strategic-directions-2022-2026>

This document provides UNHCR’s current priorities and identified areas for action. These strategic directions act as the basis for everything that UNHCR does from strategic planning to practical implementation of programs. As such, all solutions developed for this conference must necessarily be created in harmony with these directions.

“2022 Executive Committee Session.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Accessed 26 June 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/events/2022-executive-committee-session>

This page includes information on the most recent session of UNHCR’s ExCom, including links to specific statements made by Member States, video recordings and summary reports of all meetings, and the final report of ExCom for the session. As of writing this is the most recent meeting of the Executive Committee and therefore represents the most up-to-date activities and priorities of the committee. Given this conference’s purpose of simulating UNHCR’s ExCom, studying the actual meetings of the body can gain valuable insight into how the real organization operates.

I. Promoting Educational Opportunities for Refugees

“Education is a fundamental human right. It’s the bedrock of societies, economies, and every person’s potential. But without adequate investment, this potential will wither on the vine.”

-António Guterres, UN Secretary-General

Introduction

Education plays such a crucial role in the development of children and adolescents that it has widely been recognized as a foundational human right. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.”²⁰

Despite this, large numbers of refugees lack access to any type of education. Of the 8 million refugees of school age under UNHCR care, almost half are not in school. This number only increases as the children age: 68 percent of primary school-age refugees are enrolled in schools, while only 37 percent are enrolled in secondary school and less than 6 percent in tertiary education.²¹ Refugee girls are even less likely to be enrolled than boys, with over twice as many boys being enrolled than girls in certain areas.²²

Education is particularly critical for refugees as it can provide them with opportunities to develop the skills necessary to improve their situations and gain knowledge that will help them both in future careers and in rebuilding their communities. Education also plays an important part in protecting refugee children from human trafficking, child labor, and sexual exploitation.²³ It is vital that all refugees be given the chance to receive a quality education regardless of their circumstances.

Current Situation

52 percent of all refugees come from three countries: Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan, placing much of the burden of providing education on neighboring Member States including Türkiye, Iran, and those in the Eastern European region.²⁴ Analyzing the current state of refugee education

²⁰ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

²¹ UNHCR, “Education”

²² Caralho, “Why Refugee Girls Are Missing Out on Secondary School”

²³ UNHCR, “Education”

²⁴ UNHCR, “Figures at a Glance”

in these areas is vital to developing a real understanding of the global situation of the issue. Many of the challenges and obstacles faced by refugees in these areas are similar to, if not identical to, those faced by refugees worldwide, while policies that have been successful in one region may have similar success elsewhere.

More than half of all Ukrainian children have been forced from their homes as a result of the ongoing conflict there, a large number of whom are now refugees in neighboring regions and intend to stay for the foreseeable future. Most of these children are not enrolled in school, however, with the percentages ranging from just over 50 percent to less than 10 percent enrollment.²⁵ One major obstacle that these refugees face is language: most Ukrainian refugees do not speak the languages of their host Member States, and most schools in these areas do not have enough staff fluent in Ukrainian to assist the students.

One potential solution for providing education to refugee Ukrainian children is the All-Ukraine Online School developed by Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science. This program is designed to provide online learning to all Ukrainian children who have been displaced, theoretically allowing them to continue their education despite their situation. This program has had limited success, however, due to issues related to the quality of education provided and sustainability of the program.²⁶ Another program that has seen some success is the employment of Ukrainian citizens in schools in Czechia, providing refugee students with staff who speak their language and better understand their situation.²⁷

The actual number of Syrian refugee children hosted by neighboring Member States is uncertain, with most measures estimating between 1.5 and 2 million, most of whom are in Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye.²⁸ The percentages of school enrollment for these children are similar to global trends, averaging around 50 percent enrolled in each country. Türkiye previously used a system of Temporary Education Centers for Syrian refugees in which a Syrian curriculum was taught by Syrian staff, though this program was phased out in 2018 in favor of integrating Syrian students into Turkish schools. Far fewer Syrian students attend secondary school, dropping to 5 percent enrollment in some areas.²⁹ Poverty rates among Syrian refugees are also high, with 67 percent of Syrian refugees in Türkiye living below the poverty line, while the percentage in Jordan is as high as 85, meaning that many refugee children cannot afford school supplies or transportation, increasing the need for funding from governments and other organizations to make up the gap.³⁰

²⁵ UNESCO, "Ukrainian Refugees' Pathways to Inclusion in Education: Insights from Host Countries"

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Karasapan and Shah, "Syrian Refugees and the Schooling Challenge"

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Language is as much a barrier for Syrian refugees as it is for Ukrainians: most Syrian students do not speak Turkish, the language of schooling in Türkiye,³¹ and Syrian students in Lebanese secondary schools often struggle with the classes taught in English and French.³² Without dedicated language classes designed to help refugees learn the languages of their host countries, refugee students will continue to struggle greatly in school, leading many to drop out by the time they reach secondary schooling.

The majority of Afghan refugees now live in Iran and Pakistan, numbering nearly 2.5 million in total. Many of these refugees were actually born in their host countries and have never been to Afghanistan; despite this, the official policies of both Iran and Pakistan are to seek repatriation rather than integration.³³ This policy has created obstacles to the participation of Afghan children in host education systems; Afghan refugees in Iran previously had free access to all levels of the Iranian education system, but policy changes since the mid-1990s have limited access to only refugees given government-approved documentation which became far more difficult to obtain as Iran drastically reduced the number of refugees it allowed to cross the border.³⁴ A recent change in policy now allows all Afghan children to attend Iranian schools, though they must pay school fees that exceed the financial capabilities of many families, while overburdened school systems have struggled to integrate these new students.³⁵

Afghan refugees in Pakistan have faced other problems; while Afghan children have always been allowed to enroll in Pakistani schools, the quality of their education is often poor. Literacy rates among Afghan refugees are exceptionally low, especially among girls who are frequently not allowed to go to school.³⁶ Tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have meant that Afghan children struggle to integrate into schools, and Pakistan's policy of repatriation of Afghan refugees means that many students are forced out of school to return to Afghanistan, for many a country they have never even seen before.³⁷ In both Iran and Pakistan, a focus on eventual repatriation of Afghan refugees has in many cases prevented the creation of an effective solution for providing quality education for refugees.

Existing Framework

UNHCR has a number of programs designed to help refugees gain opportunities for education. One such program is Educate a Child, created by the Education Above All Foundation in which

³¹ Karaagac et al., "Uncertainties Shaping Parental Educational Decisions: The Case of Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey"

³² Karasapan and Shah, "Syrian Refugees and the Schooling Challenge"

³³ UNESCO, "Inclusion of Afghan Refugees in the National Education Systems of Iran and Pakistan" (3)

³⁴ UNESCO, "Inclusion of Afghan Refugees in the National Education Systems of Iran and Pakistan" (8)

³⁵ UNESCO, "Inclusion of Afghan Refugees in the National Education Systems of Iran and Pakistan" (10)

³⁶ UNESCO, "Inclusion of Afghan Refugees in the National Education Systems of Iran and Pakistan" (14)

³⁷ UNESCO, "Inclusion of Afghan Refugees in the National Education Systems of Iran and Pakistan" (11)

NGOs, local governments, and UN bodies including UNHCR cooperate to help refugee children gain access to schooling.³⁸ This specific program has seen tremendous success, having helped over 1 million refugee children enroll in schools; the program also works to improve the quality of refugee education, create secure learning environments, and help local education systems handle the greater demands of educating refugee children.³⁹ Another program, UNHCR's Accelerated Education system, seeks to help refugee children catch up on schooling that they missed due to their displacement. This program involves the participation of UNHCR and other members of the Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG) to provide flexible programs targeted to specific age groups of refugee children, while the biannual meetings of the AEWG allow for greater cooperation and an enhanced level of standardization throughout diverse operational areas.⁴⁰

UNHCR is also dedicated to increasing the participation of refugees in tertiary education. Its 15by30 target represents UNHCR's goal to achieve the enrollment of 15 percent of all young refugees in tertiary education by 2030. This goal represents the envisioned enrollment of approximately half a million individuals in higher education, more than 5 times the current number.⁴¹ UNHCR also has the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) scholarship program which, in cooperation with the governments of Germany and Denmark and support from private donors, has provided scholarships to over 8,000 refugees from over 50 different Member States, providing them with the opportunity to attend higher education throughout the world.⁴²

Conclusion

Education is one of the most critical elements in ensuring the safety and prosperity of refugees globally. In its 2019 document "*Refugee Education 2030: Strategy for Refugee Inclusion*", UNHCR described its vision for refugee education by stating that:

*"Inclusion in equitable quality education in national systems contributes to resilience, prepares children and youth for participation in cohesive societies, and is the best option for refugees, displaced and stateless children and youth and their hosting communities."*⁴³

It is imperative that refugee children be given the chance to participate in quality education that provides greater opportunities for their futures while also keeping them safe in the present. The

³⁸ Education Above All Foundation, "Educate a Child"

³⁹ UNHCR, "Primary and Youth Education"

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ UNHCR, "Tertiary Education"

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ UNHCR, "*Refugee Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee Inclusion*"

UNHCR must continue to adapt to the changing world and develop comprehensive, sustainable solutions while recognizing the many unique challenges posed by this issue.

Questions to Consider:

1. What unique challenges do refugees face in gaining an education?
2. What existing UN programs or frameworks could be improved or altered to improve educational opportunities for refugees without dramatically increasing funding requirements?
3. How can refugee children best be integrated into host education systems?
4. How can UNHCR best help Member States and NGOs implement effective education programs for refugees?

Annotated Bibliography

**“Education.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Accessed 20 June 2023.
<https://www.unhcr.org/education>**

Provides an overview of UNHCR’s vision for refugee education, including a full report on UNHCR’s activities in promoting education in 2022. The page also includes links to a number of useful pages relating to policies and programs enacted by UNHCR related to education. This acts as a useful springboard for more focused research into specific programs and policies UNHCR is involved in and can help to determine areas that need further work.

**United Nations General Assembly. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).
New York: United Nations General Assembly, 1948.**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a foundational document created by the UN General Assembly in 1948 that details the fundamental rights of all humans. Article 26 specifically mentions education. One of UNHCR’s primary focuses is protecting the human rights of refugees, so understanding what should specifically be included in this definition is important to narrowing the focus of potential solutions.

**Carvalho, Shelby. 2022. “Why Refugee Girls Are Missing Out on Secondary School”,
Center for Global Development. Accessed 20 June 2023.
<https://www.cgdev.org/blog/why-refugee-girls-are-missing-out-secondary-school>**

This blog post from the Center for Global Development is based on a study of refugees in Ethiopia and Kenya and includes useful data connected to the challenges that refugee girls often encounter in education. While the study is focused only in East Africa, many of the key findings are applicable in other regions and may therefore prove useful in developing gender-oriented solutions for refugee education. It is crucial that refugee girls receive opportunities for education, so potential solutions should at the least consider how they affect different genders.

**“Ukrainian Refugees’ Pathways to Inclusion in Education: Insights from Host Countries.”
UNESCO. Accessed 20 June 2023. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ukrainian-refugees-pathways-inclusion-education-insights-host-countries?hub=343>**

This article from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) details the struggles that Ukrainian refugees have faced in education as they have moved into neighboring states. This information is useful both in understanding the

specific situation of Ukrainian refugees as well as more broadly the challenges that refugees often face when attempting to integrate into neighboring Member States. Understanding these issues may help in developing solutions as they aid in determining possible areas that UNHCR can assist in.

Karasapan, Omer, and Sajjad Shah. 2018. “Syrian Refugees and the Schooling Challenge”, Brookings. Accessed 20 June 2023. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/10/23/syrian-refugees-and-the-schooling-challenge/>

This article covers the experiences of Syrian refugee children in education in their host countries, including general statistics as well as more specific information for each host country. While this article is most useful for researching the specific situation of Syrian refugees in education, the issues discussed within are often similar to those faced by refugees in other areas. Additionally, given that Syrian refugees make up nearly 20% of all refugees globally, understanding their circumstances is important in comprehending the overall status of refugee education.

Karaagac, Dilara, Basak Bilecen, and Rene Veenstra. 2022. “Uncertainties Shaping Parental Educational Decisions: The Case of Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey”, *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2022.920229>

This article provides an in-depth examination of the experience of Syrian refugees in Türkiye’s education system. It focuses heavily on the language barrier that features prominently in the issues faced by many refugees. Given the prevalence of the challenge of language in refugee education globally, studying this topic may help to construct ideas for aiding in this issue.

“Inclusion of Afghan Refugees in the National Education Systems of Iran and Pakistan.” UNESCO. Accessed 20 June 2023. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000266055>

This UNESCO report focuses on refugee education in Iran and Pakistan, especially on the challenges of inclusion and integration faced by children in a system with an official policy of repatriation. This is useful both for specific case research and as a general example of the challenges many refugees face in integration. Additionally, over 15% of all refugees come from Afghanistan so their challenges represent a major part of global refugee issues.

“Primary and Youth Education.” UNHCR. Accessed 21 June 2023.

<https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/education/primary-and-youth-education>

This page details several of UNHCR’s programs related to promoting primary education for refugees, including links to pages with greater detail on several specific programs. Studying these ongoing programs will be helpful to understand what is currently being done and what could be improved. Additionally, when developing solutions it is often best to attempt to rework an existing program or activity rather than creating a new one, so knowing what already exists helps to eliminate redundancy.

“Educate a Child.” Education Above All Foundation. Accessed 21 June 2023.

<https://www.educationaboveall.org/our-programmes/educate-a-child>

The official website of the Education Above All Foundation’s “Educate a Child” program in which UNHCR is a major partner. Subpages include detailed information on the specific goals and elements of the project. This program is a strong example of cooperation between UNHCR and NGOs, which will likely play an important role in many solutions for this issue.

“Tertiary Education.” UNHCR. Accessed 21 June 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/education/tertiary-education>

This page explains UNHCR’s efforts in promoting tertiary education for refugees, detailing its specific vision for the issue as well as including links to specific programs. When designing solutions, it is important to be aware of existing programs and work to either rework them or combine them with new ideas. It is almost always easier to modify an existing program than it is to create a new one, so becoming familiar with what is currently being done is highly recommended.

“Refugee Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee Inclusion.” UNHCR. Accessed 21 June 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/38077>

This document details UNHCR’s vision and mission relating to refugee education through the year 2030 and should act as an essential guide in designing solutions for this issue. Much like the Strategic Directions act as the foundation of all UNHCR activities and programs, this document contains UNHCR’s strategy for all programs related to education. Any ideas for solutions to this issue must therefore be designed in accordance with the principles of this guide.

II. Clean Water for Refugees

“Safe water and adequate sanitation underpin poverty reduction, economic growth and healthy ecosystems. They contribute to social well-being, inclusive growth and sustainable livelihoods.”

-António Guterres, UN Secretary-General

Introduction

Water is one of the most important commodities needed to sustain life; a person needs a minimum of 7 liters of clean water a day to survive and over twice that to live a healthy life.⁴⁴ Access to clean water is a major priority for the UN, with its sixth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) being “Clean Water and Sanitation”. Current estimates predict that, by the year 2030, over 1.6 billion people globally will not have access to safe drinking water, and nearly 3 billion people will lack clean water for sanitation.⁴⁵ The UNGA has previously recognized access to clean water and sanitation as a human right, with UNGA Resolution 64/292 stating,

“The General Assembly... recognizes the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and of all human rights [and] calls upon States and international organizations to provide financial resources, capacity-building and technology transfer... in order to scale up efforts to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all.”⁴⁶

Refugees are especially at risk of lacking access to clean water. They often live in extremely densely populated areas, increasing strain on existing clean water resources as more people are forced to use the same sources of water.⁴⁷ This requires refugees to travel further to get water or risk using potentially contaminated water. Contamination of water supplies is common in these areas due to improper waste disposal, and this lack of clean water may lead to poor sanitation, increasing refugees’ risk of serious disease.⁴⁸ Refugees living in refugee camps require even more water than they previously used at home, further exacerbating the issue.⁴⁹

Refugees need clean water to live with any semblance of normalcy, but they rarely possess the means to ensure clean water supplies on their own. UNHCR and other UN agencies and NGOs must step in to ensure that refugees are able to access clean, non-contaminated water for drinking and hygiene to prevent the spread of disease, as well as for use in irrigation for food production,

⁴⁴ UNHCR, “Ensuring Clean Water & Sanitation”

⁴⁵ UN DESA, “Goal 6”

⁴⁶ UNGA, “Resolution 64/292”

⁴⁷ UNHCR, “Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene”

⁴⁸ UNHCR, “Ensuring Clean Water & Sanitation”

⁴⁹ Ibid.

which help prevent conflict and promote development. All refugees need clean water to have any chance of improving their lives.

Current Situation

Perhaps the most obvious value of clean water is in drinking water. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), contaminated drinking water is linked to the spread of a number of diseases including cholera, dysentery, and typhoid.⁵⁰ Even seemingly less dangerous issues like diarrhea can prove deadly, with as many as 800,000 people dying each year from it, usually because of the consumption of unsafe drinking water.⁵¹ Refugees are especially vulnerable to unclean drinking water due to overcrowding of water sources near refugee camps and the contamination of drinking water supplies.⁵² Contamination with waste water, human or animal feces, or chemicals such as arsenic, nitrate, pesticides, and pharmaceuticals all carry significant risks, only exacerbating the dangers faced by refugees living in camps.⁵³

Unclean water also carries the risk of degrading personal hygiene. Washing with unclean water can lead to parasitic and fungal infections, while the use of latrines by too many individuals due to lack of clean water greatly increases the spread of communicable diseases.⁵⁴ In some cases, refugees are forced to share a communal toilet with up to 50 people, often preventing proper hygiene practices and even increasing the risk of gender-based violence.⁵⁵ Standing water can also become a breeding ground for insects that carry diseases including dengue fever, requiring greater caution regarding water sources.⁵⁶

Refugees often must travel significant distances to access clean water. Such distances may incentivize individuals to collect water from sources that are closer to home but which may be unsafe or contaminated, increasing the chances of infection and disease.⁵⁷ Time-consuming travel for water collection typically is carried out by women and girls, preventing many refugee girls from being able to attend school and gain an education.⁵⁸ When refugees must travel long distances to collect water, they have less time and energy to spend on other activities including work, making it more difficult for them to enjoy their lives and improve their situation. This travel also exposes refugees to injury from carrying the heavy water containers, and invites

⁵⁰ WHO, “Drinking-water”

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² UNHCR, “Ensuring Clean Water & Sanitation”

⁵³ WHO, “Drinking-water”

⁵⁴ UNHCR, “Ensuring Clean Water & Sanitation”

⁵⁵ UNHCR, “Water, Sanitation and Hygiene”

⁵⁶ WHO, “Drinking-water”

⁵⁷ UNHCR, “Ensuring Clean Water & Sanitation”

⁵⁸ UNHCR, “Water, Sanitation and Hygiene”

attack or gender-based violence, particularly when refugees must collect water when it is dark or at a significant distance from their shelter.⁵⁹

Access to clean water is also a major factor in triggering forced displacement. Water scarcity and severe droughts affect millions of people in rural areas, forcing large numbers to leave their homes in search of access to water.⁶⁰ Current UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) estimates indicate that up to 700 million people globally will be displaced by water scarcity by 2030, and 1 in 4 children worldwide will live in areas of water scarcity by 2040.⁶¹ Many of these refugees from water scarcity lack education or technical skills, often increasing the difficulty of finding work in their destinations.⁶²

Water scarcity can lead to conflicts that force people from their homes. Access to sources of clean water may become a focal point for conflicts, as occurred in Cameroon in early 2022.⁶³ In situations such as this, people already struggling with water scarcity are placed in the crossfire of militant groups battling over the limited water available. This lack of water may also cause food shortages as farmers are unable to properly water and irrigate their crops, often leading to further violence as these same groups fight over the reduced food supplies.⁶⁴

Existing Framework

UNHCR is currently involved in several programs designed to improve refugee access to clean water. One such initiative is its project to use solar panels in water filtration systems in refugee camps. Currently active in Kutupalong camp in Bangladesh, Za’atari camp in Jordan, and Dadaab camp in Kenya, this program has bettered the lives of millions of refugees.⁶⁵ One major outcome of this program has been the elimination of hand-pumped water systems, reducing the need for refugees to travel long distances on foot to gather water. This has helped to keep refugees safe as it prevents the gender-based violence and environmental dangers associated with this travel.⁶⁶ In Za’atari refugee camp, the program has even allowed for clean water to be pumped directly to homes, improving the situation further.

UNHCR is additionally involved in an initiative entitled Project Flow in collaboration with the Grundfos Foundation and the Danish and German governments. This project works to provide water pumps for refugee camps in six different Member States in Africa, with the goal of

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ World Bank, “Lack of Water Linked to 10 Percent of the Rise in Global Migration”

⁶¹ UNICEF, “Water Scarcity”

⁶² World Bank, “Lack of Water Linked to 10 Percent of the Rise in Global Migration”

⁶³ UNHCR, “UNHCR’s Grandi Meets Cameroonians Displaced by Conflict Over Scarce Resources”

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ UNHCR, “Clean Energy, Clean Water: How Solar Power Brings Safe Water to Refugee Camps”

⁶⁶ Ibid.

improving both the environmental and economic sustainability of water purification systems in these areas.⁶⁷ This project, which involves the use of solar-powered pumps to replace old and inefficient diesel pumps, will help refugees gain consistent and reliable access to clean water while also aiding climate-vulnerable areas.⁶⁸

Other agencies and organizations are also involved in providing clean water for refugees. UNICEF has been involved in supplying Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) kits to refugees in Sudan, including water quality monitoring kits, hygiene supplies, and water bladders.⁶⁹ UNICEF was also involved in assessing the available water near the refugee camp before it was set up, then established water treatment facilities. It also worked to prevent gender-based violence associated with collecting water and latrine usage by building latrines close to the shelters and providing solar-powered streetlights.⁷⁰ The Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has similarly been involved in WASH projects throughout Africa and Asia. In these projects, QRCS has dug wells, provided pumps and water coolers, constructed sewage networks, and developed irrigation.⁷¹

Conclusion

Access to clean water is vital in allowing refugees to live normal lives and improve their situations. Unclean water carries significant risks of disease, complicates poor hygiene, and can trigger conflicts which worsen already precarious situations for refugees worldwide. UNHCR has stated,

“People in desperate situations often lack the choice or the capacity to distinguish between safe and unsafe water. They are forced to use whatever is available. Rapid and effective outside intervention is therefore essential to supply sufficient quantities of potable water, find and protect water sources, organize collection and distribution and set up sanitation systems.”⁷²

It is crucial that refugees have access to clean and reliable sources of water. However, refugees living in refugee camps rarely have the ability to provide their own clean water. As such, it is necessary that UNHCR cooperate with other UN agencies and NGOs to establish reliable and sustainable water systems for refugees. By doing so, UNHCR can help protect and empower refugees and aid in promoting sustainable development.

⁶⁷ UNHCR, “New Green UNHCR Initiative to Transform Refugees’ Access to Clean Water”

⁶⁸ UNHCR, “New Green UNHCR Initiative to Transform Refugees’ Access to Clean Water”

⁶⁹ UNICEF, “How To Set-Up WASH Services in a Refugee Camp?”

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Reliefweb, “QRCS Provides Clean Drinking Water to Refugees, Displaced People”

⁷² UNHCR, “Ensuring Clean Water & Sanitation”

Questions to Consider:

1. What unique challenges do refugees face in regard to access to clean water?
2. What existing UN programs or frameworks could be improved or altered to improve access to clean water for refugees?
3. How can UNHCR best help Member States and NGOs develop water infrastructure for refugees?

Annotated Bibliography

“Ensuring Clean Water & Sanitation.” UNHCR. Accessed 9 July 2023.

<https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/3fcb5a3b1.pdf>

This document provides a brief overview of UNHCR’s efforts in ensuring access to clean water for refugees. It includes general information and statistics on water usage for refugees and details some of the activities that UNHCR is involved in. While it lacks information on many specific operations, it is useful in gaining an understanding of the situation and can help inspire more in-depth research.

“Water, Sanitation and Hygiene.” UNHCR. Accessed 11 July 2023.

<https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/public-health/water-sanitation-and-hygiene>

UNHCR’s primary article relating to clean water and sanitation for refugees. This article explains UNHCR’s Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) program, including its importance in refugee health and the challenges that many refugees face in getting clean water. The article’s links to annual reports and other articles related to specific WASH activities provide a useful beginning to researching UNHCR’s recent actions.

“Goal 6: Ensure Availability and Sustainable Management of Water and Sanitation for All.” UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Accessed 11 July 2023.

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal6>

This page gives an overview of the sixth UN SDG, “Clean Water and Sanitation”, including its targets and indicators. It also includes links to related news, publications, and events. Given the UN’s current focus on sustainable development, researching how to connect the issue of clean water for refugees with the SDGs is vital.

“Resolution 64/292: The Human Right to Water and Sanitation.” UN General Assembly, 28 July 2010. Accessed 11 July 2023. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/687002>

UNGA Resolution 64/292 establishes UN precedent relating to access to clean water as a human right. While the resolution itself is fairly brief, it encourages international and cross-sectoral cooperation in ensuring access to water that is essential to developing durable solutions. The reports and resolutions it references, while old, may also be helpful in studying this issue.

“Remarks at Launch of International Decade for Action ‘Water for Sustainable Development’ 2018-2028.” UN Secretary General. Accessed 10 July 2023. <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21831.doc.htm>

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’ message at the launch of the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” 2018-2028. In these remarks he emphasizes the importance of access to clean water in promoting sustainable development and lays out his Action Plan. As the Secretary General represents the entire UN, his plan for access to clean water should be used as a foundation for any UNHCR solutions to the issue.

“Lack of Water Linked to 10 Percent of the Rise in Global Migration.” World Bank. Accessed 12 July 2023. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/08/23/lack-of-water-linked-to-10-percent-of-the-rise-in-global-migration>

This article discusses the role of water scarcity in global migration, including forced displacement. This issue is most prevalent in developing regions that already contain significant numbers of refugees and further increases the strain on refugee camps. Additionally, the factors causing this water scarcity may also be involved in the access to clean water for refugees, so solutions for one issue may be viable for the other.

“Water Scarcity.” United Nations Children’s Fund. Accessed 11 July 2023. <https://www.unicef.org/wash/water-scarcity>

This article discusses global water scarcity and its effects on global displacement. As this is a UNICEF article, it focuses largely on the impact of water scarcity on children. While not directly related to clean water for refugees, this article is useful in learning more about conditions that create difficulties in accessing clean water, and many of the programs in which UNICEF is involved may have aspects that could be applied to UNHCR actions.

“UNHCR's Grandi Meets Cameroonians Displaced by Conflict Over Scarce Resources.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 1 May 2022. Accessed 11 July 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/unhcrs-grandi-meets-cameroonians-displaced-conflict-over-scarce-resources>

This article details a visit by High Commissioner Grandi to displaced Cameroonians following conflict over water resources. This situation is only one example of this kind of conflict that often occurs in regions facing water scarcity issues. The article also mentions

some programs and projects currently being undertaken by UNHCR and its partners to help prevent water scarcity and help alleviate the struggles of refugees in affected areas.

“Clean Energy, Clean Water: How Solar Power Brings Safe Water to Refugee Camps.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Accessed 11 July 2023. <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/clean-energy-clean-water-how-solar-power-brings-safe-water-to-refugee-camps/>

This article explains UNHCR’s program of using solar panels to power water filtration systems in refugee camps in Bangladesh, Jordan, and Kenya. While this is only one of the many programs being undertaken by UNHCR, it provides a good example of the type of program that UNHCR is often involved with. This program is especially notable because it is active in refugee camps in very different areas, showing that it is effective in more than only one situation.

“How To Set-Up WASH Services in a Refugee Camp?” United Nations Children’s Fund. Accessed 12 July 2023. <https://www.unicef.org/sudan/stories/how-set-wash-services-refugee-camp>

This article provides information on UNICEF’s efforts in providing WASH supplies to Tigray refugees in Sudan. The article provides the three primary steps UNICEF followed to carry out this program. This is a good example of a program spearheaded by another UN agency, as well as a practical guide on how to set up a realistic and achievable project.

“Drinking-water.” World Health Organization. Accessed 11 July 2023. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/drinking-water>

This page includes facts and information related to the importance of clean drinking water for health. It elaborates on the risks associated with unclean and contaminated drinking water as well as the causes and challenges of this issue. It also includes links to some of WHO’s programs designed to counter this problem.

“New Green UNHCR Initiative to Transform Refugees’ Access to Clean Water.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 16 October 2022. Accessed 12 July 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/neu/81249-new-green-unhcr-initiative-to-transform-refugees-access-to-clean-water.html>

This article details UNHCR’s Project Flow initiative. This project is a collaboration between UNHCR and several Member States to provide solar-powered water pumps in

several locations in Africa. This initiative is an excellent example of the kind of cooperation between UN bodies and Member States that is nearly always present in effective solutions to refugee issues and can therefore act as a sort of guide to developing a strong idea.

“QRCS Provides Clean Drinking Water to Refugees, Displaced People.” Reliefweb. 9 April 2023. Accessed 12 July 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/qrcs-provides-clean-drinking-water-refugees-displaced-people-enar>

This article describes QRCS’s program of supporting WASH projects throughout Africa and Asia. This is an excellent example of an NGO implementing a program and should be seen as proof that UNHCR should collaborate with NGOs to best solve this issue. Because this program occurred in eight different Member States, it also shows that the situations that refugees face in different regions are often very similar, so solutions are often effective in dramatically different locations.