



# SOCHUM

## TOPIC GUIDE

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# Academy Model United Nations

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Hello delegates!

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to AMUN XXIV! My name is Angela Li, and I am honored to be one of your co-chairs for the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee. I am a junior in the Science Academy at BCA and I've been involved with MUN at BCA since freshman year. I'm excited to experience your committee discussions and unmods live, something I missed when chairing AMUN virtually last year. Because this is probably your first or second conference ever, I encourage you to actively step out of your comfort zone: there is much to gain from committee discussions that internet research does not offer! Outside of Model UN, I am an avid TV show watcher of all genres (currently watching Monarca), casual poet (hello fans of Naomi Shihab Nye), and cat lover. What I enjoy the most about MUN conferences is the interdisciplinary and multifaceted (that word again) nature of the issues that are debated; I hope you all will find your research as thought-provoking as I did. If you have any questions about committee procedures or the background guide, feel free to email me at [angli24@bergen.org](mailto:angli24@bergen.org)

Best of luck!

Angela Li, Chair, SOCHUM  
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Hey delegates!

My name is Reia Lee and I am one of your co-chairs for this committee. I am also a junior in the science academy and I have been doing Model UN since the beginning of my freshman year. I have participated in AMUN for the past 2 years, and I'm so excited to participate as a chair now (in-person)! I have met so many amazing people through Model UN and was able to develop my research and speaking skills a lot. Now that conferences can take place in person instead of virtually, I'm even more excited to continue attending conferences and further develop my speaking skills! Outside of school and Model UN, I like to play soccer, table tennis, piano, watch Kdramas, and spend time with my friends. My co-chair and I hope that you learn a lot from researching and discussing this topic of refugees resulting from military conflicts, since this is an important, widespread, and ongoing issue. I believe that everyone can gain something valuable from doing Model UN, even though it can be intimidating at first. Whether you're an experienced delegate or this is just your first conference, I know that you will all do great and remember to have fun! If you have any questions, please feel free to email me!

Good luck!

Reia Lee, Chair, SOCHUM  
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# Introduction to Committee

There are currently over 89 million refugees in the world, with over 26 million forced to flee their homes in the past year due to military conflict: the highest number ever recorded. Despite this increase in military conflict displacements, the number of countries and host communities taking in refugees remains disproportionately small.

Even after relocation, refugees still face many issues such as xenophobia, inadequate work opportunities and conditions, poor healthcare, and other issues that make it difficult for them to integrate into their new homes.

In 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which caused Europe's biggest refugee crisis since World War II, forced over 9 million Ukrainians and 300,000 Russians to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Delegates should consider this recent and ongoing conflict when discussing potential solutions. However, this is only just one modern example – with underreported military conflicts occurring all over the world, especially in Africa and the Middle East, there are millions more lives impacted by conflict and violence at stake.

# Refugees Resulting from Military Conflicts

## Topic History

The past century was filled with military conflicts that left many people no choice but to flee their home countries. Informally documented since the 16th century, tens of millions of people have been displaced from their homes since the creation of international refugee law, over 25 million of whom are considered refugees (30).



The First World War and the ensuing creation of the League of Nations in 1921 was the first establishment of comprehensive international law defining and dealing with the status of refugees. This time period saw the first international military conflict and created one of the highest volumes of refugees in part because of the brutal hostilities of war and because of the new requirements of travel documents such as passports and visas in movement across borders.

The first modern definition of international refugee status was given after the refugee crisis in Europe immediately following World War I. The League of Nations, which preceded the United Nations, defined “refugee” as any person who, “owing to 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; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” (31)

The collapse of European empires prompted the creation of The League of Nations’ High Commissioner for Refugees, which first assisted the over one million refugees resulting from the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing civil war (13). In the same time period, US President Herbert Hoover created the first NGO for refugee aid, the Commission for Relief in Belgium, which by the end of the war distributed over 5 million tons of food and \$1 billion in aid to refugees (14). Importantly, the League of Nations also established the Nansen International Office for Refugees, which created the Nansen passport in 1930, a refugee travel document for stateless persons, and led 14 nations to ratify the 1933 Refugee Convention (23).

About 30 years after the First World War, World War II displaced nearly 40 million Europeans in the 1940s, and post World War II conflicts displaced an additional 13

million Germans and 11 million laborers, or unskilled workers from their home countries (10). Even as early as 1933, the rise of Nazism began to cause external displacement; at this time, the League of Nations lacked political influence and countries such as Britain continued to tighten visa requirements for immigrants (27). This and the high volume of refugees displaced by the War led the Allies to create the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in 1943, which set up displaced persons camps and returned over seven million refugees to their countries of origin (43). It is important to note that many Jewish refugees at the time were met with xenophobia and antisemitism in countries that had previously accepted refugees from Poland and Belgium without such hostility.

After the end of the Second World War, millions of European refugees needed to be repatriated or resettled, and, in 1945, the United Nations was formed and took on the UNRRA’s role in doing so (41). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was founded in 1950 by the Allies to aid and protect refugees and to assist their resettlement to a different country.



The agency started out small with an annual budget of \$300,000; however, their size, work, and budget would later grow to where it is now. Another organization founded by the United Nations, the International Refugee Organization, also helped displaced Europeans repatriate or resettle (7).

Later that decade, the UNHCR assisted 200,000 refugees in relocating to neighboring countries during Algeria's independence struggle against France, the agency's first intervention in Africa. In the following years, conflicts continued to occur on the African continent due to the end of colonialism, affecting countless countries including Rwanda, Tanzania, Mozambique, and surrounding countries. In the following half decade, the UNHCR would continue its efforts in military conflicts all over the world, in countries such as India, Vietnam, Thailand, Iraq, Guatemala, and Sudan (32).

In the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the United Nations also established the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which specifically provided emergency relief to the more than 700,000 Palestinian refugees displaced by the war and exodus of Palestinian Arabs. After its establishment in 1952, the UNRWA allocated four times as much funding on reintegration than on relief and refocused its efforts on human development, an approach that was not previously seen in the resettlement of European refugees of World War II. Since then, the UNRWA has operated with its own working definition of "refugee," separate from that of the UNHCR, to allow it to provide humanitarian assistance (21).

To understand the UN's present day role in the matters of refugees, it is important to know the original definitions and rights established by the UN. As summarized by Amnesty International, a refugee is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution if they stay there (3). Their own government cannot or will not protect their rights from those dangers, so they must seek safety in a different country (3). In 1951, the UN organized the first large-scale Refugee Convention, which had representatives of 26 States in attendance at Geneva. The definition of "refugee" at the time had changed from "displaced persons" to "any person fleeing events that had taken place before January 1st 1951 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted'." (26)"



The Convention, which was led by the UNHCR, asserted that "a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom," which would later be considered international law. At the time, this convention was the most comprehensive codification of refugee rights and expanded the scope of refugees they would aid, compared to

previous efforts by the Red Cross and the League of Nations which were limited to specific refugee groups.

The 1967 Protocol further broadened their scope, removing geographical and time limits that still existed in the 1951 Convention (5).

## Current situation

In addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which articulated the basic freedom that all people – including those fleeing their homes because of persecution – are guaranteed, the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are the only international treaties outlining the rights of refugees. An important question that has arisen in international law is the distinction between refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants, and the protections that each population is entitled to by law. By definition, refugees are persons who are forcibly displaced from their home countries due to the well-founded fear of persecution (42). Today, armed conflict is a major cause for refugee movement, engendering political, religious, ethnic, social, or gender persecution (30). In the 2010s, low global displacement levels of the early 21st century were once again disturbed by a series of armed conflicts, including the war in Syria, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the South Sudanese civil war, and civil conflict in Colombia. In 2015, the UNHCR estimated that the total number of refugees and internally displaced people amounted to over 60 million people (29).

Forced displacement, however, can also be caused by other factors: many people displaced by armed conflict are not recognized as refugees under the 1951 Convention, as they are considered to be fleeing generalized violence rather than persecution. Over the years, nations have developed different laws and protocols governing the status of refugees and the rights afforded to refugees, which have evolved throughout the modern history of refugee movement. In most cases, an individual must apply for asylum status and meet the definition of a “refugee” given in the 1951 Convention before asylee status is given.

Despite the UNHCR’s statement that “the use of detention is, in many instances, contrary to the norms and principles of international law,” it is common practice in many nations to hold asylum-seekers in detention centers during the process, a practice that has been criticized by international humanitarian organizations for being overused and inhumane. Although there are no numbers available, the Global Detention Project (GDP) estimates that there have been 2,000 immigration facilities (including detention centers and immigrant jails) in use across 100 countries over the last decade (12).

The UNHCR has implemented The Global Strategy in a number of countries around the world to discourage the practice of the detention of asylum-seekers, ensure humane conditions of detention centers when detention is necessary, and ensure that alternatives to detention are implemented in practice (33).

Once relocated, refugees remain among the most vulnerable members of society, often subject to poor living and working conditions, inadequate access to essential services such as healthcare, and discrimination in many forms such as racial and religious. In fact, refugees previously exposed to armed conflict are disproportionately subject to post-traumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, and other common mental disorders (20).

While pre-migration exposure to armed conflict is an important contributor to the development of mental health disorders, post-migration conditions also play a role in its adaptation and recovery (15). While refugee camps offer a safety net and first step to the reintegration process, over half of the global population of refugees (60%) choose to live outside of refugee camps, where government policy has a major impact on the ease of the reintegration process (44). Despite the goal of the 2018 Global Compact for Refugees to increase refugee self-reliance, investments in refugee reintegration are often unevenly diverted away from supporting urban-based refugees, which requires more complex provision structures than reintegration within refugee camps (44).

For those displaced by armed conflict, the prospect of returning home is often slim or prolonged, as armed conflict often lasts for a prolonged period and takes a toll on the economy of the country in which it occurs. In ongoing conflicts, these conditions continue to be suffered by refugees who are still unable to return home. In particular, one of the most urgent and recent refugee crises is happening in Ukraine, as a result of

the continuing Russian invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022. The UNHCR has declared this crisis as a Level 3 Emergency, the highest level. More than 5.6 million Ukrainian refugees and 8.7 million border crossings have been recorded since last February. It is estimated that more than 7.1 million people will be internally displaced in Ukraine as of April 2022, many of them in neighboring European countries such as Poland, Romania, and Hungary (16). However, although many countries together have hosted millions of refugees, they face logistical and coordination challenges, economic obstacles, and integration difficulties.

Currently, numerous UN conventions, non governmental organizations, and UN committees are in existence to protect the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. UN committees include the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), both responsible for providing humanitarian aid. Other notable organizations include the International Rescue Committee, Refugees International, Doctors Without Borders, and the International Organization for Migration. SOCHUM, the third committee of the United Nations, approves multiple draft resolutions discussing the treatment of refugees each year (40).

## Country Policy

### Europe

European countries have historically seen high levels of refugee displacement from military conflicts. Refugee numbers fluctuate

as conflicts arise and solutions are found, but Europe has had a long history of offering sanctuary for asylum-seekers, with current refugees primarily being hosted in Germany, France, and Italy.

Turkey is the largest refugee hosting country in the world with more than 3.8 million refugees, 15% of all displaced globally (34). The European Union established a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in 1999, which was reformed in 2020 after an unprecedented increase in refugee arrival in 2015 exposed the deficiencies in existing European refugee policy (11). Though Europe has had ambitious goals of refugee reintegration, many of its refugee camps are characterized by squalid living conditions (17). Most recently, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict has displaced over 11 million refugees and 6 million internationally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine in June 2022. The EU has granted Ukrainians the automatic right to stay and work throughout its 27 member nations for up to three years (6).

### Asia and the Pacific

The wealthiest countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as South Korea and Japan, have highly restrictive refugee policies, while their poorer neighbors grant asylum to thousands of refugees each year (22). Countries in Southeast Asia bear the disproportionate burden of hosting refugees relocated to Asia but lack the funding and supplies needed to fund this humanitarian aid. Developing countries host 85% of the world's refugee population, a problem that persists in the Asia-Pacific region, yet these

countries have not been prepared to become parties to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its Protocol (28). Currently, Asia is the only region of the world without a regional agreement on refugees. With a lack of regional policies, these countries must create regulations to crises as they happen, which caused years of processing delays for refugees displaced by the Afghanistan war (8). Changes have been occurring in recent years, however, as South Korea enacted its first ever refugee law in 2013 and Japan has accepted dozens of Ukrainian “evacuees” in 2022 (18).

### Africa

The African Union (AU), a continental union consisting of 55 member states in Africa, is one of UNHCR's most important partners and a longtime leader of global efforts to resolve forced displacement, creating landmark treaties on refugees and international displacement (35). As of 2021, more than 32 million Africans have been displaced by government conflicts, political fragmentation, and violent extremist groups, such as the conflict in Tigray which displaced 1.8 million people and violent attacks by the Islamic State in West Africa which displaced 2.5 million Nigerians (1).

Despite being some of the world's poorest countries, African nations host 30 million refugees as of 2021, about one-third of the international refugee population. In Africa, the long-term, and seemingly permanent, migration of refugee communities has highlighted the importance of integrating refugee camps into their host societies rather than closing them, something that is being

done in the Kalobeyei camp in Kakuma (4).

Despite large numbers of displacements each year, African refugee crises are increasingly overlooked and underfunded as media coverage turned its attention to the Ukrainian refugee crisis and, for the first time, the Norwegian Refugee Council's annual top ten neglected displacement crises was comprised entirely of African countries in 2022 (24). The Organization of African Unity (OAU) created the OAU Refugee Convention in 1969. The OAU comprises 15 articles that govern refugee protection in Africa, which builds on the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol. The convention has been ratified by 46 out of 55 member states of the African Union and is the only binding, regional legal instrument on refugee issues in the developing world.

#### North America

Since 1980, the USA has accepted more than 3.8 million refugees and asylum seekers, and in 2019 accepted over 30,000 refugees and granted asylum to over 46,000 individuals. In March 2022, President Biden announced that his administration will welcome up to 100,000 refugees from Ukraine. More than 71,000 have arrived in the USA, where more than 38,000 have been approved.

However, only 300 Ukrainians have been resettled through the traditional US Refugee Admissions Program, which uses federal funds to bring in UN-vetted refugees and resettles them in communities with access to resources. President Biden has promised to improve this program after this has been cut by the previous Trump administration (2).

More than 32,000 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in neighboring Canada, where they are allowed to stay “for a few years” and may apply for financial assistance to help them settle into their new homes (19).

#### South America

The region of Northern South America, comprising Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia, faces political and economic stability.

One major conflict is in Colombia, where many Colombians living in border areas have been forced to flee to neighboring countries such as Peru and Ecuador due to a series of security threats in the country. Border security is a major issue for Colombia due to increases in migration flows and the widespread stigmatization of Colombians as kidnappers and drug traffickers.

In 2003, a bilateral agreement between Colombia and Venezuela was signed to improve border monitoring and population movements. However, the UNHCR is concerned that this will weaken already established protection and lead to increasingly restrictive practices.

The region of Southern South America, which includes Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile, also faces many political and economic conflicts. However, these countries have been willing to accept Colombian refugees, showing their commitment to protecting refugees. In 2002, Southern South American countries signed a MERCOSUR agreement, which allowed free transit and residence for all their citizens (36).

This had positive implications for refugees and those in similar situations, and will facilitate the integration of those fleeing from one MERCOSUR country to another.

### Central America

Central America, specifically a region called the North of Central America, is considered one of the most dangerous places on earth due to gang violence, threats, extortion, persecution, and sexual violence.

This region includes Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, where an estimated 890,000 people have been forced to flee their homes. Over 550,000 have fled to neighboring countries and over 315,000 are displaced within the region. In 2018, more than 100,000 fled from Nicaragua to neighboring countries such as Costa Rica and Panama due to political turmoil and persecution. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the situation since lockdowns allowed gangs to take control of food and medicine in certain areas, causing more people to flee the region. Many have lost their jobs and poverty only became worse. More and more refugees are in need of basic necessities such as food, housing, and medicine.

In this area in particular, unaccompanied minors make up most of the refugee population and a large portion of the refugees are part of the LGBTQ community, forced to flee their homes to avoid gender and sexuality based violence (37).

## Potential Solutions

A number of issues arise on the path of mass immigration and refugee movement, especially during times of armed conflict. International refugee relief experts, including the UNHCR, recognize three solutions as durable solutions for refugee movement: repatriation, local integration, and resettlement (9).

Delegates should first consider the groundwork that their country has laid for attaining the safe and successful provision of these solutions for asylum seekers. This includes evaluating the restrictiveness of policies to grant refugee status, the process of detaining asylum seekers, and the country's adherence to the principle of non-refoulement.

Once in their host country, refugees still face a myriad of challenges in regards to their status and quality of life. Those who temporarily stay in a host country will either live at a refugee camp or relocate to an out-of-camp accommodation; in both situations, refugees will face unique economic and social challenges. In many cases, a refugee's decision of where to live is impacted by the following factors: freedoms, housing conditions, social networks, and economic participation (25). Delegates should keep in mind that refugees in camps are 36% more likely to live below national extreme poverty lines; furthermore, they often contend with inadequate access to water, electricity, and sewerage (38).

At the same time, the vast majority of

refugees outside of refugee camps are still at high risk of poverty and have limited access to basic services, education, and job opportunities. Racism and xenophobia contribute to the difficulty of reintegration. Delegates should look at the support structures that are available for refugees in their country and international standards, and find solutions for successful long-term reintegration. In doing so, delegates should also address issues unrelated to quality of life that continue to affect forcibly displaced peoples, such as the existence of harmful trafficking gangs that exploit refugees and migrants.

Resettlement is also recognized as one of the three durable solutions for refugee crises, and it involves the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence (39). However, it has only been provided to refugees considered most vulnerable by the UNHCR. As of 2020, less than one percent of all refugees are resettled each year. Delegates should discuss what policies are necessary to increase this number and extend this safe option to more refugees.

Finally, delegates should frame these considerations in the context of currently ongoing refugee crises. Notably, the current Russo-Ukrainian conflict should be a main topic of contention and delegates should consider what their countries can do to improve asylum conditions and the migration process for the refugees displaced by this crisis.

## Questions to Consider

What existing legislation does your country have regarding refugee status and refugee camps?

Is your country part of any international agreements pertaining to refugees?

How did your country respond to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, or other previous refugee crises?

How do refugee crises in your region affect your country?

What is your country's stance on accepting refugees?

What kind of new legislation might help refugees gain access to basic necessities and services in their new societies?

How can countries provide more employment opportunities and facilitate the reintegration process for refugees?

What can be done to overcome the effects of COVID-19 on refugee crises?

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