

## Aiding Refugees and Displaced People

### Topic Background for the Committee on Aiding Refugees and Displaced People

*Now more than ever, we need international cooperation and practical, effective responses. We need better answers for those who flee, and better help for communities and countries that receive and host them...Indeed, at a time when the right to asylum is under assault, when so many borders and doors are being closed to refugees, when even child refugees are being detained and divided from their families, we need to reaffirm the human rights of refugees*

– **António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General**

### Statement of the Problem

The world today is facing one of the largest human migration crises in modern history, with more people displaced today than at the end of World War II seventy-five years ago. Wars, conflicts, and persecution, along with natural disasters, droughts, and famines (often caused by climate change) leave people with no choice but to leave their home, and at times their country, to seek safety and security. These people become **forcibly displaced**, meaning they involuntarily must leave or flee their homes due to a variety of reasons that makes it impossible for them to stay. This is different from those who choose to migrate from their home or country in search of better economic opportunities, job opportunities, or to be closer to family. Today, 70.8 million people worldwide are forcibly displaced.<sup>1</sup>



*A girl at a refugee camp on the Turkey-Syria border. (Reuters)*

Forced displacement creates a multitude of issues and places stress on individuals, governments, and the international community. When someone is forcibly displaced, they often lose access to basic human necessities such as healthcare, food, water, and education. They may face physical violence, mental health issues, a lack of employment opportunities, separation from family members, and trouble integrating into a new culture and society. Furthermore, about half of all forcibly displaced people worldwide are children. Many of these children were born during the events that caused their displacement and do not know life otherwise.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Figures at a Glance](#), UNHCR, 2019.

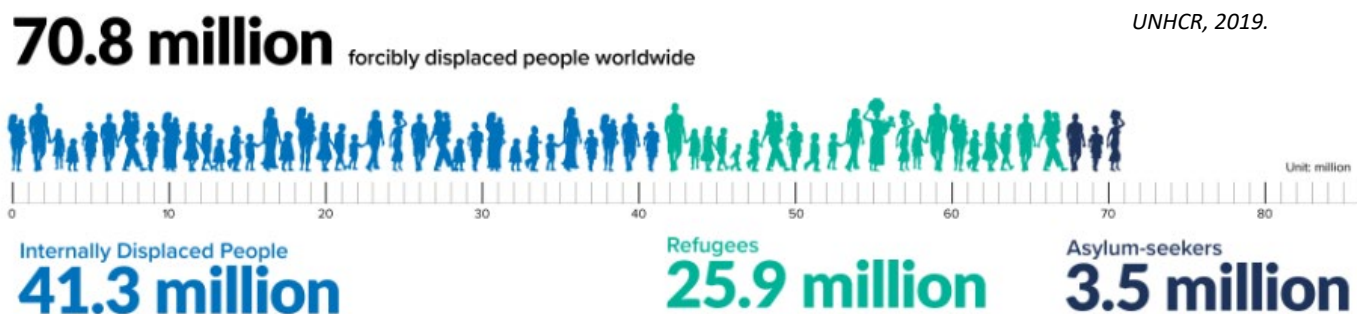
International law, created by the **United Nations (UN)** in the **1951 Geneva Convention** and **1967 Protocol**, protects **asylum** seekers and **refugees**. But this law only protects those who are fleeing to another country. When people are displaced within their own country, it remains the home country's responsibility to help those who are displaced *within* its borders. In addition, even with the international law that protects refugees, a country's **internal politics** often complicates their response on how to deal with large influxes of refugees in terms of how much money to allocate, where to relocate them to, and how many people to grant asylum to, just to name a few. Large **migration crises**, like in Venezuela, often create regional and national political tensions, as some citizens struggle with how their **national identity** will be affected by the newcomers.

The amount of people in the world forcibly displaced today is astounding and represents one of the world's greatest challenges. During this crisis, countries have increasingly had to work together to decide how to properly accommodate refugees crossing their borders. Countries have also had to grapple with how to accommodate the displaced people within their country. In both situations, countries often have fallen short due to politics and a lack of decision-making.

### Defining Refugees and Internally Displaced People

Under the umbrella term of forcibly displaced people, there exists sub-categories that more accurately describe the situation that a displaced person is experiencing. According to the United Nations, "a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee [their] country because of **persecution**, war, and violence"<sup>2</sup> due to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. Most likely, they are unable to return to their home country or are afraid to do so. Under the protection of international law, refugees are entitled to seek asylum in a **country of destination**. Asylum is "the right to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and **material assistance**. An asylum seeker must demonstrate that his or her fear of persecution in his or her home country is well-founded"<sup>3</sup> Someone who is seeking asylum is deciding to seek a legal right to reside in a new country, rather than returning to their **country of origin** if the danger that caused them to flee subsides.

An **internally displaced person (IDP)**, unlike a refugee, "stays within their own country and remains under the protection of their government, even if that government is the reason for their displacement."<sup>4</sup> Oftentimes the government is the cause of an IDP's displacement, for reasons such as internal conflict or persecution, which makes it even more difficult for **humanitarian organizations** to reach IDPs to give out aid and assistance. An example today is war-torn Syria, where war has not only produced millions of



<sup>2</sup> [What is a Refugee?](#), UNHCR, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> [What is a Refugee?](#), UNHCR, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> [Internally Displaced People](#), UNHCR, 2019.

refugees who have fled the country seeking safety, but also caused millions of Syrians to become displaced within the country's borders. These IDPs in Syria continue to be affected by the war, facing not only physical violence, but a lack of food and water, proper health supplies or access to hospitals, and a broken or nonexistent education system. An IDP may also be forced to move within their country due to environmental factors, such as natural disasters, drought, and famine. Another factor that makes it especially difficult for the United Nations and humanitarian organizations to protect and help IDPs is the fact that they are not protected under international law like refugees. They are also not eligible for certain forms of aid because they are technically under the protection of their home government (even if their government is failing to protect them).<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that almost two-thirds of all of the forcibly displaced people in the world are IDPs who have not left their home country.

### International Efforts Regarding Forcibly Displaced People

In an effort to help the millions of people displaced after World War II, the newly created United Nations established the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**. Also known as the UN Refugee Agency, the UNHCR since its founding has expanded its work to protecting and aiding not only refugees, but also IDPs. Today, it works in 134 countries to provide emergency assistance to those who have become forcibly displaced. It provides clean water, sanitation and healthcare, and necessities such as shelter, blankets, household goods and sometimes food. The UNHCR also works on resettling displaced people, arranging for their transportation, providing assistance packages, and working with people to create projects that can generate an **income** after displacement. In addition to providing basic necessities like food, water, sanitation, and health care, the UN also works to provide security for those displaced people living in temporary camps. Usually, UN Peacekeepers are present in UNHCR refugee camps in order to protect the camps and those living in them.<sup>6</sup>



*UNHCR staff give out food to displaced Venezuelans. 4 million have fled Venezuela since the outbreak of political chaos, food shortages, and hyperinflation. (UNHCR, 2019)*

The UNHCR is the official guardian of the 1951 Geneva Convention (also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention) and the 1967 Protocol. The 1951 Convention is a legal document, signed by 145 UN **member states**, that defines the term refugee and outlines refugees' rights. It also lays out the legal obligations of member states to protect refugees, which includes banning member states from returning refugees to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. The 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, is another legal document that followed the 1951 Convention.

The Convention originally only applied refugee status and rights to those who were displaced before 1951, so the 1967 Protocol removed this restriction to apply the Convention **universally**. These two legal documents are now used together to lay

<sup>5</sup> [What is a Refugee?](#), UNHCR, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> [Refugees](#), United Nations, 2019.



out the international law that protects refugees today. An important note about this law is that children of refugees and their descendants are also considered refugees until a solution is found. This solution can be asylum or **repatriation** in their country of origin.<sup>7</sup>

Each year, the United Nations observes World Refugee Day on June 20. In recent years it has held high-level meetings, like one held in September 2016, to address the mass amounts of displaced people in the world today. The UN also held the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, which brought together key actors such as refugees, heads of state and government, UN leaders, international institutions, development organizations, business leaders, and others.

The issue of refugees and displaced people can relate to almost every one of the UN's **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. One example can be SDG 3, "clean water and sanitation," because those who are forcibly displaced often lack access to both clean water and sanitation. Another example can be SDG 1, "no poverty," because forcibly displaced people, especially IDPs, must often live in extreme poverty due to a loss of livelihood and past employment and the temporary nature of their settlement within their country. But even though this issue is connected with most of the SDGs, refugees and displaced people are not specifically mentioned anywhere in the SDGs. Organizations that support forcibly displaced people and proponents of refugee and displaced people's rights have fought to have the United Nations include this. It has been a **contentious** topic, especially as the number of displaced people in the world continues to hit record numbers.<sup>8</sup>

### Major Issues Related to Refugees and Displaced People

Many of the countries that host the largest share of refugees and have the greatest number of IDPs are **developing countries**. Most refugees' countries of origin are developing countries and most countries of destination, or where refugees wind up fleeing to, are their neighboring countries. Developing countries and their citizens already experience issues with poverty, inequalities, conflict, and political instability, and both refugees and IDPs unfortunately can put a major strain on money and resources. "Countries in crisis-affected regions, in spite of limited resources, have largely kept their doors open, preserving millions of lives."<sup>9</sup> These developing host countries sometimes must spend **foreign aid** that they receive from developed countries on displaced people, even if the UN and humanitarian organizations are already there



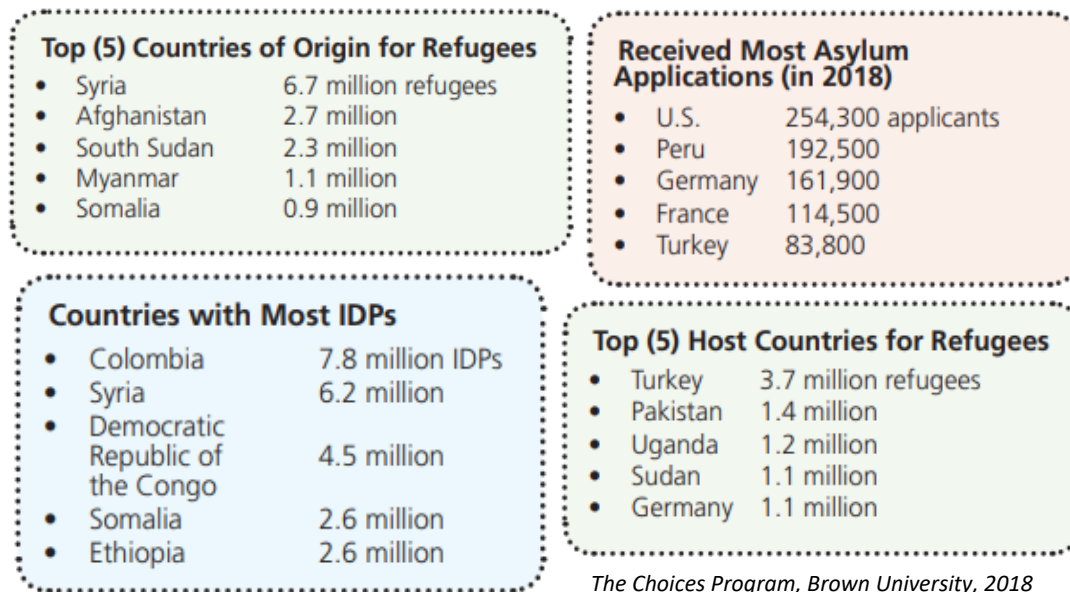
*Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar arrive in neighboring Bangladesh by boat. After facing persecution and extreme violence by the government of Myanmar beginning in 2017, around 910,000 Rohingya have taken refuge in Bangladesh. (UNICEF)*

<sup>7</sup> [About Us](#), UNHCR.

<sup>8</sup> [Including Forced Displacement in the SDGs](#), UNHCR, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> [The first-ever Global Refugee Forum](#), UNHCR, 2019.

providing aid. In Lebanon, for example, refugees from neighboring Syria now make up about 16% of the country's population, making it the country that has hosted the most refugees **per capita** in the world today.<sup>10</sup>



In addition, there is nothing stated in international law that legally protects displaced people who must flee because of natural disasters or environmental causes. This could be drought, floods, famine, earthquakes, mudslides, or hurricanes, just to name a few. Although most forced displacement related to environmental factors is internal (within a country), as these natural disasters and environmental emergencies continue to increase, largely due to **climate change**, the international community may have to incorporate language in the international law protecting refugees to include those who are forcibly displaced due to these factors. Rising sea-levels, difficulty growing crops in polluted soil, extreme weather, drought, and **desertification**, can contribute to the forced displacement of people across national borders.

In order to gain status as a refugee, a displaced person must state that they are fleeing due to persecution, war, and violence due to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. The international law laid out by the Geneva Convention does not protect those who are fleeing their country of origin due to a lack of food, water, health care, and livelihood, even though it is often caused by persecution, war, or violence. While these are often the reasons that people must leave their country, these reasons alone would not sustain a refugee claim under the existing international law. An example of this is in Sudan, where violence and conflict began over a lack of resources, like food and water, due to droughts caused by climate change.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> [Confronting the Global Forced Migration Crisis](#), Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> [Refugees](#), United Nations, 2019.

## The Challenge

If recent trends continue, there could be between 180 and 320 million forcibly displaced people worldwide by 2030.<sup>12</sup> Countries not only need to work together more **cohesively** and efficiently in how they respond to large amounts of forcibly displaced people migrating across borders, but they also need to take more **preventative** efforts to ensure that there are less conflicts that force people to flee their homes. In addition, countries should strive to lessen the effects of climate change that are



*Syrian refugee children in a German classroom. Education can be a key tool in integrating refugees into a new country and its culture. (Brookings Institution)*

responsible for creating conflict and environmental issues that make places almost unlivable. Politics within a country and between countries often get in the way of coordinating effective and adequate responses to forcibly displaced people.

Displaced people migrating to a new place or new country sometimes face **xenophobia** upon their arrival. Despite the extremely harsh situations that have forced them to flee their homes and their inability to have much of a choice in deciding the direction of their lives, they can be met with hostility or fear from those already living in the place they migrate to. Xenophobia often drives political responses to displaced people that hinder a country's ability to provide adequate resources, successful integration measures, and sometimes even drives a government's decision to lessen the number of asylum applications that they will approve each year.

"With refugees, the best solution is being able to return home voluntarily, in safety and dignity."<sup>13</sup> Reflected in the numbers and statistics stated in this briefing paper, a large portion of refugees are not asylum seekers. They wish to return to their home countries when and if it is safe to do so. Those who do successfully apply for asylum need assistance with **integrating** into the life, society, and culture of their new home countries. Many people who are forcibly displaced experience severe trauma and therefore experience high rates of mental health problems related to these traumatic experiences. This can make integration into a new culture and society even more difficult.<sup>14</sup> Some countries have implemented programs that aim to connect refugees with their new communities, part of efforts to build relationships with community members and help them find commonalities with one another. Education is also a key factor in refugee integration, with both children and adults. Learning the country's language, history, and

<sup>12</sup> [Confronting the Global Forced Migration Crisis](#), Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> [Global forced displacement tops 70 million](#), UNHCR, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> [Refugees and Social Integration in Europe](#), UNDESA, 2018.

culture is critical for becoming part of their new country. It is important to note though that integration does not mean a loss of connection and culture from a refugee's country of origin.

The issue of refugees and internally displaced people is one of the largest problems the world faces today. While there are many shortcomings in how countries have responded to this crisis and it often seems as if the conflicts and disasters that create these forcibly displaced people are nearly impossible to solve, there are still many solutions that have potential to truly help those who experience displacement and to prevent more people from being forced from their homes. In this committee, delegates will come together to discuss these issues and debate the responsibilities that individual countries have with respect to this growing global concern.

## Questions to Consider

---

1. What is forced displacement? What are some of the reasons that someone may become forcibly displaced from their home?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

2. What is the difference between an internally displaced person (IDP) and a refugee? What are the unique issues related to the different types of forced displacement?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. What forms of aid might an IDP or refugee need? Why?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

4. Is forced displacement a major issue related to your assigned country? How does this issue relate to your country? For example, does your country predominantly have IDPs, displaced people who are leaving your country (like refugees), and/or is it a country of destination for displaced people?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

5. How has forced displacement affected your country's national politics? How has it affected politics in your region of the world?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

6. What policies, if any, does your country have in place to accommodate forcibly displaced people? What is your country's policy in regards to granting asylum? How many refugees are granted asylum in your country per year?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

7. What are some solutions that your country and the international community can take to help forcibly displaced people? What are some actions your country and the international community can take to prevent more people from becoming forcibly displaced?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Term	Description
1951 Geneva Convention (1951 Refugee Convention)	A key legal document that defines who is a refugee, their rights, and the role countries are required to play in handling refugees. Also produced from this convention was the guideline that refugees should not be forced to return to their country if they fear persecution or threat. When ratified, the convention articles only affected those refugees from events prior to January 1, 1951.
1967 Protocol	Removed the limitation of the 1951 Geneva Convention from those forcibly displaced before January 1, 1951. Universally applied the rights and legal protections of refugees to anyone affected.
Asylum	The right to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance. An asylum seeker must demonstrate that his or her fear of persecution in his or her home country is well-founded. Someone who is seeking asylum is deciding to seek a legal right to reside in a new country.
Climate Change	A change in global or regional climate patterns; In particular, a change apparent from the mid to late 20th century onwards and attributed largely to the increased levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide produced by the use of fossil fuels.
Cohesively	To work well together.
Contentious	Controversial; something that is highly debated upon.
Country of Destination	A country that is the destination for refugees, displaced people or other migrants; the country that a migrant is hoping to enter and relocate
Country of Origin	The home country of a migrant
Desertification	The process by which fertile land becomes desert, typically as a result of drought, deforestation, or inappropriate agriculture
Developing Countries	Countries that do not have complex economic systems, often relying on agricultural, mining or other natural resources for economic activity. Often these countries are poorer and seek to grow their country by advancing their economic systems and infrastructure.
Forcibly Displaced	Refers to people who must leave their home due to armed conflict, persecution, human rights violations/abuses, violence, natural disasters, and/or the negative effects of climate change. This term can refer to people who move within their home country or to another country.
Foreign Aid	Money, food, or other resources given to a country from another country or international organization
Humanitarian Organizations	Groups that provide aid and assistance to people that need help due to conflicts, displacement, natural disasters, or other environmental factors
Income	Money received on a regular basis for work.
Integrating	Process in which people are brought into equal standing within a group or society through equal opportunity and other rights.
Internal Politics	Political actions and debate within a given country.
Internally Displaced Person (IDP)	A person displaced within their own country; Unlike refugees, international law does not protect IDPs because they are still under the protection of their government, even if their government is the reason for the conflict or persecution that caused their displacement.
Material assistance	Aid that comes in the form of material goods such as food, water, health supplies, clothing, blankets, shelter, etc.
Member States	The term used for a country that is a member of an international organization, such as the United Nations.
Migration Crisis	When a large amount of people (including refugees, forcibly displaced people, and economic migrants) leave their country of origin and seek to move to other countries in a short period of time. This can lead to countries of destination being overwhelmed with new people and not having adequate housing, food, jobs or social services to provide for them all. This often leads to tensions both domestically and abroad.
National Identity	A sense of belonging to a nation or country; National identity is represented by traditions, culture, language, a shared history, and politics
Per Capita	The amount of something per person in a specific area. For example, the number of hospitals per capita in a country.

<b>Persecution</b>	Hostility and/or mistreatment, often due to race, ethnicity, religion, or political beliefs
<b>Preventative</b>	Used to stop something (typically something bad) from happening.
<b>Refugee</b>	Someone who has been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war, and violence due to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. Most likely, they are unable to return to their home country or are afraid to do so.
<b>Repatriation</b>	The act of returning someone to their country of origin or country of citizenship.
<b>Sustainable Development Goals</b>	Also known as Global Goals, these build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty. The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet.
<b>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)</b>	Established by the United Nations, the UNHCR is an international organization responsible for the protection of refugees and displaced people worldwide.
<b>Universally</b>	Covering everyone and everything without limit or exception.
<b>Xenophobia</b>	A fear or hatred of strangers or foreigners.