

Study Guide

for the

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

on the topics of

- **The increased discrimination and social exclusion towards female refugees,**
- **The barriers that refugees face when accessing education, jobs and health services,**
- **The effects of Covid-19 and climate change on displacement,**
- **The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.**



Chairs:

Laura Recaño Costoso

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List of Contents

Welcoming Letter from the Chairs 2

The Committee: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees..... 4

1. Introduction to the topic 4

2. Historical Background..... 6

3. The Increased Discrimination and Social Exclusion towards Female Refugees 6

4. The Barriers that Refugees Face when Accessing Education and Jobs 7

5. The Barriers that Refugees Face when Accessing Health Services 9

6. The Effects of Covid-19 on Displacement 11

7. The Effects of Climate Change on Displacement 13

8. The Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan..... 14

Questions a Resolution should Answer 15

Bibliography 15



Welcoming Letter from the Chairs

Distinguished delegates,

First and foremost, we would like to extend our warmest welcome to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at KAMUN - The Black Forest Summit 2021! We are honored to have been given the opportunity to be chairing this committee and draft together a resolution that will be the result of your hard work and efforts. Most importantly, we are pleased to be finally going back to face-to-face conferences after the Covid-19 pandemic.

My name is Laura Recaño Costoso, a 4th year student of Law and Criminology at Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. I'm very interested in criminal law and international affairs, with special regard for gender inequality. I began attending MUNs in high school and continued through university by participating in local and international conferences. In all of them, I participated as a delegate but this year I wanted to face a new challenge by being a chair and I'm really looking forward to it.

My name is Gemma Roig Arsequell and I'm a third year student of Global Governance, Economics and Legal Order at Esade. I'm also taking another degree in Translation, Interpreting and Applied Languages. The first time I participated in a MUN was when I was 16 years old. Since then, I immediately fell in love with how the UN works and decided I want to become a diplomat. I have been a delegate in several conferences all around Europe, but I can't wait to be back to chairing and meet all of you in a few months.

Our journey together began at the same time: we joined the International Programmes Club - IP Club - of our school and discovered the fascinating world of MUNs. Since then, we have attended the following conferences: Model United Nations of Bucharest in Romania, Model United Nations of Goldberg in Germany, Espergaerde Model United Nations in Denmark and Catalonia Model United Nations in Spain. Last but not least, we became Presidents of the IP Club and started training fellow students for the MUNs. We believe that this former aspect has given us the necessary tools to successfully guide and help those delegates that may be in need of assistance.

All in all, we hope this study guide helps you prepare for the conference, as well as offer you an overview of the topics debated this year. Let's make this conference the best and most fruitful one yet!

Best wishes,

Laura & Gemma.

Chairs, UNHCR, KAMUN 2021

The Committee: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was constituted in 1950 as a tool to tackle the refugee crisis after the Second World War. It is a United Nations agency whose principal aim is to protect human rights and assure the safety of refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless people. Additionally, not only does it endeavor to assure that every person has the right to seek asylum and be relocated in a safer territory, but also intends to give them the chance to return to their homeland voluntarily, be integrated in the host country or move to another state if preferred.

This committee is based on two fundamental legal documents: the 1951 Refugee Convention - which initially established its scope and legal framework - and its 1967 Protocol - which expanded its operations outside of Europe, as well.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' main current missions are in Lebanon, South Sudan, Chad / Darfur, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kenya. As per 2021, it has more than 20 million refugees under its mandate. Although this agency has helped safeguard the lives of millions of people, recent events have increased the need for assistance by this organization. Thus, this year's conference will focus on debating the following topics:

- a. The increased discrimination and social exclusion towards female refugees,
- b. The barriers that refugees face when accessing education, jobs and health services,
- c. The effects of Covid-19 and climate change on displacement,
- d. The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

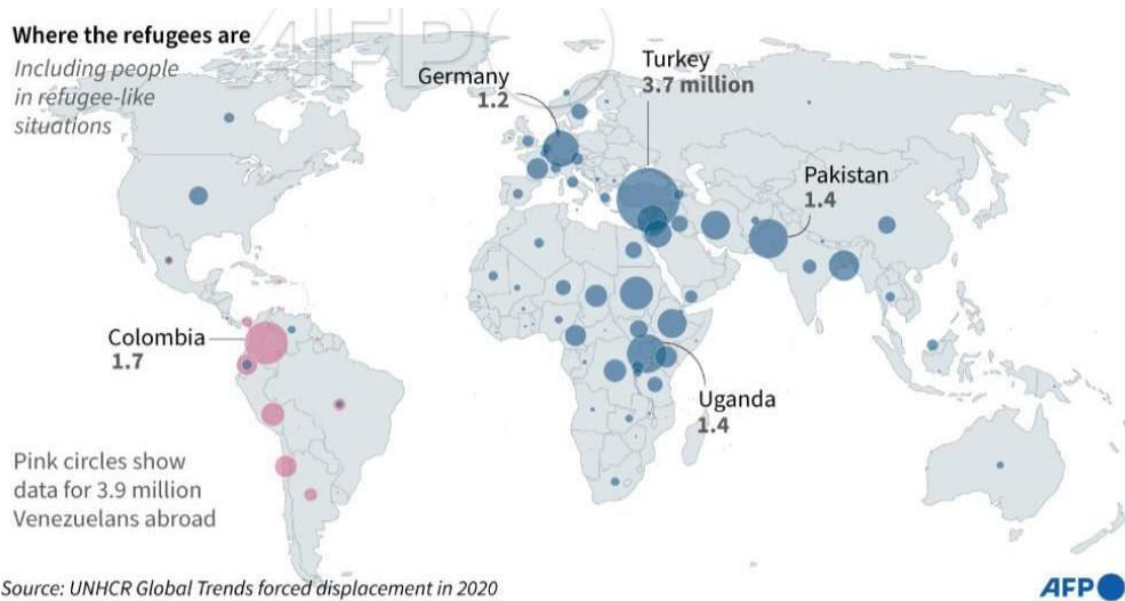
1. Introduction to the topic

The topic at hand is not new. Since 2010, the world has been experiencing a wide variety of population influx of migrants proceeding from regions such as Syria, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Iraq, Eritrea, Myanmar, South Sudan and Somalia. This increased wave of migration was mainly due to war, human rights violations, political instability and / or natural hazards, which forced people to leave their homes and seek safer ones. By the end of 2020, 82.4 million people have been displaced by violence and conflicts worldwide: 48 million are internally displaced, 26.4 million are refugees under UN mandates and 4.1 million are seeking asylum, with applications pending¹. However, recent events - such as the territorial and political conflict in Afghanistan - have further worsened the data previously provided. This calls for immediate international action to tackle the issues that will be developed in this study guide.

¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020). "Refugees" and "Migrants" – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). UNHCR.

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/3/56e95c676/refugees-migrants-frequently-asked-questions-faqs.html>





Key Concepts²

The following concepts should be borne in mind before debating the topics at hand. It must be acknowledged that the definitions provided have been extracted from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees¹ and Amnesty International² themselves.

Refugee

According to the UNHCR, a refugee is “*someone who has been forced to flee their country in order to escape to safety*”. The leading reasons for fleeing their homeland are the following: war, persecution and ethnic, tribal and/or religious violence. International law protects them from being forced to return to where their life is in danger. This principle is called *non-refoulement*.

Non- Refoulement Principle

The principle of non-refoulement guarantees that “*no one should be returned to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other irreparable harm*”.

Asylum Seeker

An asylum seeker is someone who has also fled their country and is awaiting their request for asylum to be processed - and therefore be officially recognized as a refugee -.

Internally Displaced People

Internally displaced people are those that are also fleeing from a conflict but without crossing their country’s borders to find safety. Unlike refugees, they are on the run at home. The main concern behind IDPs is that they tend to relocate to areas where the UNHCR has problems accessing it and, consequently, successfully delivering humanitarian assistance.

Stateless People

Stateless people are “*people to whom a nationality is denied*”. As a result, they often have difficulty accessing basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement.

² Amnesty International. (2021, June 1). *Refugees, Asylum-seekers and Migrants*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/>

Refugee vs Migrant

The main difference between these concepts are the reasons for leaving a home county. While refugees do so because of safety motives, migrants do not fear for their own life. However, it must be noted that although they are not persecuted or are not experiencing ethnic, tribal and / or religious violence, their human rights must still be protected by both internal and national law as they do experience some sorts of discrimination .

2. Historical Background

In regard to the historical background of the global refugee crisis, as mentioned before, persecutions and conflicts have been the reason behind the emigration and exodus of people from their countries of origin. It must be noted that although Syria now holds now the status as the origin country of the majority of refugees, this increased movement of people has already occurred in the past. In fact, there were significant refugee displacements during the Second World War, which caused more than 1 million refugees and was the reason for the creation of the UNHCR itself. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that these humanitarian crises have been taking place more constantly in recent times. Unfortunately, the future will not hold better news if there is no actual commitment by the Member States to improve the situation.

The following aspects should be considered as the primary issues for the upcoming debates. De facto, they should be regarded as the main focus of the resolution that will be drafted between the Member States.

3. The Increased Discrimination and Social Exclusion towards Female Refugees

Women and young girls comprise half of the refugees in the world. This evidence is of utmost concern as they suffer from all forms of discrimination and violence, such as sexual abuse, child marriage, prostitution, human trafficking and gender-based violence along with an uneven access to resources - mainly education and health - and a lack of inclusion in the decision and policy-making. This tendency must be addressed by the international arena, which should give refugee women specific protection in international law to allow them to gain independence from men economically, politically and socially.

Regarding gender-based violence, it is not only a subject of for concern in less economically developed countries, but also in leading economies such as Sweden³ where concerns have not been completely eradicated and it still causes a high number of deaths around the globe . It must be acknowledged that gender-based violence includes both physical violence, economic and psychological violence and discrimination. The leading example of gender-based violence is female

³ Stjernquist, B. A. (2020, December 20). *Sweden tops statistics of gender equality and domestic violence*. Boston University News Service. <https://bunewsservice.com/sweden-tops-statistics-of-gender-equality-and-domestic-violence/>



genital mutilation - FGM -, to which female refugees are especially vulnerable. Regarding the latter, Europe is making some advances in tackling this issue, but it is still far from being resolved.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees highly condemns all gender-based violence and additionally collaborates internationally to assure that action is taken by the national governments to ensure the protection of this vulnerable group. They have been directly involved in the provision of services and resources towards mental health support to the victims⁴.

Furthermore, the United Nations has found evidence that shows that child marriage numbers quadruple in refugee girls, if compared to the usual rates of non-refugee girls living in the same country. The reason behind it is that refugee families seek to protect their daughters. However, it sets them up to suffer gender-based violence instead, as they suffer physical and also psychological violence from the high dependence on their husbands and the age disparity. Finally, girls are often forced to abandon their education after getting into an arranged child marriage.

Regarding human trafficking, female refugees are extremely vulnerable to it, since they tend to be isolated groups in society and lack proper access to resources and opportunities. Human traffickers use their especially vulnerable situation to take advantage of them and add them to the human trafficking dynamic⁵, which most of the times causes them to be victims of forced prostitution. Some women refugees turn to prostitution as a way to be able to pay for basic resources or allow their family members to also flee their home country⁶.

It is key to understand that to resolve the ongoing issues with refugees and their status within other states, it will be of pivotal importance that women play a central role in decision-making. This is not yet occurring as there is a lack of significant decisions that impact the rights and living conditions of refugees on a substantial matter, not just on a formal matter. As previously shown, refugee women are at a disadvantaged position regarding their participation in decision-making processes. Thus, they should be helped to enter it as they have proven to be equally - if not more - effective and successful in their endeavors than their male counterparts. The prevalence of positive discrimination to correct systematic issues such as lack of representation of women in boards and executive positions, has begun to correct issues that have been present for many times. These challenges to the traditional social customs have incredible transcendence and have positively impacted the lives of thousands of women.

4. The Barriers that Refugees Face when Accessing Education and Jobs

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁷ states that “everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary

⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2021). *Gender-based Violence*.

UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/gender-based-violence.html#:~:text=Gender%2DBased%20violence%20refers%20to,threatening%20hea>

⁵ *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*. (2021). United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/global-report-on-trafficking-in-persons.html>

⁶ Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com). (2017). *Disappointed refugees driven to prostitution*. DW.COM.

⁷ United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>



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". As such, the right to education is a universal human right that is not only protected by international law, but also it is an essential tool for the proper development of human personality and the protection of human dignity.

Additionally, Article 22 of the 1951 Refugee Convention⁸ declares that "states shall accord to the refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education". Consequently, Member States have a duty to respect and assure that the right to education is granted to each and every one of the inhabitants within its borders, and that such education promotes the values of non-discrimination and tolerance towards all nations, all races and all religions. For that reason, the United Nations drafted Sustainable Development Goal 4⁹, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".

This right is usually taken for granted, but there are currently 3.7 million refugee children that are not receiving any type of education¹⁰. This data amounts to more than half of the total number of refugee children who are of school age. De facto, only 3 percent of refugees have been able to start university or take a higher education course. The reason behind this low rate is that there are some prevalent barriers that keep them from moving onto this higher education level:

- *certification* - refugees usually lose the certificates obtained during the chaos of leaving their homes and / or they obtain certificates that are not recognized in another country to enter into their universities,
- *language* - most courses require proficient language skills - and cost – high international student rates to pay for university and other courses.

All of these barriers call for future action to improve refugees' access to education, since it is the essential tool to assure their inclusion within the society of the host country. Having access to a basic education gives them a sense of stability and therefore improves their well-being. It provides them with the essential instruments that will allow them to find a job and be able to sustain themselves - and not be dependent on the state -. Along with this, it gives them a sense of normality and routine, which are two aspects highly needed by children that have suffered such traumas. Finally, it protects refugee children from human trafficking, and from being recruited by terrorist groups.

More specifically, regarding young female refugees, receiving an education contributes to reducing gender-based violence, prostitution and child marriage. According to UNESCO¹¹, if all refugee girls finalized primary school, there would be a reduction of child marriage by 14 per cent. If they also finished secondary education, this rate would drop by 64 per cent. However, there is a lack of female teachers that could encourage families to enrol girls in schools. Most female refugees are also under high pressure to provide for their families, for instance by collecting water, taking care of the siblings and doing other household chores . These duties are regarded as being more important than investing in their education, which is why they end up being put into an arranged marriage, as mentioned before.

⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (1951). *The 1951 Refugee Convention*. UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>

⁹ Goal 4 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2020). UN Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

¹⁰ *Refugee crisis Crisis Watch*. (2020). International Rescue Committee (IRC). <https://www.rescue.org/topic/refugee-crisis>

¹¹ *Education for migrants: an inalienable human right*. (2018, December 18).

UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/courier/2018-4/education-migrants-inalienable-human-right>



There are many reasons that could be used to explain and understand the main reasons behind such low data, which will be mentioned next, as they should be considered as points that the resolution should try to address. First and foremost, displacement itself is what affects children's education, mainly because fleeing a country and integrating oneself in another country is complex. Related to the former aspect, when refugees relocate, millions establish themselves in low or middle-income regions. Thus, where they are there may not be a school to attend, or they may be overflowing with a lot of students, a minimum number of teachers, and insufficient teaching materials.

Moreover, many of the refugees leave their homes without the necessary documentation - birth or educational certificates and records – to enrol in a new school. In the case that they do have them, schools do not always accept them as valid. Consequently, as a temporary action to these humanitarian emergencies, there has been an increased tendency towards uncertified parallel schooling, which does not follow a specific curriculum, does not offer a recognized official certification, and is mostly poor-quality education. Although it is still some type of education, all of the mentioned aspects prevent students from being able to later on take official exams that could actually provide an actual valid recognition of studies.

Finally, it must be noted that the access to education in refugee camps is even more precarious. There is a lack of facilities where education could be provided, as well as school materials, qualified teachers and financial resources. This requires a higher commitment by Member States to establish tangible and decisive international action that can give refugee children a chance to have a decent future.

Recently, agencies have started implementing accelerated educational programmes, whose principal aim is to enable children to enter or re-enter the standard school system by providing them the necessary education that they haven't received yet. In other words, it is an educational program that is provided to out-of-school disadvantaged children and youth.

Along with this, the international arena should work on legally allowing adult refugees to be employed. If they do not have working permits, they cannot work and, therefore, cannot afford the costs of schools¹². Because of this, host countries must focus on their policymaking to allow the adult refugees to access the labor market. This way, humanitarian aid would be reduced - as refugees would be able to sustain themselves - and a significant number of refugees would be able to attend school. As Nelson Mandela¹³ once said, "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

5. The Barriers that Refugees Face when Accessing Health Services

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹⁴ states that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family... including

¹² *Refugee Education Crisis Requires a Global Employment Strategy*. (2020, October 28). Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/15/refugee-education-crisis-requires-global-employment-strategy>

¹³ *Nelson Mandela*. (2020). Oxford Reference. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191843730.001.0001/q-oro-ed5-0000704>

¹⁴ United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>



medical care". Additionally, Sustainable Development Goal 3¹⁵ aims to "ensure healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at ages" and achieve universal health coverage - among others -.

That being said, it is undeniable that health is - as education – a fundamental human right that is not only protected by international law, but is also crucial to ensure the survival of the most vulnerable groups. Despite this, most refugees encounter a lot of obstacles in accessing health services. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention¹⁶, refugees should be given access to the same health services as the rest of the population of the host country. It must be noted that refugees face dreadful conditions not only in their home country, but also on the journey out of it. This has serious consequences on their physical and psychological wellbeing, which calls for Member States to consider this topic as one the key issues on the international agenda.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees collaborates with local governments and partners to provide emergency health services, improve the local ones already in place and include refugees into the local health systems as well as to assure that they receive the health support they need in emergencies and in stabilized situations.

The main health needs of refugees are dependent on many factors, such as the healthcare provided in their homeland, the conditions they live in when they flee it, the healthcare access in the host country, or pre-existing conditions. When refugees arrive in their new host country, they usually do not have access to health services that they can afford. Consequently, they are not able to get the medical attention they need to treat their ongoing conditions - for instance, noncommunicable diseases and malnutrition - and may have to live with serious injuries not being treated.

According to the UNHCR's Integrated Refugee Health Information, the top three causes for morbidity were malaria, upper respiratory tract infections and lower respiratory tract infections¹⁷. Along with neonatal deaths, malaria and lower respiratory tract infections are also the three top causes of refugee children's deaths under five. Neonatal deaths are also the leading cause of maternal mortality, which is of utmost concern to the UNHCR, since most women's deaths due to pregnancy-related complications would be treatable and thus preventable. However, health clinics are in need of high-skilled staff and sufficient medical equipment to manage emergencies related to birth.

Moreover, the most common health challenges of refugees include the following:

untreated communicable diseases - tuberculosis HIV / STIs and other parasitic infections -, poorly controlled chronic conditions - diabetes, hypertension or badly healed old injuries -, maternal care - which includes female genital mutilation complications - and mental health - because of previous trauma, violence, torture and / or exploitation -. All of these aspects cause the refugee population to have poorer health indications, specifically if they do not have access or cannot afford the medical assistance they need, as stated before.

¹⁵ Goal 3 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2020). Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3>

¹⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (1951). *The 1951 Refugee Convention*. UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>

¹⁷ *Unique health challenges for refugees and asylum seekers - Refugee and asylum seeker patient health toolkit - BMA*. (2020). The British Medical Association is the Trade Union and Professional Body for Doctors in the UK. <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/ethics/refugees-overseas-visitors-and-vulnerable-migrants/refugee-and-asylum-seeker-patient-health-toolkit/unique-health-challenges-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>



Finally, regarding refugee camps, refugees face even more obstacles to access healthcare services¹⁸. This is because these camps are usually located in a remote location with limited power supply, which affects UNHCR's access to it. The resources and services that camps have is limited, and the population there is growing - due to the increased number of people fleeing their homes - which places a burden on the available resources - specifically food and water -. With a constant inflow and outflow of people in these refugee camps, the most complex challenge is providing sustained care over a long period of time. As Voltaire once said, "there can be no happiness without good health".

6. The Effects of Covid-19 on Displacement

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global phenomenon that affects us all. According to the World Health Organization, coronavirus is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus that spreads through the air and can cause illnesses of different severity mainly in the respiratory system¹⁹. This virus does not only have effects on people's health, but also on many socioeconomic aspects, such as employment, social interaction, consumerism and GDP, among others. As of now, the best-known weapon to fight Covid-19 is vaccination. Until there is an antidote, the global aim must be to vaccinate as many people as possible for them to develop immunity and lower the transmission rate of the virus.

It must be noted that refugees - since they are more vulnerable and have less resources and access to health services - are at greater risk, especially the millions of refugees and forcibly displaced people located in developing countries and communities weakened by political instability or war. The aforementioned risk is not only physical but also psychological. According to the results of a survey conducted by the World Health Organization, more than 50% of refugees declared that they were suffering major levels of anxiety, depression, and fear²⁰. WHO states that at some point refugees will suffer some kind of psychological affliction and 1 out of 5 even mental disorders like PTSD, schizophrenia or bipolar disorders²¹. This is due to the fact that marginalized people are more vulnerable, and their coping mechanisms are weakened because of the stress suffered.

As it is known, some countries have implemented strict measures - like closing borders - in order to fight and avoid the virus spreading. Nonetheless, refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs cannot be left behind since international law protects them by enforcing the non-refoulement principle. This principle implies that even if such restrictions are imposed, people seeking protection have a right to be safeguarded and not returned to their homeland if there is a chance of facing danger or being persecuted there.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has taken efforts in order to help the 134 refugee-hosting countries that have reported signs of virus

¹⁸ *Healthcare in Refugee Camps and Settlements*. (2019). Unite for Sight. <https://www.uniteforsight.org/refugee-health/module1>

¹⁹ *Coronavirus*. (2020, January 10). World Health Organization. https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1

²⁰ *Migrants and refugees say COVID-19 has dramatically worsened their lives*. (2020, December 18). World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/migrants-and-refugees-say-covid-19-has-dramatically-worsened-their-lives>

²¹ *Ensuring a coordinated and effective mental health response in emergencies*. (2021, July 1). World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/activities/ensuring-a-coordinated-and-effective-mental-health-response-in-emergencies>



transmissions by requesting extra funds for the UN Covid-19 appeal²². The aim of this, in line with the Global Compact for Refugees²³, has been to ensure that refugee and internally displaced camps are protected as well as the national health and sanitary systems. This is because it is believed that a strong inclusive health system is better to tackle refugees' needs than to create a parallel one, considering that it would improve their trust and integration in the community. Therefore, parallel health systems should only be enforced as a last resort when sanitary systems face severe emergencies. In order to accomplish this goal, the UNHCR has ensured that 3.93 million refugees have accessed essential health services, that 256.000 refugees and IDPs have received mental health support services, and that 468.000 women and girls have benefitted from sexual and reproductive health services. Regarding Covid-19 specific needs, this agency has provided 41.2 million masks, 2.8 million medical gowns, 195 ventilators and 2.037 oxygen concentrators.

Taking this into account, future strategies should focus on providing refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs with essential needs and assuring access to healthcare services to minimize the effects of the pandemic on their already precarious situation. Additionally, implementing preventive measures as means to stop infection and including refugees in the countries' operational plans must be taken into consideration. Further, children's and youth's necessities must also be addressed, by prioritizing their education and learning especially during lockdown. And last but not least, promoting cash assistance as a way of reducing people's vulnerability. With the purpose of achieving this, there must be a united front of all the actors involved: refugees themselves, NGOs, INGOs, civil society and the private sector and other organizations.

As previously mentioned, vaccination is key: countries should include refugees and IDPs in their vaccination campaigns to meet the goal of immunizing as many individuals as possible. UNHCR is pleased to announce that from the 126 countries with a refugee population of more than 500 people, 123 have done so²⁴. Also, this agency - along with the COVAX facility - is working towards the goal of vaccinating 20% of refugees by the end of 2021. In spite of this, many marginalized people are not vaccinated yet and it must be highlighted that they face many obstacles, such as, language barriers - and a consequently lack of information -, exclusion from national sanitary services because of being undocumented, transportation difficulties to access vaccination facilities and limited opportunities to resolve doubts and questions regarding their health condition.

What is more, the United Nations' Secretary General calls for the need of safeguarding people's human rights²⁵ taking into account that the pandemic exacerbates concerns like Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), child trafficking or forced labor. This occurs for the most part in countries where instability has escalated due to Covid-19. Likewise, other UN bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

²² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2021a). *Coronavirus outbreak*.

UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/coronavirus-covid-19.html>

²³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2018). *Global Compact on Refugees – Booklet*.

UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4>

²⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2021c). *UNHCR calls on states to remove barriers to access to COVID-19 vaccines for refugees*. UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/6/60d45ebf4/unhcr-calls-states-remove-barriers-access-covid-19-vaccines-refugees.html>

²⁵ *The role of the Global Compact on Refugees in the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic*. (2021).

The Global Compact on Refugees | Digital Platform.

<https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/role-global-compact-refugees-international-response-covid-19-pandemic>



and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) also advocate for refugees and IDPs' human rights protection during states' responses regarding coronavirus.²⁶

7. The Effects of Climate Change on Displacement

As it has been mentioned before, the humanitarian crisis that the world is facing and climate change are intertwined. Refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs do not only flee their country to escape from war and political conflicts, but also do it as a result of natural hazards. Each year, more than 20 million people run away and leave their homes due to adverse weather conditions. This includes prolonged droughts, storms, heatwaves, sea-rise levels, cyclones, wildfires and desertification, among others. These events not only put their lives at risk but also affect their livelihoods, crops and livestock, making it difficult to survive after losing everything since usually these resources are the result of a lifetime of their hard work.

In the last couple of years, the most notable climate concerns have occurred in Central America because of Hurricane Eta, Cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi and flooding caused by the monsoon storms in Bangladesh camps.²⁷ This last case must be highlighted: in the region of Cox Bazar in Bangladesh, there is a refugee camp that provides assistance to the Rohingya community that came from Myanmar. They fled from their country of origin because their basic human rights were being threatened, they faced violence, discrimination and even their lives were at risk. Unfortunately, this shows how their journey to save their life is sometimes not accomplished once they arrive in their host territory.

Although it might seem appropriate, the sometimes-used concept of 'climate refugee' is not legally defined. The 1951 Refugee Convention²⁸ and any other international law do not include this term. Thus, when addressing this topic it is more accurate to use the term 'persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change'.

All in all, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees acknowledges the importance of this concerning issues, and is therefore focusing on raising awareness about the atrocities climate can provoke and its role on displacement. Furthermore, it must be noted that climate action is Sustainable Development Goal 13²⁹. It comprises several objectives that focus on improving states' capacity to respond to climate hazards, including climate change policies into national plans, and last but not least, raising awareness and education on mitigation, adaptation and minimizing the impact of such hazards. Additionally, the United Nations' Secretary General hopes that in the light of the current crisis, a shift towards a more sustainable economy is made,³⁰ benefiting not only the planet but the people. In order to do so, programs like the Clean Energy Challenge must be mentioned,

²⁶ *The role of the Global Compact on Refugees in the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

(2021b). The Global Compact on Refugees | Digital Platform.

<https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/role-global-compact-refugees-international-response-covid-19-pandemic>

²⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2021). *Climate change and disaster displacement*. UNHCR.

<https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

²⁸ *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (1951a). Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.* UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>

²⁹ *Goal 13 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.* (2020). Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal13>

³⁰ M., & D. (2020). *Climate Change*. United Nations Sustainable

Development. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change/>



whose aim is to create a united front of all the actors involved - government, businesses and organizations - to supply safe and green energy to forcibly displaced people, must be mentioned.³¹

This includes the following targets:

providing energy for cleaner cooking, electricity for households, energy in emergency situations, and energy for community facilities. It is believed that by enforcing this, families and individuals will feel more supported and will be more resilient and will have means to start a new life away from home.

8. The Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan

According to Filippo Grandi, the 11th United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: “Afghanistan’s displacement crisis is one of the largest and most protracted in UNHCR’s seven-decade history”³². For 40 years, almost 6 million Afghans³³ have left their homes as a consequence of violence, poverty, natural disasters, and currently also due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The displacement usually occurs within the country, meaning that the majority of those who flee remain on Afghan territory. So far, this year it’s been up to 600.000 people and it must be highlighted that more than 80% are women and children.³⁴ On the other side, the ones who cross borders are the third largest displaced population in the world, Syrians and Venezuelans being first and second. It is common that Afghan refugees flee to their neighboring countries - those being Pakistan and Iran -, which have hosted nearly 1.4 million and 780.000 refugees respectively.³⁵

Currently, the Afghanistan refugee crisis has been exacerbated due to the recent political events that have taken place in the country. The Taliban invaded the capital Kabul, and took control of its government and implemented the Sharia Law. This Islamic law is a code of conduct and ethics that in some ways contradicts the core values and human rights by which this agency is ruled and protected. There is grave fear for women and children that are facing critical situations. UN Women is extremely concerned and states that protecting human rights especially of women and girls must be paramount.

In relation to this, uncertainty is another factor worth mentioning since Afghans are worried about the new political regime and how it will affect their daily lives. Reports depict a rapid increase of violence and crimes all around the country, some even could be considered war crimes and crimes against humanity. This agency is concerned for the many human rights violations that can be perpetrated under the Taliban government and for this reason makes an appeal to the international community to keep borders open.

In almost two decades, the UNHCR has helped 5.2 Afghan³⁶ people on their journey. It is currently taking action on the matter by providing displaced Afghans with essential needs such as water, food, hygiene and sanitary assistance, as well as cash. Furthermore, this agency has ensured that those who

³¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020a). *Clean Energy Challenge*.

UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/clean-energy-challenge.html>

³² *How many refugees are fleeing the crisis in Afghanistan? | USA for UNHCR*. (2020).

UNHCR. <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/how-many-refugees-are-fleeing-the-crisis-in-afghanistan/>

³³ *Afghanistan Refugee Crisis Explained*. (2021). UNHCR. <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/afghanistan-refugee-crisis-explained>

³⁴ “Major” humanitarian crisis looms in Afghanistan, as the UN convenes. (2021, September 8). UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1099112>

³⁵ *Afghanistan Refugee Crisis Explained*. (2021b). UNHCR. <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/afghanistan-refugee-crisis-explained/>



wished to leave their hosting country to return home voluntarily could as soon as it has been verified that it would be safe for them and that their stay would be durable.

Questions a Resolution should Answer

- How do we ensure women's rights are protected throughout all stages of displacement?
- How can developing countries provide refugees with Covid-19 health equipment when they have scarce resources to supply their locals?
- How do we improve women refugees' access to healthcare, reproductive health services, sanitary products and contraceptive methods?
- How can host countries provide more educational opportunities for the refugee population?
- How can the international and national arena promote higher education for refugees?
- How can refugee camps improve their provision of healthcare?
- How can we protect refugees while they travel from their home country to a safer one?
- How can we protect young refugees' access to education during a lockdown?
- How can we improve refugee camps infrastructure to protect them from natural hazards?
- How can we promote gender equality while also respecting all religions?
- How can the UNHCR further help tackle Afghanistan's situation?
- How can we further include refugees into the host country's society?
- What can the international arena do to protect refugees overall? What are the following steps that should be followed to address the issues mentioned?

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