



**BOĞAZIÇİMUN 2026**

# **UNHCR STUDY GUIDE**

## **Agenda Items:**

- 1)** Rebuilding the Future: Ensuring Sustainable Reintegration and Return Pathways for Refugees Displaced by Conflicts in the Middle East
- 2)** Host or Home? Balancing Refugee Protection and National Pressure in Middle Eastern Host States

**Under Secretaries-General:** Tibet Tuna Topçu,  
Maryam El-Saleh

**Academic Assistant:** Tuğalp Muslu



## Letter from the Secretary-General

Meritorious Participants,

I am Duru Yavuz, a senior Political Science and Sociology student at Boğaziçi University. As the Secretary-General, I would like to welcome you all to the 8th official session of BoğaziçiMUN, BoğaziçiMUN'26.

Our academic and organizational teams have been working endlessly to ensure the best BoğaziçiMUN experience for our participants. I would like to begin by thanking our Deputy Secretaries-General, Ömer Alp Şiringöz and İpek Şen for their efforts, support and friendship. And the biggest of thank you's goes to our Director-General and Club co-Coordinator Kaan Berker and our Deputy Director-General Ekin Asyalı, this conference would not be what it is without their ambition and hard work. I would also like to thank our Club co-Coordinator İrem Ayber for all her help in both academic and organizational capacities.

BoğaziçiMUN has always been a ground where we aim to achieve academic and organizational excellence, but it has also been a place where old friends get to gather and work towards a common goal, even if it is in the middle of a snowstorm. In our experience as a club and as a conference, we have broken and reshaped barriers, we have learned what it means to be in a close-knit team, we have looked to the past and embraced our legacy, and we have looked to the future to envision an improved BoğaziçiMUN.

Throughout the years, we have gained new experience, knowledge, and strength; and found a sense of community in our members and participants. In each BoğaziçiMUN; we have seen you, our participants, learn and grow with us; expanding your knowledge of international relations, world politics, and history. It was this growth and the chance to witness your dedication and curiosity that have inspired us to continue improving BoğaziçiMUN every single year. And because we get to see your enthusiasm, because we get to engage our participants' minds with the pressing issues of our time, our efforts are made worthwhile. This year, we have prepared for you a wide range of unique committees and agenda items, all thanks to our wonderful Under Secretaries-General who have worked closely with our academic team to bring fresh perspectives and discussions to the conference.



## BOĞAZIÇİMUN 2026

After months of preparation on top of our years of foundational experience, BoğaziçiMUN is finally ready to open its doors to you and ‘Bridge the Gap’ once again this February. At the intersection of diplomacy, international relations and creative decision-making, BoğaziçiMUN stands as a chance to take matters into your own hands. Let us embark on this mission together and broaden our horizons as well as our community. It is my utmost honor to welcome you all to BoğaziçiMUN 2026, I hope to meet you soon.

Kind regards,

Duru Yavuz

Secretary-General of Boğaziçi MUN 2026



## Letter from the Under Secretaries-General

Dear Delegates,

It is with great pleasure and excitement that we welcome you to the BOĞAZIÇİMUN'26 conference and to The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Committee. We are delighted to have you join this unique and stimulating event, and we look forward to the engaging discussions that will follow.

As the Under-Secretaries-General of this committee, we would like to extend our warmest greetings to all delegates. Your participation reflects a commitment to engaging with the realities of forced displacement and the challenges faced by refugees who have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict, instability, and insecurity. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) plays an important role in protecting displaced populations and advancing durable solutions, and your discussions on refugee rights, return, reintegration, and long-term stability will be essential in addressing one of the most pressing humanitarian issues of our time.

As we embark on this thrilling experience, please keep in mind that it is not only a competition but also an opportunity for skill development, personal growth, and meaningful engagement with other delegates who are as passionate about international cooperation and labor rights as you are.

We strongly advise you to read your guide carefully, become familiar with the UNHCR Committee's rules and procedures, and be ready to represent the perspectives of the governments you will represent in order to have a successful and productive conference experience.

If you have any questions or need any assistance leading up to or during the conference, we, alongside the Secretariat, are here to support you every step of the way. Please don't hesitate to reach out: [mariam.saleh@std.yildiz.edu.tr](mailto:mariam.saleh@std.yildiz.edu.tr) & ([topcutibettuna@gmail.com](mailto:topcutibettuna@gmail.com))



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### Introduction to the Committee

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a United Nations agency established in Geneva on 14 December 1950 with the mandate to protect refugees, forcibly displaced populations, and stateless peoples, and to assist them in returning to their places of origin, integrating into their new places of residence, or, when necessary, being resettled in a third country.

Following the completion of its mandate after the World War II refugee crisis (1 September 1939 – 2 September 1945), the largest refugee crisis in history, the International Refugee Organization, which itself had been established as the successor to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration founded during the war, was dissolved. In response to the continuing needs of refugees worldwide, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was subsequently established. Although UNHCR was initially conceived as a temporary commission with a three-year mandate, it was made permanent by the collective decision of the member states.

As its first major initiative, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees drafted and brought into force the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, commonly known as the Geneva Refugee Convention of 28 July 1951, which remains to this day the foundational legal instrument of international refugee law.

Initially operating within a framework of Eurocentric legal norms and primarily focused on European refugees, the High Commissioner faced its first major test during the Hungarian Revolution (23 October 1956 – 11 November 1956), in coordinating assistance for political refugees forced to flee the country. Shortly thereafter, it addressed the challenges faced by Chinese refugees in Hong Kong and by Algerian refugees fleeing the Algerian War (1 November 1954 – 19 March 1962). This shift in context led to the recognition that refugee crises were not confined to European populations, ultimately resulting in the expansion of both the Convention's and the High Commissioner's scope.

The decolonization of Africa, which began on 24 December 1951, marked a dramatic shift in the High Commissioner's focus and signaled a search for responses to a massive



refugee crisis emerging across the continent. The process by which African colonies were dismantled and African peoples sought to establish their own nation-states resulted in a series of prolonged, large-scale conflicts with high civilian casualties. These included the Western Desert Campaign (11 June 1940 – 4 February 1943), the Malagasy Uprising (29 March 1947 – 5 February 1949), the Egyptian Revolution (23 July 1952), the Mau Mau Rebellion (7 October 1952 – 12 January 1960), the Algerian War (1 November 1954 – 19 March 1962), the Ifni War (23 November 1957 – 30 June 1958), the Congo Crisis (5 July 1960 – 25 November 1965), the Angolan War of Independence (4 February 1961 – 25 April 1974), the Eritrean War of Independence (1 September 1961 – 24 May 1991), the Guinea-Bissau War of Independence (23 January 1963 – 10 September 1974), the Zanzibar Revolution (12 January 1964), the Mozambican War of Independence (25 September 1964 – 25 June 1975), the South African Border War (26 August 1966 – 21 March 1990), the Western Sahara Conflict (17 June 1970 – present), and the Western Sahara War (30 October 1975 – 6 September 1991).

For UNHCR, this constituted a profound challenge. Unlike the situation of refugees in Europe, Africa lacked sufficient stabilization mechanisms and durable solutions. As a result, within a short period of time, approximately 70 percent of the High Commissioner's budget began to be allocated to refugees in Africa.

In response to this paradigmatic shift, the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted on 31 January 1967, with the aim of establishing a more universal definition of who qualifies as a refugee.

The 1970s marked a further paradigmatic shift, this time toward Asia. The Bangladesh Liberation War (26 March 1971 – 16 December 1971), which claimed the lives of millions of civilians, and the Vietnam War (13 August 1945 – 30 April 1975), one of the most widely known military conflicts of modern history, resulted in staggering numbers of people becoming refugees. The growing reluctance of states to host refugees, combined with the intensification of armed conflicts, where even relatively limited confrontations gained the capacity to displace tens of thousands of people, placed an ever-increasing burden on UNHCR from the 1980s onward.

The end of the Cold War on 26 December 1991 initially created the impression that global conflicts would diminish. However, it also reduced the incentives for major powers to



maintain their roles as “protectors,” thereby opening space for repressive governments to act with greater freedom. In the post–Cold War period, particularly the Yugoslav Wars (1 March 1991 – 13 August 2001) and the Rwandan Civil War (1 October 1990 – 18 July 1994) resulted in major humanitarian tragedies and large-scale refugee crises.

Today, more than 20 million refugees are under the protection of UNHCR. The organization provides refugees with humanitarian protection, shelter, healthcare, emergency assistance, support for return or integration, and advocacy for refugee rights at the political level. Operating as a subsidiary body of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is currently headed by Barham Salih, an Iraqi-Kurdish politician, former President of Iraq (2 October 2018 - 17 October 2022), former Prime Minister of Kurdistan Region (28 October 2009 - 5 April 2012), and a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

### **Agenda Item I**

#### **1. Background of the Issue**

Refugee return and reintegration in the Middle East must be understood within the region’s prolonged history of conflict, political instability, and governance failures. Displacement in this context is not a temporary humanitarian interruption, nor can return be approached as a purely administrative task. Over time, displacement has become a structural feature of the region, shaping political priorities, economic conditions, and social relations across multiple states.

For displaced populations, the impact of conflict extends far beyond the loss of housing. Displacement<sup>1</sup> frequently involves the collapse of livelihoods, the loss of legal documentation, limited access to public services, and a gradual erosion of trust in state institutions. As conflicts persisted and political solutions failed to take hold, displacement shifted from an assumed short-term condition to a long-term reality. In many cases, this reality has lasted years or even generations.

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<sup>1</sup> Displacement: the action of moving something from its place or position.



For this committee, the significance of this background lies in how it shapes contemporary debates on return. Refugee return in the Middle East is rarely determined by a single event such as a ceasefire or peace agreement. Instead, it is influenced by ongoing security conditions, governance structures, and the credibility of state institutions. These factors continue to affect whether the return is viewed as realistic, safe, or desirable.

## **1.1 Historical Background of Conflict-Induced Displacement**

Displacement in the Middle East has developed through repeated cycles of conflict, political instability, and exclusion. Wars and internal conflicts have repeatedly disrupted civilian life, often in contexts where state authority was weak or contested. Violence against civilian populations, whether direct or indirect, has been a recurring driver of flight.

In earlier periods, displacement was frequently assumed to be temporary. Refugees were expected to return once fighting ended or political agreements were reached. In practice, this expectation rarely materialized. Political settlements were often delayed, incomplete, or collapsed, while reconstruction efforts remained uneven or inaccessible to displaced populations.

As displacement became prolonged, many refugees established lives in host states while remaining legally and economically unstable. Limited access to residency, employment, and long-term services produced a condition of uncertainty in which refugees were neither fully integrated nor able to return home in a meaningful way. Over time, this uncertainty became self-reinforcing<sup>2</sup>.

Governance failures played a central role in shaping these outcomes. Weak institutions, limited accountability, and restricted political systems created conditions in which returnees faced discrimination or renewed insecurity. For many refugees, interactions with the state were associated with risk rather than protection, a perception that continues to influence return decisions.

## **1.2 Key Events and Turning Points in Refugee Movements**

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<sup>2</sup> self-reinforcing : tending or serving to strengthen itself.



Certain periods marked clear turning points in the scale and character of displacement in the Middle East. In the late twentieth century, internal conflicts increasingly blurred the distinction between civilians and combatants<sup>3</sup>. Fighting extended into urban areas, and civilian infrastructure such as housing, schools, and hospitals was frequently damaged or destroyed.

The early twenty-first century represented another significant shift. Foreign interventions and internal power struggles destabilized several states simultaneously, weakening central authority and breaking territorial control. Civilians were often exposed to continuous threats, including violence, economic collapse, and political repression<sup>4</sup>, making return increasingly difficult.

The uprisings that began in 2011 further transformed displacement patterns. What began as revolutions or movements calling for political reform escalated into armed conflicts in multiple countries. Violence spread rapidly, and millions of civilians were forced to flee. Neighboring states became primary destinations, and temporary refuge arrangements evolved into long-term hosting situations.

As displacement became protracted, international discussions increasingly shifted toward sustainability, burden-sharing, and return. In many cases, however, this shift occurred without corresponding improvements in security or governance, creating a gap between political narratives and conditions on the ground.

### **1.3 Current Situation on the Ground (Final Polished)**

The Middle East remains one of the most displacement-affected regions in the world. Millions of refugees continue to live in host states under legal arrangements that are often temporary or subject to change. While camps remain part of the response, most refugees now reside in urban and peri-urban areas<sup>5</sup>, where vulnerability is less visible but persistent.

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<sup>3</sup> combatants: a person or nation engaged in fighting during a war.

<sup>4</sup> political repression: refers to the institutional, unfair usage of power and authority to discriminate and place restrictions on an individual or group, restricting their freedom and limiting their ability to wholly embed themselves into society.

<sup>5</sup> peri-urban areas: It is a name given to the grey area which is neither entirely urban nor purely rural in the traditional sense; it is at most the partly urbanized rural area.



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In practical terms, refugees face ongoing challenges in accessing employment, education, healthcare, and legal documentation. Informal labor remains widespread, exposing individuals to instability and exploitation. Access to services often depends on legal status and local capacity rather than need alone.

Conditions in countries of origin continue to limit prospects for return. Insecurity, damaged infrastructure, economic decline, and weak rule of law remain widespread. Refugees also face unresolved housing, land, and property disputes, alongside concerns related to persecution or arbitrary detention.

At the same time, host states face increasing economic pressure and political strain. Refugee presence is more frequently framed as a domestic challenge, leading to restrictive policies and growing pressure for return. These dynamics shape the difficult choices refugees face today.

### **Chronological Timetable: Evolution of Displacement in the Middle East**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Key Developments</b>	<b>Significance for Displacement</b>
Mid–20th Century	Interstate conflicts and regional wars	Establishment of large, long-term refugee populations
1970s–1990s	Prolonged civil wars and political repression	Displacement becomes protracted and intergenerational
Early 2000s	Foreign interventions and state fragmentation	Expansion of cross-border refugee flows
2011–2015	Uprisings escalate into armed conflicts	Largest refugee movements in modern regional history



2016–Present	Protracted crises and partial stabilization	Shift toward debates on return and reintegration
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## 2. Major Actors and Stakeholders

Refugee return and reintegration in the Middle East is shaped by the interaction of multiple actors operating at different political, legal, and practical levels. These stakeholders do not act independently. Their policies, incentives, and constraints often overlap, reinforce, or undermine one another, directly affecting whether return is possible, sustainable, and genuinely voluntary.

At the core of this issue is a recurring tension. While refugee return is frequently framed as a national or regional priority, the conditions required for safe and durable return depend on coordinated action across countries of origin, host states, international organizations, and refugee communities themselves. Gaps or failures at any stage can weaken the entire process.

For delegates, understanding the roles and interests of these actors is essential. Return outcomes are rarely the result of a single policy decision. They emerge from the combined actions of states, institutions, and individuals, often under conditions of political pressure and limited resources.

### 2.1 Countries of Origin

Countries of origin play a central role in determining whether refugee return is feasible, safe, and sustainable. Their responsibilities extend beyond the formal end of hostilities and include restoring security, rebuilding infrastructure, ensuring access to basic services, and providing legal and political guarantees for returnees.

In principle, refugee return is often presented by governments as a sign of restored sovereignty and post-conflict recovery. In practice, many countries of origin remain fragile. Years of conflict have weakened state institutions, disrupted administrative systems, and



reduced the capacity of public services. Law enforcement and judicial mechanisms are frequently unable to provide consistent protection, particularly in areas that were heavily affected by violence.

A critical factor shaping return decisions is the relationship between refugees and state authorities. In other words, refugees associate the state itself with persecution, discrimination, or forced displacement. This creates a significant trust deficit. Formal declarations of safety or amnesty may be viewed with skepticism<sup>6</sup> if they are not supported by credible accountability mechanisms or observable changes on the ground.

Legal and administrative barriers further complicate reintegration. Housing, land, and property issues are particularly significant, as many refugees lack the documentation needed to reclaim homes or land. Post-conflict laws or reconstruction policies may also exclude displaced populations or prioritize other groups. Without fair and accessible restitution processes, return may result in homelessness or renewed marginalization.

For the return to be durable, countries of origin must address not only physical reconstruction but also governance, the rule of law, and political inclusion. Where these elements remain weak, return may occur, but it is unlikely to be sustainable.

## 2.2 Host States in the Middle East

Host states have played a crucial role in providing protection and shelter to refugees, often under significant economic and political strain. What began as emergency humanitarian responses gradually evolved into long-term hosting arrangements, frequently without sufficient international burden-sharing.

Host governments face complex policy trade-offs. On the one hand, they are expected to uphold international standards of protection and provide access to basic services. On the other hand, prolonged refugee presence places pressure on public infrastructure, labor markets, housing availability, and social cohesion.<sup>7</sup> These pressures are particularly acute in middle-income countries already facing economic challenges.

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<sup>6</sup> skepticism : the theory that certain knowledge is impossible

<sup>7</sup> social cohesion: a measure of how well groups stay together and complete their tasks.



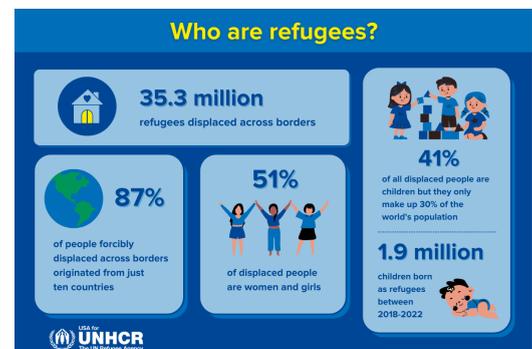
Legal frameworks governing refugee presence vary widely across the region. In many cases, refugees live under temporary or exceptional arrangements that limit access to formal employment, education, or residency rights. Restrictive policies often push refugees into informal sectors, increasing vulnerability to exploitation. More inclusive approaches may improve self-reliance, but they require political will and sustained resources.

Over time, refugee issues have become increasingly politicized within host states. Economic downturns, rising unemployment, and public dissatisfaction have contributed to narratives framing refugees as a burden or security concern. This political environment has led to growing pressure for return, sometimes framed as a domestic necessity rather than a protection-based process.

Host states, therefore, occupy a pivotal position.<sup>8</sup> Their policies shape refugees' daily living conditions and influence how return is perceived and pursued. Continued international support is essential to prevent host states from bearing disproportionate responsibility and to preserve protection space.

## 2.3 Refugee Communities

Refugee communities themselves are among the most important, yet frequently underrepresented, stakeholders in discussions on return and reintegration. Refugees are not a homogeneous group. Differences in age, gender, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, education, and socio-economic background shape both experiences of displacement and perspectives on return.



For refugees, decisions about return are highly individualized. Security concerns are central, but they are not the only consideration. Access to livelihoods, education, family reunification, property restitution, and trust in institutions all play a role. For many, return is not a single moment but a gradual and conditional process, influenced by changing circumstances.

<sup>8</sup> pivotal position: important, but it has the sense of centrality and turning.



Prolonged displacement has also transformed refugee communities socially and economically. Many refugees have established livelihoods, social networks, and cultural ties in host states. Children born during displacement may have limited connections to their parents' countries of origin. These realities complicate assumptions that return is always the preferred or most viable solution.

Excluding refugee perspectives from policy design carries practical risks. International standards emphasize that return must be voluntary and informed, which requires meaningful consultation and access to reliable information. When refugee voices are absent, return initiatives may fail to reflect lived realities.

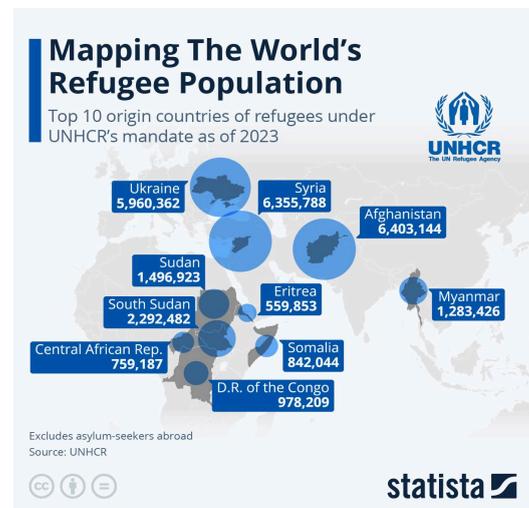
Recognizing the refugee agency is therefore essential. Sustainable reintegration depends not only on state policies, but also on refugees' willingness and capacity to rebuild their lives under new or changing conditions.

## 2.4 United Nations Agencies (UNHCR, UNDP, OHCHR)

United Nations agencies play a central coordinating and normative role in addressing refugee displacement, return, and reintegration. While each agency has a different mandate, its effectiveness depends largely on coordination and on linking humanitarian action to longer-term recovery and rights protection.

UNHCR holds the primary mandate for refugee protection and the pursuit of durable solutions, including voluntary repatriation. Its role includes monitoring conditions in areas of return, providing refugees with information to support informed decision-making, and engaging with states to ensure compliance with international protection standards. In practice, UNHCR operates within political constraints and relies heavily on cooperation from both host states and countries of origin, which can limit its ability to act independently.

UNDP focuses on development, governance, and early recovery. Its involvement is critical in addressing the structural conditions that determine whether return can be sustained over time. Livelihoods, infrastructure rehabilitation, and institutional capacity all fall within UNDP's scope. Without development-oriented engagement, return risks becoming short-lived,





particularly in post-conflict environments where public services and economic opportunities remain limited.

OHCHR contributes by monitoring human rights conditions and documenting violations. While it does not facilitate return directly, its assessments are essential for evaluating whether conditions meet the standards required for safe and dignified return. Human rights reporting helps bridge the gap between political commitments and realities on the ground, particularly in contexts where accountability mechanisms are weak.

Coordination among these agencies remains a recurring challenge. Fragmentation between humanitarian, development, and human rights efforts can undermine overall effectiveness. For delegates, understanding these institutional roles highlights why integrated approaches are frequently emphasized but difficult to implement in practice.

### **2.5 International and Regional Organizations**

Beyond the UN system, international and regional organizations play an influential role in shaping refugee return and reintegration outcomes. These actors contribute financial resources, technical expertise, and political leverage, particularly in reconstruction and stabilization efforts.

International financial institutions and development banks influence reintegration through funding decisions related to infrastructure, public services, and economic recovery. Regional organizations and donor coalitions can also shape policy incentives by linking assistance to cooperation on return or hosting arrangements. In some cases, these mechanisms encourage burden-sharing and longer-term planning.

However, the involvement of international and regional organizations is often shaped by geopolitical considerations and shifting global priorities. Donor fatigue, competing crises, and political conditionality can limit the consistency and predictability of support. Short funding cycles, in particular, constrain the ability to invest in long-term reintegration strategies.



These limitations affect both countries of origin and host states. Reconstruction efforts may prioritize visible projects over inclusive recovery, while support for host communities may fall short of actual needs. As a result, international engagement can be influential, but uneven.

For delegates, these dynamics underscore the importance of sustained international cooperation. Without predictable support and coordination, responsibility for displacement and return risks falling disproportionately on states with limited capacity.

### **2.6 Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations**

Civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations operate at the frontline of refugee protection, assistance, and reintegration. They provide essential services, including legal aid, psychosocial support, education, and livelihood assistance, often reaching populations that larger institutions cannot easily access.

Local NGOs are particularly important due to their practical knowledge and relationships within affected communities. They frequently serve as intermediaries between refugees, host communities, and state authorities, helping to identify emerging protection risks and social tensions. In many contexts, their presence contributes directly to social cohesion and conflict prevention.

International NGOs complement these efforts by providing resources, technical expertise, and advocacy at national and international levels. Together, civil society actors play a key role in translating policy commitments into practical outcomes on the ground.

Despite their importance, civil society organizations often face significant constraints. Funding is frequently short-term and project-based, while political restrictions and security risks limit operational space in some countries. Exclusion from formal policy processes further reduces their influence, even when their insights are directly relevant.

Strengthening civil society engagement is therefore an important component of effective return and reintegration strategies. When these actors are included in planning and coordination, policies are more likely to reflect local realities and refugee needs.



### 3. Legal and Normative Framework

For the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), legal and normative frameworks are not abstract principles but practical reference points that guide protection, assistance, and decisions related to durable solutions. Every discussion on refugee return and reintegration must be grounded in these frameworks, as they define both the responsibilities of states and the rights of refugees.

For delegates, understanding this framework is essential. Legal standards do not mandate return, nor do they treat it as the default outcome of displacement. Instead, they establish conditions under which return may be considered safe, voluntary, and sustainable. Where these conditions are not met, continued protection remains a legal and normative requirement rather than a policy preference.

#### 3.1 International Refugee Law

International refugee law provides the foundation of UNHCR's mandate and activities. It defines who qualifies as a refugee and outlines states' obligations toward individuals fleeing persecution, violence, or conflict. At its core, refugee law recognizes that when individuals are unable to rely on the protection of their own state, the international community assumes responsibility for their protection.

Within this framework, three durable solutions are traditionally identified: voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement to a third country. Voluntary repatriation is often described as the preferred solution when conditions allow, as it enables refugees to return to their country of origin in safety and dignity. However, refugee law is explicit that return must be voluntary. Refugees are not legally obligated to return, even when conditions in their country of origin appear to be improving.

In the Middle East, the application of international refugee law is uneven. Not all states have acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention or incorporated its provisions into domestic law. As a result, refugees often reside under temporary or ad hoc arrangements rather than comprehensive legal frameworks. This legal uncertainty complicates long-term planning and reinforces the importance of UNHCR's role in protection and advocacy.

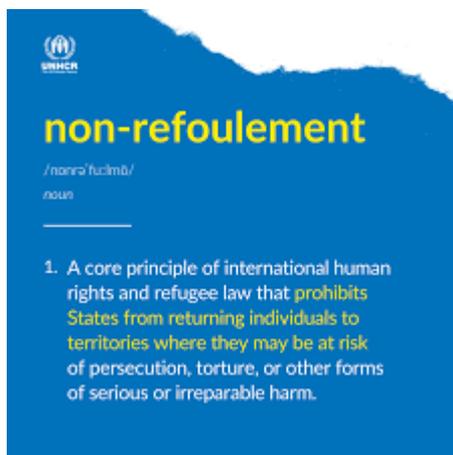


For delegates, this means that legal obligations related to refugee protection vary significantly across the region, shaping both the possibilities and limitations of return policies.

### 3.2 Principle of Non-Refoulement

The principle of non-refoulement<sup>9</sup> is the cornerstone of international refugee protection. It prohibits the return of individuals to territories where they would face serious threats to their life, freedom, or physical integrity. This principle applies regardless of formal refugee

recognition and is widely considered a norm of customary international law.



Importantly, non-refoulement extends beyond direct forced return. It also includes indirect forms of pressure that effectively compel refugees to leave host states against their will. Such pressure may take the form of restrictive residency policies, denial of access to services, or conditions that make continued stay untenable.

In the Middle Eastern context, concerns related to non-refoulement are particularly significant. As host states experience economic strain and political pressure, refugees may face increasing limitations on legal status, employment, or freedom of movement. When these measures leave refugees with no realistic alternative but to return, the voluntariness of return becomes questionable.

UNHCR plays a key role in monitoring protection risks, advocating against premature or coerced return, and engaging in dialogue with states. For this committee, non-refoulement represents a clear legal boundary: return cannot be pursued at the expense of refugee safety, even when political pressure for return is strong.

### 3.3 International Human Rights Law

<sup>9</sup> Non-refoulement: the practice of not forcing refugees or asylum seekers to return to a country in which they are liable to be subjected to persecution.



International human rights law complements refugee law by applying to all individuals, regardless of nationality or legal status. For UNHCR, human rights standards reinforce protection principles related to safety, dignity, and non-discrimination, both during displacement and in return processes.

Human rights norms are particularly relevant when assessing conditions for return and reintegration. Rights related to life, liberty, housing, education, healthcare, and freedom of movement help determine whether return can realistically be sustained. Where these rights cannot be reasonably ensured, return may expose individuals to renewed harm or secondary displacement.

In countries of origin, ongoing human rights concerns, such as arbitrary detention<sup>10</sup>, forced conscription<sup>11</sup>, or discrimination, directly influence refugees' willingness to return. In host states, access to basic rights shapes daily living conditions and affects decision-making over time.

UNHCR does not function as a human rights enforcement body. Instead, it uses human rights standards as an analytical and advocacy framework, informing refugees of potential risks and engaging states in dialogue. For delegates, this illustrates how legal assessments of return extend beyond formal ceasefires or political declarations.

### 3.4 Voluntary, Safe, and Dignified Return Standards

The principles of voluntariness, safety, and dignity form the normative core of UNHCR's approach to refugee return. These standards are not symbolic commitments but practical criteria that must be met before return can be supported.

<sup>10</sup> arbitrary detention: is the violation of the right to liberty. It is defined as the arrest and deprivation of liberty of a person outside of the confines of nationally recognized laws or international standards.

<sup>11</sup> forced conscription: compulsory military service.



**Self-Organized Voluntary Return Programme** 

A one-time cash grant and support with exit procedures is available for refugees choosing to permanently and independently return to Syria. Here is what you need to do:

- 1 Register your intention to return** by calling UNHCR at 04726111 or writing to us via the Online Contact Form at [help.unhcr.org/lebanon/contact-us](http://help.unhcr.org/lebanon/contact-us)
- 2 Receive a call from UNHCR** for counselling on the voluntary return programmes and guidance on the steps for you to take to prepare for your return such as obtaining civil and academic documentation.
- 3 Receive SMS** confirming the time, date and location of your in-person interview scheduled at a designated UNHCR Return Center.
- 4 Go to your interview with all family members planning to return to Syria.**  
**Bring with you:**
  - ▶ All available IDs (expired and valid) for each family member (Passport, National ID, Personal certificate, and/or UNHCR certificate),
  - ▶ Red Card (if you have one), and
  - ▶ Documents that will support reintegration in Syria such as military booklets (if applicable), civil and education documents, medical records and legal documents regarding access to land or property in Syria.

UNHCR will confirm that all adult family members are fully informed and freely and voluntarily choosing to return to Syria. We will ask for consent to share basic personal data for return services, and provide a Repatriation Form, required for exiting Lebanon and redeeming a one-off return cash grant of **100\$ per returning individual**.
- 5 Receive SMS** from UNHCR within one week information on how and when to redeem your one-time return cash grant (via Red Card or OMT). Note that your UNHCR file in Lebanon will be closed once you have redeemed your assistance.
- 6 Organize your own transportation via official border crossing points** within one week of receiving the SMS notification about your return cash grant.
- 7 At the designated official crossing points, GSO will stamp your Repatriation Form** upon exit and confirm to UNHCR that you have left Lebanon. Using official crossing points is important for your safety.

**Assistance is always free of charge**

For individual counselling:  
 • Call UNHCR at **04726111**, after selecting language press 5 (Monday-Friday, 8AM – 5PM) or,  
 • Write to [help.unhcr.org/lebanon/contact-us](http://help.unhcr.org/lebanon/contact-us)  
 A UNHCR staff member will call you back to answer your questions and discuss your needs.



**Voluntariness** requires that refugees make return decisions freely, without coercion, and based on accurate and up-to-date information. This includes access to reliable assessments of security and legal conditions, as well as to services in areas of return. UNHCR emphasizes that refugees must be able to decide whether and when to return.

**Safety** refers to both physical security and legal protection. Returnees must not face violence, persecution, arbitrary detention, or forced recruitment. Safety is not static; it must be sustained over time to prevent renewed displacement.

**Dignity** involves the ability to rebuild a meaningful life. This includes access to housing, livelihoods, education, healthcare, and legal documentation. Returns that leave individuals destitute, excluded, or dependent on emergency aid cannot be considered durable.

UNHCR's role is to assess whether these conditions are met, facilitate informed decision-making, and support reintegration where possible. Where standards are not satisfied, continued protection remains necessary. For delegates, these criteria provide a practical framework for evaluating return proposals and policy claims.

#### 4. Humanitarian and Human Rights Challenges

Humanitarian and human rights challenges remain central to the refugee experience in the Middle East and continue to shape decisions around return and reintegration. These challenges do not disappear once large-scale hostilities decline. Instead, they often persist in different forms, becoming structural obstacles that affect refugees both during displacement and after return.

For UNHCR and its partners, addressing these challenges is not separate from discussions on durable solutions. Humanitarian needs, protection risks, and rights violations directly



influence whether return can be considered safe, voluntary, and sustainable. Failure to address these issues increases the risk of premature return, renewed displacement, and long-term instability.

#### 4.1 Security Risks and Protection Concerns



Security remains one of the most significant barriers to sustainable refugee return in the Middle East. Even in contexts where major fighting has subsided, many areas continue to experience localized violence, political repression, unexploded ordnance, and the presence of armed groups. For civilians, these risks are often unpredictable and unevenly distributed.

For many refugees, fear of arrest, forced conscription, retaliation, or persecution remains a decisive factor in decisions about return. Individuals who fled conflict may be perceived as politically disloyal or associated with opposition groups, particularly in environments where dissent is criminalized. In such contexts, formal declarations of safety offer limited reassurance.

Protection concerns are not limited to countries of origin. In host states, refugees may face harassment, arbitrary detention, or exploitation, especially when legal status is temporary or unclear. Restrictions on movement and employment can increase vulnerability, particularly for women, children, and undocumented individuals.

UNHCR monitors protection risks through field presence, assessments, and dialogue with authorities. For delegates, it is important to understand that security is not defined solely by the absence of war. Sustainable return requires predictable, rights-respecting conditions over time, rather than short-term reductions in violence.

### **4.2 Housing, Land, and Property Rights**

Housing, land, and property issues represent one of the most complex and politically sensitive challenges affecting refugee return and reintegration. Displacement frequently results in the loss, destruction, or confiscation of homes and land, often under conditions that make documentation difficult or impossible to retain.

In many conflict-affected states, property records have been damaged, lost, or deliberately altered. Post-conflict laws and reconstruction policies may exclude displaced populations or impose administrative requirements that refugees cannot meet, such as physical presence, security clearances, or proof of ownership. These barriers disproportionately affect those who fled under emergency conditions.



Without secure access to housing and land, returnees face a high risk of secondary displacement, poverty, and social marginalization. Lack of shelter also limits access to livelihoods, education, and healthcare, undermining reintegration efforts from the outset.

UNHCR works with partners to support legal counseling, documentation recovery, and advocacy for inclusive housing policies. However, resolving housing, land, and property disputes often requires sustained political will and institutional reform, highlighting the need for long-term international engagement rather than short-term solutions.

### **4.3 Access to Basic Services, Livelihoods, and Legal Documentation**

Access to basic services plays a decisive role in determining whether refugees can rebuild their lives, either during displacement or after return. Essential services include healthcare, education, water and sanitation, employment opportunities, and civil documentation. When access to these services is limited or discriminatory, displacement becomes prolonged, and return becomes increasingly unviable.

Legal documentation is particularly critical. Many refugees lack birth certificates, identity documents, marriage records, or property deeds due to flight, destruction, or administrative barriers. Without documentation, individuals may be unable to access education, healthcare, formal employment, or freedom of movement, leaving them effectively excluded from legal systems.

Economic marginalization further compounds these challenges. In host states, refugees are often restricted from formal employment and rely on informal labor markets, exposing them to exploitation and instability. In countries of origin, damaged economies and limited recovery reduce employment opportunities, even when security conditions improve.

UNHCR promotes a protection-centered approach to service access, supporting civil registration initiatives, advocating for inclusive policies, and facilitating livelihoods programs. For delegates, this highlights how humanitarian assistance and legal protection are closely intertwined in shaping long-term outcomes.



## 4.4 Impact on Women, Children, and Other Vulnerable Groups

While displacement affects all refugees, its impacts are not experienced equally. Women, children, elderly persons, persons with disabilities, and survivors of violence face distinct and often heightened risks throughout displacement and return processes.

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, early marriage, and exploitation, especially in contexts of economic hardship and legal insecurity. Displacement may weaken traditional protection mechanisms while increasing dependency and exposure to harm.

Children often experience disruptions in education, psychosocial distress<sup>12</sup>, and increased risks of child labor or recruitment by armed groups. Lack of birth registration and documentation can lead to statelessness, with long-term consequences for protection and identity.

UNHCR integrates age, gender, and diversity considerations into protection activities, emphasizing participation, targeted assistance, and inclusive decision-making. Addressing the needs of vulnerable groups is not a secondary concern but a central requirement for sustainable reintegration.

## 5. Political Dimensions of Return and Reintegration

Refugee return in the Middle East is not only a humanitarian or legal issue, but a deeply political one. Decisions surrounding return are shaped by power relations, domestic political considerations, regional dynamics, and international interests. As a result, return is often discussed in political terms that do not fully reflect conditions on the ground or the perspectives of refugees themselves.

For UNHCR, navigating these political dimensions requires balancing protection principles with the realities of state sovereignty and geopolitical pressure<sup>13</sup>. For delegates,

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<sup>12</sup> psychosocial distress: family dysfunction, financial struggles, and educational challenges.

<sup>13</sup> geopolitical pressure: The struggle over the control of geographical entities with an international and global dimension, and the use of such geographical entities for political advantage.



understanding the political context is essential to evaluating why return processes unfold unevenly and why durable solutions remain difficult to achieve.

## 5.1 State Sovereignty and Political Legitimacy

Governments in countries of origin often frame refugee return as an indicator of restored sovereignty and political legitimacy<sup>14</sup>. Public narratives of stabilization and recovery are frequently linked to claims that displacement is no longer justified and that refugees should return to participate in national reconstruction.

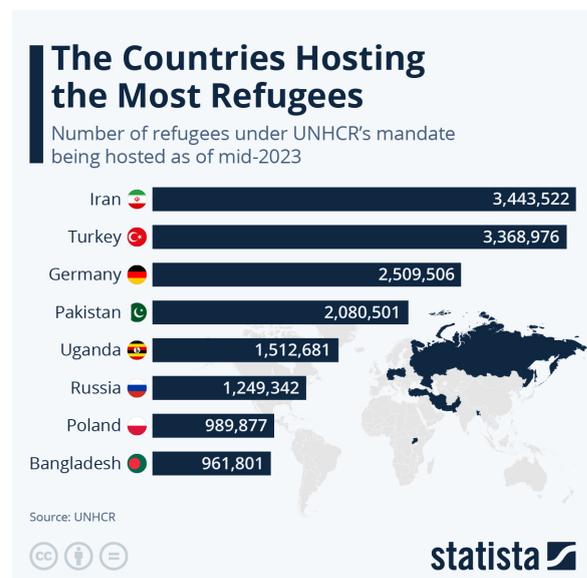
However, political incentives to promote return may not align with actual conditions. In some cases, return is encouraged before institutions are capable of ensuring security, legal protection, or economic inclusion. When return is used to project stability rather than reflect it, refugees may be exposed to renewed risks.

Sovereignty considerations also affect international engagement. Governments may resist external monitoring, human rights reporting, or conditionality attached to assistance, framing these measures as interference in domestic affairs. This can limit the ability of international actors to assess return conditions independently.

For delegates, this tension highlights a recurring challenge: while states retain authority over their internal affairs, refugee protection requires transparency and accountability. Sustainable return depends on balancing sovereignty with adherence to international norms.

## 5.2 Domestic Politics in Host States

In host states, refugee return is closely tied to domestic political dynamics. Prolonged displacement places visible pressure on public services, labor markets, and housing, particularly in urban areas. Over time, the presence of refugees may become a focal point of political



<sup>14</sup> political legitimacy: the belief that a rule, institution, or leader has the right to govern.



discourse, especially during periods of economic stress or political instability.

Political actors may frame refugees as competitors for jobs, public assistance, or national identity, regardless of empirical evidence. These narratives can influence public opinion and contribute to restrictive policies, including limitations on residency, employment, or access to services. In this environment, return may be promoted as a solution to domestic challenges rather than as a protection-based process.

Policy decisions in host states are often shaped by short-term political considerations rather than long-term planning. While some governments adopt inclusive approaches to refugee access and self-reliance, these policies remain vulnerable to reversal under political pressure.

For UNHCR and other actors, engaging with host-state politics requires careful navigation. Supporting host communities, addressing misinformation, and promoting burden-sharing are essential to maintaining protection space and preventing coerced return.

### 5.3 Regional and International Political Dynamics

Refugee return in the Middle East is also influenced by broader regional and international political dynamics. Conflicts often involve multiple external actors, and post-conflict arrangements are shaped by regional rivalries, alliances, and shifting diplomatic priorities. These dynamics affect reconstruction efforts, security arrangements, and access to international assistance.

At the international level, refugee return is sometimes linked to foreign policy objectives, including stabilization strategies, counterterrorism<sup>15</sup> efforts, or migration management. In some cases, financial assistance or political normalization is tied, explicitly or implicitly, to progress on return. This can create incentives for states to promote return narratives even when conditions remain fragile.

Global attention to displacement is also uneven. Competing crises and changing political priorities can reduce international engagement over time, contributing to funding gaps and declining diplomatic pressure. As international focus shifts, responsibility for managing displacement increasingly falls on states with limited capacity.

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<sup>15</sup> **Counterterrorism:** political or military activities designed to prevent or thwart terrorism.





In countries of origin, employment prospects are frequently limited by damaged infrastructure, weak private sectors, and slow economic recovery. Returnees may face competition for scarce jobs or encounter discrimination that restricts access to work. Without targeted support, return can place individuals in economically precarious situations.

UNHCR and development partners increasingly emphasize livelihood programs that support self-reliance, skills development, and income generation. For delegates, this underscores the importance of linking return policies to broader economic recovery efforts rather than treating employment as a secondary concern.

### **6.2 Pressure on Host and Return Communities**

Large-scale displacement affects not only refugees, but also host and return communities. In host states, increased demand for housing, healthcare, education, and employment places a strain on already limited resources. These pressures can contribute to social tensions, particularly in communities experiencing economic hardship.

Host communities may perceive refugees as competitors for jobs or public services, even when evidence suggests broader structural causes of economic decline. If these perceptions are not addressed, they can fuel resentment and political opposition to inclusive policies.

In areas of return, similar challenges emerge. Communities receiving returnees may lack adequate infrastructure or services to absorb additional population growth. If return is not accompanied by investment in local development, it can deepen inequalities and strain social cohesion.

UNHCR promotes community-based approaches that support both displaced populations and host or return communities. For delegates, this highlights the importance of policies that balance refugee assistance with broader community support to prevent conflict and ensure sustainability.

### **6.3 Long-Term Development and Sustainability**



Sustainable reintegration depends on more than immediate humanitarian assistance. Long-term development is essential to addressing the structural conditions that drive displacement and limit return. This includes rebuilding infrastructure, strengthening public institutions, and creating inclusive economic opportunities.

Short funding cycles and fragmented programming often undermine these goals. Humanitarian assistance may address urgent needs but fails to establish pathways toward self-reliance. Development initiatives, meanwhile, may exclude displaced populations due to legal or political constraints.

Bridging the gap between humanitarian and development responses remains a central challenge. UNHCR increasingly works with development actors to align protection objectives with national development plans. However, progress depends on political commitment, predictable funding, and inclusive policies.

For delegates, this section illustrates why refugee return must be approached as part of a longer trajectory of recovery and reform. Without sustained investment and institutional capacity, return risks become temporary rather than durable.

## 7. Previous UN and International Efforts

The international community has engaged extensively with issues of refugee displacement, return, and reintegration in the Middle East. Over time, responses have evolved from short-term humanitarian assistance toward more complex approaches that seek to balance protection, development, and political considerations. Despite these efforts, outcomes have



been uneven, reflecting both the scale of displacement and the persistence of underlying conflicts.

For UNHCR and its partners, past initiatives provide important lessons. While international engagement has mitigated suffering and supported millions of refugees, it has often struggled to translate political commitments into sustainable solutions. Understanding these efforts helps delegates assess what has worked, what has not, and why.



## **7.1 Humanitarian Assistance and Emergency Response**

Initial international responses to displacement in the Middle East were largely humanitarian in nature. UN agencies, international organizations, and non-governmental partners focused on emergency shelter, food assistance, healthcare, and protection services. These interventions were essential in preventing large-scale loss of life and addressing immediate needs.

However, as displacement became protracted, emergency-oriented responses proved insufficient. Funding mechanisms remained short-term, while planning assumptions continued to treat displacement as temporary. This mismatch limited the ability of humanitarian actors to invest in education, livelihoods, and institutional capacity.

Despite these constraints, humanitarian assistance has played a stabilizing role, particularly in host states facing significant resource pressures. For delegates, this highlights both the necessity and the limits of emergency response in addressing long-term displacement.

## **7.2 Development-Oriented and Resilience-Based Approaches**

Recognizing the protracted nature of displacement, international actors increasingly adopted development-oriented approaches to enhance resilience in both refugee and host communities. Programs focused on livelihoods, education, infrastructure, and service delivery sought to reduce dependency on humanitarian aid and promote self-reliance.

Initiatives linking humanitarian and development actors marked a significant shift in international thinking. These efforts acknowledged that long-term displacement requires structural solutions rather than indefinite emergency assistance.

Despite progress, implementation challenges persisted. Legal restrictions, political sensitivities, and limited coordination constrained the reach of development programs. In some cases, displaced populations were excluded from national development plans, limiting impact.



For delegates, these experiences illustrate the importance of inclusive development frameworks that explicitly account for the realities of displacement.

### **7.3 Political and Diplomatic Efforts**

International diplomatic efforts have sought to address the root causes of displacement through peace negotiations, ceasefire agreements, and political settlements. While these initiatives are essential, their impact on refugee return has often been indirect and delayed.

Peace processes have frequently stalled or addressed security concerns without resolving governance, accountability, or rights-related issues. As a result, political agreements did not always translate into conditions conducive to return.

At the same time, refugee return has occasionally been used as a diplomatic benchmark for progress, even when conditions remained unstable. This disconnect highlights the risks of politicizing return without adequate safeguards.

For UNHCR, engagement in political processes remains limited to advocacy and technical input. For delegates, this underscores the need to align political objectives with protection realities.

### **7.4 Lessons Learned**

Several key lessons emerge from previous international efforts. First, displacement in the Middle East is inherently long-term and requires sustained engagement beyond emergency phases. Second, return processes are most effective when linked to governance reform, economic recovery, and rights protection rather than treated as isolated objectives.

Third, coordination remains a recurring challenge. Fragmentation among humanitarian, development, and political actors weakens outcomes and creates gaps in protection. Finally, refugee participation is essential. Policies designed without refugee input are less likely to succeed.



These lessons inform current UNHCR strategies and provide a foundation for future policy discussions within this committee.

### **8. Possible Solutions and Future Prospects**

Refugee return and reintegration in the Middle East requires long-term, coordinated approaches rather than singular policy interventions. Given the protracted nature of displacement and the persistence of political and economic instability, solutions must balance protection obligations with practical constraints faced by states and institutions.

For this committee, the objective is not to identify a single pathway to return, but to outline conditions and strategies that can reduce risks, expand choices for refugees, and support stability over time.

#### **8.1 Establishing Credible Conditions for Voluntary Return**

The foundation of any return process is the existence of verifiably safe and predictable conditions. This includes physical security, legal protection, and the absence of persecution or arbitrary detention. Political declarations of stability alone are insufficient without observable improvements and independent monitoring.

International access and assessment remain essential to ensuring that return decisions are informed rather than coerced. Where such conditions are absent, continued protection must remain the priority.

#### **8.2 Supporting Reintegration Through Institutions and Services**

Reintegration depends on the capacity of institutions to provide documentation, resolve housing and property disputes, and deliver basic services. Legal and administrative barriers often determine whether returnees can rebuild their lives or face renewed marginalization.



Strengthening governance at national and local levels is therefore central to durable return. While institutional reform is a long-term process, incremental improvements can significantly affect reintegration outcomes.

### **8.3 Linking Return to Economic Recovery and Community Support**

Economic sustainability is a key determinant of whether returns can be maintained. Access to livelihoods, education, and infrastructure allows returnees to move beyond dependence on assistance and contribute to local recovery.

At the same time, support must extend to host and return communities to prevent social tension and competition over resources. Inclusive recovery approaches benefit both displaced populations and receiving communities.

### **8.4 Strengthening International Cooperation and Refugee Participation**

Given the scale of displacement, international cooperation remains indispensable. Predictable funding, burden-sharing, and coordination between humanitarian, development, and political actors are necessary to support both host states and countries of origin.

Equally important is the meaningful participation of refugees. Voluntary return requires access to accurate information and genuine choice. Policies that incorporate refugee perspectives are more likely to reflect realities on the ground and produce sustainable outcomes.

## **9. Questions to be Addressed**

1. Under what conditions can refugee return be considered genuinely voluntary, safe, and dignified, and how can these conditions be assessed and verified in practice?  
How can protection obligations be upheld in contexts where host states face



2. increasing political, economic, or social pressure to promote return?  
What responsibilities do countries of origin have toward returnees beyond facilitating physical return, particularly in relation to governance, legal reform, and human rights protection?
3. How can refugee return and reintegration be effectively linked to long-term socio-economic recovery without placing disproportionate strain on host or return communities?
4. What role should international cooperation and burden-sharing play in addressing protracted displacement, and how can refugee participation be meaningfully incorporated into decision-making processes?

### **Agenda Item II: Host or Home? Balancing Refugee Protection and National Pressure in Middle Eastern Host States**

#### **10. Background of the Issue**

##### **10.1. Historical Overview of Refugee Hosting in the Middle East**

The Middle East has historically always been a region of exile and forced migration. During the Palestinian Expulsion and Flight (1947 – 1949) and the Palestinian expulsions (1949 – 1956), Palestinians; during the Jewish exodus from Muslim-majority countries (1948 – 1980), Jews; during the expulsions of Greek people from Istanbul (1964 – 1965), Greeks of Turkey; during the persecution of Christian people by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (2014 – present), Christians; during the persecution of the Shia people by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (2014–present), Shia Muslims; and during the Gaza Strip evacuations (2023 – 2025), Gazans were all forced to leave their homelands.

This atmosphere, which the region has been immersed in for more than a century, has not dissipated in the present day. Refugees from various countries have once again been compelled to leave their homelands for a wide range of reasons and seek refuge elsewhere. The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees has never been fully implemented de facto in the region and has not been adopted by the Arab Republic of Syria, the Republic of Iraq, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Sultanate of Oman, the



Republic of Lebanon, the State of Kuwait, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the State of Qatar, or the United Arab Emirates. As a result, migrant-hosting processes have largely operated not on the basis of formal legal statuses, but rather through de facto residence permissions, assumptions of temporariness, or informal arrangements. All of this has led to the Middle East's relationship with migration diverging significantly from that of many other parts of the world, and especially from Europe.

The first modern-era practices of refugee reception in the region were implemented by the Ottoman Empire. Finding itself in a rapid process of dissolution, the Ottoman Empire initially put these practices into effect in order to transfer Muslim populations loyal to Ottoman culture from its former territories toward the imperial center. In this context, Albanians, Bosniaks, Chechens, Circassians, Crimean Tatars, Pomaks, Torbeš, Muslim Greeks, Muslim Serbs, Muslim Georgians, Muslim Ossetians, and Muslim Roma were placed under the protection of the Ottoman Empire. However, during this period, the legal definitions of “refugee” and “citizen” had not yet fully developed, and these policies were implemented through centralized state settlement rather than through a codified legal framework.

The formal foundation of refugee policies in the region, however, begins with the Nakba (lit. “the catastrophe”), a process that started with the Balad al-Sheikh massacre and has continued since 31 December 1947. The Nakba can best be defined as a policy of forced displacement, dispossession, mass destruction, and erasure of identity directed by the State of Israel against the Palestinian people. Despite it being almost certain that the actual numbers are higher, the Nakba resulted in the deaths of at least 361,600 Palestinian civilians and the forced displacement of at least 3,063,000 Palestinian civilians, thereby igniting a major humanitarian crisis. Following the Palestinian Expulsion and Flight between 31 December 1947 and 20 July 1949, in which at least 750,000 Palestinian civilians were forcibly displaced from their homes and at least 15,000 were killed, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established. Despite being a United Nations agency, UNRWA was designated as a “terrorist organization” by the State of Israel in 2024.

Regional conflicts that intensified during the Cold War period significantly increased the number of refugees in the Middle East. A wide range of violent military and political



confrontations; such as the Arab–Israeli conflict (15 May 1948 – present), the Suez Crisis (29 October 1956 – 7 November 1956), the Six-Day War (5 June 1967 – 10 June 1967), the Yom Kippur War (6 October 1973 – 25 October 1973), the Arab Cold War (23 July 1952 – present), the Lebanese Civil War (13 April 1975 – 6 July 1991), the Iranian Revolution (7 January 1978 – 11 February 1979), and the Iran–Iraq War (22 September 1980 – 20 August 1988); resulted in the opening of new territories to warfare and forced large numbers of civilians to abandon their homes. The Lebanese Civil War, in particular, led to the politicization of Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, causing the crisis to evolve through new and complex dynamics, while the Iranian Revolution brought the issue of political refugees to the forefront of regional and international agendas.

The Gulf War (2 August 1990 – 28 February 1991), which followed these crises, marked a critical moment in the formation of the “temporary protection” approach that is now widely adopted by many major Middle Eastern states. As the number of Kuwaiti refugees steadily increased, Iraqi Kurds were also displaced on a massive scale. While the international community struggled to process the shock of Saddam Hussein trying to sustain a full-scale war against a coalition of 43 states, countries such as the Republic of Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan deliberately avoided permanent integration policies and instead developed a narrative of providing refugees with “temporary protection.”

Before the wounds of the Gulf War had fully healed, the invasion of Iraq (20 March 2003 – 1 May 2003) and the subsequent Iraq War (20 March 2003 – 18 December 2011) triggered the influx of millions of Iraqi refugees into Syria and Jordan. During this same period, Gulf countries, facing serious labor shortages, hosted migrants in order to employ them in their own development projects, a practice that in turn gave rise to growing objections concerning the economic exploitation of refugees.

The Syrian Civil War (15 March 2011 – 8 December 2024) became the principal event that expanded the scale of debates surrounding refugees and transformed displacement into an issue of truly international concern. The war in Syria generated more than 6.7 million refugees, turning it into one of the largest refugee crises of recent decades. While the majority of these refugees sought shelter in Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan, they have faced severe poverty, food insecurity, and similar hardships in their countries of refuge. A comparable refugee crisis also erupted in Yemen. As a result of the Yemeni Civil War (16



September 2014 – present), approximately 4.5 million Yemenis were forced to flee their country, seeking refuge primarily in Djibouti, Somalia, and Oman.

In summary, the foundations of modern refugee crises in the Middle East were laid with the Nakba experienced by Palestinians in 1947, were intensified by the failure to effectively implement the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, expanded in scope through the conflicts of the Cold War era, and have ultimately evolved into one of the major challenges facing the world today. Moreover, the crisis has not remained static: the Lebanese Civil War created an atmosphere in which Palestinian refugee camps became politicized and refugees increasingly came to be perceived as “security threats”; the Gulf War paved the way for the rise of the “temporary protection” narrative; and the Iraq War and the Syrian Civil War pushed the crisis into a grotesque phase in which refugees were reduced to objects of legal and political bargaining.

Today, international geopolitics is dominated by an environment in which Western states maintain highly limited resettlement quotas, host countries remain dependent on international funding, and the refugee crisis, stripped from its original context, is reframed from a humanitarian emergency into a series of national security crises.

### **10.2. Current Refugee Hosting Landscape**

The Middle East is today one of the regions hosting the largest number of refugees in the world. Many of the refugee crises of the twenty-first century have either occurred within the region or directly affected it. To speak in empirical terms, of the twelve large-scale refugee crises that are currently ongoing, nine have taken place in the Middle East or in countries bordering the Middle East. These nine crises can be listed as follows: the Arab–Israeli conflict refugee crisis (15 May 1948 – present), the Somali Civil War refugee crisis (6 April 1981 – present), the War in Afghanistan refugee crisis (7 October 2001 – present), the Iraq War refugee crisis (20 March 2003 – present), the Libyan Civil War refugee crisis (15 February 2011 – present), the Syrian Civil War refugee crisis (15 March 2011 – present), the South Sudanese Civil War refugee crisis (15 December 2013 – present), the Yemeni Civil War refugee crisis (16 September 2014 – present), and the Sudanese Civil War refugee crisis (15 April 2023 – present). The remaining three crises that fall outside the Middle Eastern



context are the Crisis in Venezuela refugee crisis (2 June 2010 – present), the Rohingya conflict refugee crisis (9 October 2016 – present), and the Russo-Ukrainian War refugee crisis (24 February 2022 – present).

In light of these facts, it is evident that the refugee crisis in the Middle East is not an “emergency” but a permanent social and international issue. Despite this reality, legal and institutional frameworks concerning refugees remain severely underdeveloped in the Middle East. Political leaders and policymakers in the region continue to employ rhetoric centered on notions such as “temporariness,” “return,” and “guesthood” when addressing refugee populations, and in the worst cases, they directly single refugees out as targets.

Three distinct archetypes have emerged among host states. The first consists of temporary protection regimes. The Republic of Turkey and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan can be cited as representative examples of this model. Their core logic lies in accepting refugees in large numbers, settling them in camps or urban areas, and attempting de facto integration while generally denying them in legal terms.

The second archetype comprises regimes with far more fragile refugee policies. The clearest example of this model is the Republic of Lebanon. In such regimes, refugees survive largely through informal economies and are governed primarily by municipalities and local security units. This approach can be described, in simple terms, as a policy of “tolerating refugees.”

The third and most contested archetype is the labor regime, often referred to as the “Gulf model.” In these regimes, refugees are typically not granted any special legal status; instead, they are incorporated into the labor force, often through highly controversial mechanisms such as the kafala (sponsorship) system. The most prominent examples of this model include the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

## **11. Major Actors**

### **11.1 Host State Governments**

Host state governments can be defined as countries that host refugees inside their borders and provide their basic needs to refugees while protecting them at the same time. Member states that host refugees carry some responsibilities regarding this situation. One



responsibility those states have is providing regulations of safe refugee entry. Statistics show that the major issues regarding refugees happen while the refugees are entering the host states. Host states must make sure that there are solid regulations regarding the entrance of refugees inside their borders. Another issue that has to be mentioned is the legal status of the refugees inside the host states. Since the majority of the Middle Eastern host states are not part of the 1951 Refugee Convention, refugees are not granted full refugee rights. Instead, they are usually given temporary protection. In such situations, refugees are recognised as guest status which creates legal uncertainties for refugees.

To understand the second responsibility of host states we need to be aware that refugees require any sort of public services as well as the citizens of the host states. These services can be listed as healthcare, education, employment and housing. Host state governments have a responsibility of providing these services to refugees. However, this is not as easy as it is sound. Governments face pressure from their own citizens regarding this issue because citizens perceive refugees as rivals to their job opportunities or state resources. This puts host state governments in a difficult situation where they need to meet the demands of the refugees whereas not making their own citizens angry and making sure they are satisfied. In such situations, host states may come up with ideas such as work permit systems or air-dependent models.

The third responsibility of host governments is providing security and political stability. Governments need to make sure their borders are observed 7/24 with as advanced technology and army as possible. They need to prevent any activity related to radicalization. One thing host states need to be careful of is the possible conflicts and tensions that might happen between the citizens and refugees in affected regions. Governments are supposed to take necessary precautions to stop any possible encounter. Refugee policies linked to national security frameworks should be implemented.

The fourth and the last responsibility of host states is to make international coordinations. These coordinations should take place with organizations such as UNHCR, NGOs and donor states with the purpose of obtaining financial aid and any humanitarian support. To ensure long-term refugee protection, these coordinations are essential.

### **11.2 United Nations and Humanitarian Actors**



United Nations and humanitarian actors play a huge role in supporting refugee protection. Their involvement matters most in areas where the resources are limited and refugees cannot get enough support as they need. The most appropriate example for this situation is the Middle East. In such areas, having the support of the United Nations affects a lot of things positively.

The primary international organization related to the United Nations and refugee protection is UNHCR which is the committee we will be working in. UNHCR works with host states to resolve issues regarding refugees such as legal status, education, shelter, healthcare services, protection and their registration. Apart from UNHCR, there are other United Nations sub committees such as UNICEF, WHO, WFP and UNDP which operate to meet specific demands of refugees. UNICEF's main focus is on child protection, WFP tries to distribute food for people who cannot access enough of it. WHO focuses on health related matters and UNDP is a sub committee working on development.

## **12. Legal and Policy Framework**

### **12.1 International Human Rights Obligations of Host States**

Every host state that hosts refugees inside their border is obligated to protect the rights of the refugees. This protection is a standard of conduct. What does this mean? This means that states are not responsible for any human rights violations by private subjects. This is an issue that the delegates of the UNHCR committee should address. There are international human rights law obligations that require each state to protect and respect the rights of individuals inside their borders. This includes protection from third parties or business enterprises as well.

There are a few options states can take to ensure refugees' rights do not get violated:

1- States can enforce laws or regulations about the rights of refugees which targets both citizens of the state as well as the business enterprises.



2- Corporate laws and effective guidance on how to respect human rights can be provided to businesses with taking into consideration not limiting their operations.

3- Public campaigns regarding raising awareness can be held especially targeting the citizens of the host state with the purpose of explaining all the challenges refugees are facing.

In general host states are responsible for taking care of the safety, education, health and housing rights of the refugees. Delegates are expected to come up with solutions to make sure these rights are provided smoothly to refugees.

### **12.2 National Sovereignty vs. International Responsibility**

The dilemma of national sovereignty and international responsibility is one of the most important debates that delegates will have to conduct inside the UNHCR committee. While some people believe that the most important thing and priority of states should be their own national sovereignty, some indicate that each member state has international responsibilities which include protecting the citizens of other countries if necessary. Even though this is a subjective matter which is difficult to find a common ground with, member states should always consider the fact that every human being on this planet deserves basic human rights. One example regarding this dilemma is happening in Middle East right now.

At the heart of Middle Eastern refugee governance is the conflict between international responsibility and national sovereignty. While the international community highlights the shared responsibility to protect refugees escaping conflict and persecution, host states assert their sovereign right to control borders, immigration laws, and internal security. From the standpoint of sovereignty, host governments contend that significant refugee inflows put unmanageable strain on public services, state capacity, and social cohesion. Particularly for nations that are not full parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention or have geographical restrictions, many Middle Eastern states stress that accepting refugees is a voluntary humanitarian act rather than a permanent legal obligation. States are able to implement return policies, travel restrictions, and temporary protection regimes in accordance with domestic priorities thanks to their sovereignty.



In summary, balancing national sovereignty and international responsibility requires moving beyond legal obligations toward genuine international solidarity, where protection is shared, predictable, and respectful of host state capacities.

### **13. Humanitarian and Human Rights Issues**

#### **13.1 Access to Healthcare, Education and Employment**

Several times it was mentioned that the host states should meet the basic demands of refugees. The first service that has to be provided to refugees is healthcare systems. Public hospitals should serve the refugees as well. However, this brings up another issue which is excessive capacity issues in hospitals. If there are not enough rooms for patients in need or there are not enough spaces in internal care units, that is a huge issue for the state. One possible solution seems to be opening new hospitals after accepting the refugees but it requires financial support. International organizations may step in at these points to financially assist the host states to overcome healthcare system issues. The primary organization that can be consulted would be the World Health Organization. Another solution might be non-host states financially supporting the host states. As the delegates of the UNHCR committee, you are expected to come up with creative solutions that resolve the aforementioned issues regarding healthcare systems.

The second right is the education right. Every child no matter their race, religion or nationality deserves receiving basic and fair education. Refugees who are children also deserve to receive education no matter what the circumstances are. Host states should make sure that refugee students get proper education. There are issues that have to be dealt with by the host state regarding education. Refugees who come from different states may not speak the mother language of the host state. This shows the importance of international schools in member states. In such cases host states should build new schools for the refugees to not get affected by this issue. UNICEF should be the primary organization to be consulted in such situations. Another aspect is the potential discrimination children refugees may face in schools. Host states have the responsibility of preventing these sorts of issues in schools by



implementing necessary regulations and educating the citizens properly about refugee problems. Delegates of UNHCR need to find a balance between providing fair education to refugees and not hurting the sovereignty of the host state by applying a different curriculum to refugees inside host states.

The third right is the employment right. Refugees need to earn money so they can afford their needs. Employing the refugees is a huge matter that includes a variety of aspects within itself. The first issue regarding the refugee employment is that since refugees are not recognised as a citizen of the host state, employees tend to make refugees work for really low amounts. Refugees who are in desperate conditions usually accept to work for low amounts under terrible conditions. This is a big violation of human rights and international bodies should step in for these issues as well as the host states themselves. UNHRC should be the primary organization to be consulted in these cases.

Another issue regarding the employment of refugees is the potential competition between the citizens of the host state and refugees. Many host states currently have a significant ratio of unemployment. When refugees also seek job opportunities, the unemployment rate of citizens automatically rises. This is something every government would try to avoid because nobody wants to harm their own citizens that way. When the unemployment rates among citizens rise because of the competition between refugees, citizens tend to develop hatred towards refugees which enables internal crises inside the borders of host states. This is also a major issue that has to be prevented by the government. Delegates of UNHCR are expected to find solutions that include employing refugees without violating human rights and do not affect the unemployment rates of citizens which in the end triggers internal chaos.

### **13.2 Legal Status, Detention and Deportation Risks**

Refugee legal status regulates the right to enjoy rights and protection. Legally unregistered or unregistered refugees with expired or unregistered documents may have limited rights to jobs, education, health care, and movement. Complicated procedures for



renewal or high renewal fees may place refugees in irregular status despite having entered the host state through formal avenues.

Administrative detention bears a close association with unclear legal status. Refugees and asylum-seekers get arrested due to unavailability of documentation, moving around illegally, or suspicion of national security. Arresting or detaining people takes place mostly through the administrative process, which does not require formal charges or set time boundaries. Even people from protected groups like children, women, or trauma victims are not exempt from detention, contrary to internationally discouraged standards.

Deportation and forced return are considered the gravest protection risk. Whereas the principle of non-refoulement forbids returning individuals to places where they face persecution or serious harm, host states can still conduct such deportations based on national security, public order, or migration control. In reality, returns might be conducted through summary procedures, pressure on those who would "voluntarily" return, and deportation after detention, especially in periods of increased political or economic stress.

These risks are compounded by policy uncertainty and politicization of refugee presence. Sudden regulatory changes, mass status reviews, or intensified enforcement campaigns can quickly push refugees from protected to deportable status. Limited access to legal aid and appeal mechanisms further weakens procedural safeguards.

To summarize, an insecure legal situation leads to a vicious cycle of vulnerability, in which there is a danger of detention in view of an irregular situation, a danger of deportation in view of detention and a danger to refugee protection standards in view of deportation.

## **14. Political and Security Dimensions**

### **14.1 Domestic Political Pressures**



Although often denied by states, it is a well-established reality that refugee policies are also shaped by fluctuations in domestic politics. Electoral cycles and the rise of populist pressures constitute critical turning points in the formulation of policies that directly affect the lives of refugees.

One of the greatest risks faced by refugees, particularly during periods of economic crisis, is their designation as scapegoats in debates surrounding unemployment, housing shortages, social welfare, and public security, making them primary targets of right-wing populist movements. In many parts of the world, parties and organizations operating within this archetype blame refugees in order to mobilize voters, draw identity-based divisions, and construct nationalist rhetoric, using refugees as instruments of political contestation. This dynamic poses a serious threat to refugees' physical safety and human dignity; in cases such as the anti-refugee riots in Turkey (30 June 2024 – 2 July 2024), the Dublin riot (23 November 2023), and the United Kingdom riots (30 July 2024 – 10 August 2024), these policies escalated into episodes of violent unrest.

Furthermore, internal disagreements within state bureaucracies, most commonly between ministries of interior, defense, foreign affairs, and social services, often complicate the passage of refugee-related legislation and hinder the ability of UNHCR to intervene effectively. In addition, national governments' efforts to shift their perceived "burden" onto local administrations can sometimes backfire, as local authorities such as municipalities may respond with resistance, thereby restricting refugees' access to basic services including housing, education, and healthcare.

Public opinion also wields substantial power in shaping refugee policies. During periods of economic insecurity, segments of the population seeking an outlet for their frustration may identify refugees as convenient targets, attributing a wide range of social problems to them and directing their emotional grievances toward refugees, even at the expense of rejecting empirical evidence.

### **14.2 Security Concerns and Policy Responses**



Moreover, in societies where concerns over security are already on the rise, security-related anxieties can be displaced onto refugees. Although crimes committed by refugees are, in proportional terms, lower than those committed by local populations in many contexts worldwide, isolated incidents are often exaggerated or disproportionately highlighted by the media. This dynamic contributes to the spread of fallacious narratives portraying refugees as threats to public security, despite a lack of empirical support.

In certain contexts, states themselves may frame refugees as “border violators,” “demographic threats,” or “cultural outsiders” in order to legitimize military operations, restrictions on demographic rights, or the imposition of states of emergency. In other cases, states and governments may deflect responsibility for their own planning failures onto refugees, claiming that refugees have “disrupted” or “undermined” state policies and development plans. Nevertheless, as with most phenomena in world politics, it is also possible for refugee crises to generate certain genuine security concerns. While pressures on states’ border management capacities or the risk of armed groups blending into civilian populations do exist, the security risks arising from these factors have thus far remained relatively minor in scale.

Another issue concerns the potential for radicalization or criminal gang formation within refugee camps, as illustrated by the previously mentioned case of the Lebanese Civil War. This phenomenon has been observed more frequently in quantitative terms. Many Palestinian militant organizations were founded by individuals born in refugee camps and emerged from within those camps themselves. Additionally, the existence of criminal groups such as the 515 Hashemites, which operated for a short period in Turkey, is documented. However, when the situation is analyzed in depth, it becomes clear that, if responsibility is to be assigned at all, the primary cause lies not with refugees themselves, but with the catastrophic conditions they are forced to endure, including extreme poverty, asylum-related trauma, and broader social deprivation. Accordingly, this issue should be examined as a subheading of refugee welfare and protection debates rather than as an inherent security problem attributable to refugees.

## **15. Economic Considerations**

### **15.1. Impact on Public Services and Infrastructure**



Public services encompass a wide range of sectors; including healthcare, education, housing, urban infrastructure, water supply, sanitation, waste management, transportation, energy, and social services; and are provided in pursuit of the general welfare of society. Strains on the infrastructure supporting these public services typically stem from rapid population growth, inadequate planning, and insufficient financing.

In cases of sudden population increases, including those driven by refugee crises, a number of challenges may emerge: increased patient loads in hospitals, longer waiting times in emergency departments, pressure on basic health services, and heavier workloads for healthcare workers. These problems generally arise from the limited flexibility of existing systems and their inability to adapt quickly to sharp demographic changes.

Similarly, the integration of refugee children into education systems constitutes a particularly sensitive issue. Differences in students' mother tongues and constraints on existing educational capacity can result in refugee children being excluded from schooling, thereby increasing the risks of lost generations, informal or child labor, and early marriage.

Housing presents another major challenge. Refugees are often compelled to reside in informal settlements or slum neighborhoods with weak infrastructure, becoming concentrated in overcrowded living conditions. Where refugee camps exist, the provision of essential services such as water and electricity also emerges as a direct responsibility of the state.

When inadequate planning and insufficient financing intersect with sudden population growth, these general problems become increasingly pronounced. Addressing them therefore requires robust international financial support mechanisms and infrastructure improvements implemented within the framework of humanitarian assistance.

### **15.2. Labour Markets and Informal Employment**

Refugees are, for the most part, individuals who are capable of participating in the labor force and contributing productively, yet who are prevented from fully integrating into labor markets due to legal and structural barriers. While labor force participation constitutes a humanitarian necessity for refugee populations, it is simultaneously a macroeconomic issue.

The first major obstacle refugees encounter concerns work permits. Procedures for obtaining work authorization are, in many countries, slow, costly, complex, and highly



bureaucratic. Some states further impose quotas or geographical restrictions, making it even more difficult for refugees to enter labor markets as formally registered workers. This process lays the groundwork for the phenomenon of informality.

Informal employment is not solely the result of deficiencies within state bureaucracies; it may also emerge from legal ambiguity. In the previously mentioned “Gulf model” of host regimes, refugees’ legal status may be deliberately obscured, creating environments in which their participation in labor markets is less regulated. In addition, language barriers may require refugees to learn an entirely new language before accessing employment, while their diplomas or professional certifications may not be recognized in host countries. In contrast to these obstacles, refugees in urgent need of income are often compelled to accept employers’ offers of lower wages, lack of social security, flexibility, and precarious working conditions. In this context, informality appears not as a voluntary choice, but as a burden imposed upon refugees as a condition of economic survival.

Although refugees find employment across nearly all sectors, they are particularly concentrated in agriculture, construction, textiles, food production, services, and domestic labor. These forms of employment—characterized by low wages, long working hours, inadequate occupational safety, and lack of unionization—also reinforce gendered divisions of labor, with women disproportionately directed toward domestic work and children toward agricultural labor or small workshops.

Despite a widespread public perception that refugee employment “causes unemployment among local populations,” empirical evidence does not support this claim. Given that the vast majority of jobs occupied by refugees are low-skilled and precarious, the core issue lies instead in the rapid expansion of informality and the exploitation of refugee labor.

Finally, from the perspective of the state, informal labor results in significant losses in tax revenue and social security contributions, thereby undermining the financing of public services. Moreover, employers’ persistent tendency to depress wages can generate a “race to the bottom” affecting both refugee and local workers alike. This dynamic, in turn, exacerbates a range of problems related to security, poverty, and social stability.



## 16. Previous UN and International Efforts

### 16.1. UNHRC and UNHCR Initiatives

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) work in close coordination in addressing refugee crises. While the UNHRC primarily engages with the normative, supervisory, and political dimensions of the issue, UNHCR translates the theoretical and normative framework developed within the UNHRC into practical action on the ground. Moreover, the very existence of the UNHRC has ensured that refugee rights are evaluated within the broader framework of human rights, playing a crucial role in dismantling the narrative that states owe human rights obligations solely to their own citizens.

UNHCR, in turn, continues its work in areas such as providing legal counseling to refugees and civil society organizations, maintaining refugee registration systems and determining legal status, and contesting deportation and refoulement decisions. In addition, UNHCR supports refugees on the ground through the provision of shelter, healthcare, and education, as well as through the management of refugee camps and the implementation of urban refugee programs. In carrying out these activities, UNHCR cooperates with and receives support from other international actors, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Bank Group (WBG).

### 16.2 International Aid Mechanisms

International assistance mechanisms should be understood not as acts of charity, but as instruments of international responsibility-sharing. Through modalities such as humanitarian aid, development assistance, emergency financing, and long-term capacity building, these mechanisms aim to alleviate the burden on host countries, meet refugees' basic needs, and reduce the likelihood of protracted refugee situations.



UNHCR's budget is primarily composed of voluntary contributions from member states, donations from regional organizations, and contributions from the private sector and individual donors. However, the unpredictability of these funds and their dependence on political crises constrain UNHCR's operational reach. For this reason, support is at times supplemented through mechanisms such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

One of the most significant gaps in international responsibility-sharing lies in the fact that refugees are predominantly hosted by lower- and middle-income countries, while the majority of UNHCR's funding is provided by upper-middle- and high-income states. This asymmetry often generates a sense of alienation within host countries, particularly where the burdens of long-term refugee hosting are most acutely felt.

Moreover, the reality that refugees; who are themselves largely located in the Global South, are financed primarily through resources originating in the Global North has raised concerns that contemporary refugee governance may reproduce dynamics resembling a new form of neo-colonialism.

## **17. Possible Solutions and Future Prospects**

### **17.1. Sustainable Hosting Models**

Sustainable hosting can be defined, in simple terms, as an umbrella concept for models that manage the long-term presence of refugees through social cohesion, economic participation, and rights-based approaches, without exceeding the capacities of host societies. The core objective is to transform the refugee issue from a perpetual "crisis" into a manageable humanitarian and social challenge.

Once emergency assistance phases come to an end, the first fundamental requirement of sustainable hosting policies is a shift away from temporary measures, such as camps and short-term humanitarian aid, toward more durable and sustainable approaches, including urban integration, access to public services, and the strengthening of local governance. Without establishing integrated systems in public services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure that are shared by both refugees and host communities, without preventing



ethnic and social tensions, and without a firm commitment to sustainability, it is not possible to minimize the harm experienced by all parties involved in the crisis.

At the same time, given that municipalities stand on the front lines of public service provision, the role of local governments must be treated as a central issue. Questions of authority, capacity, and access to resources must be carefully regulated, and international funding mechanisms should be designed in ways that allow direct access by local administrations.

Furthermore, it must not be overlooked that the key to sustainable solutions for refugee crises lies in expanding refugees' economic autonomy. If refugees are granted access to work permits, formal employment, entrepreneurial opportunities, and vocational training, their dependence on aid will naturally decrease, while social integration will become significantly easier.

Another critical pillar of social integration is ensuring equal access to education for refugee children. Children and young people, being more open to change, form the foundation of long-term societal integration. To build this foundation on solid ground, refugee children must enjoy equal educational rights alongside citizens of host countries, and deliberate efforts must be made to equalize opportunities. Given that education yields some of the highest invisible social benefits due to positive microeconomic externalities, it becomes clear that education constitutes one of the most essential components of refugee integration.

In addition, from a legal and political perspective, refugees must not be perceived merely as “helpless populations,” but rather recognized and treated as dignified, autonomous, and equal legal and political subjects. Enabling refugees to participate actively in decision-making processes, to democratically organize their own communities, and to access legal protections against discrimination will preserve their dignity while expanding their capacity for agency.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that new crises are inevitable. The real challenge lies not in denying this reality, but in developing durable and just solutions.

### **17.2. Protection-Oriented National Policies**

Protection-oriented policies refer to measures designed to define refugees' legal status in humanitarian and social terms, and to safeguard their rights and dignity.



Although the core framework of these policies is established by the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, national asylum systems are also expected to incorporate additional safeguards. These include explicit prohibitions on forced return (refoulement), as well as clear, accessible, and fair asylum procedures. Given that legal uncertainty constitutes one of the most serious risks to refugee protection and produces significant psychological harm, the prior and transparent determination of legal statuses is of fundamental importance.

The formulation of such protection regimes requires, first and foremost, a departure from arbitrary detention practices and movement restrictions associated with state surveillance regimes. This entails recognizing the principle of individual criminal responsibility, avoiding the hyper-collectivization of migrant subjectivity, adopting proportional measures, and establishing effective mechanisms of legal oversight. At the same time, guaranteeing refugees' access to basic needs; such as healthcare, education, housing, employment, and livelihoods, constitutes the material foundation upon which these legal frameworks must rest.

Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that refugees do not constitute a monolithic group. Policies must therefore include targeted measures addressing the specific vulnerabilities of women, children, persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and older persons. At the societal level, responsibilities also include combating hate speech, informing and educating the public, and investing in local-level social cohesion programs.

Finally, it should not be overlooked that the effective implementation of these measures requires sufficient institutional capacity, trained personnel, and coordination, and that managing these processes in cooperation with the international community is not optional but essential.

### **17.3. Durable Solutions Beyond Protracted Displacement**

Protracted displacement refers to situations in which refugees are unable to access durable solutions for far longer periods than initially anticipated, producing severe and often devastating effects on refugee communities. Typically resulting in legal uncertainty, socio-economic exclusion, and the erosion of communal structures, this condition has followed an increasingly alarming trajectory and is steadily becoming a global norm rather than an exception.



Within the refugee studies literature, three classical solutions have traditionally been proposed to prevent protracted displacement. The first is voluntary repatriation. This approach, which can be summarized as encouraging refugees to return to their countries of origin through various mechanisms, has long been considered the preferred solution. However, ongoing political instability in the majority of contemporary refugee-producing contexts has rendered this option largely unviable. The second solution is local integration, which envisions refugees becoming permanently settled in host societies without a predetermined timeline for return. Yet it is important to note that this approach is difficult to fully implement in practice, as it may disrupt sensitive political balances in host countries and often encounters legal barriers related to access to citizenship and rights. The third classical solution is resettlement. Resettlement programs are typically temporary, small in scale, and non-systematic, focusing primarily on the protection of particularly vulnerable populations. As such, they are insufficient as a comprehensive response, making the development of new models beyond these traditional frameworks increasingly necessary.

Protracted displacement is generally sustained by prolonged conflicts, unresolved political crises, the absence of effective responsibility-sharing, and persistent legal status uncertainty. Addressing it therefore requires the articulation of a new vision capable of moving beyond the existing status quo. Emerging approaches increasingly emphasize elements such as social mobility, human rights-based regimes, long-term planning, and, in some cases, freedom of movement as central components of durable and just solutions.

### **18. Questions to be Addressed**

- 1- How did the conflicts that happened in the past affect the current status and what lessons can be taken from past incidents?
- 2- What are the main challenges faced by host states and how can they be solved?
- 3- How can host states balance their humanitarian obligations with domestic pressure coming from citizens?
- 4- What are the primary needs of refugees and how can they be provided?
- 5- What's the role of legal status in refugee rights?
- 6- How do large refugee populations affect the social and economic conditions of host states?



- 7- What measures can be taken to reduce tension between refugees and citizens of host states?
- 8- What roles do the United Nations and international organizations play in refugee protection?
- 9- Are human rights obligations implemented correctly?
- 10- How can host states deliver their international responsibilities without compromising their sovereignty?
- 11- What precautions can be taken to not politicize refugees in host states?
- 12- What safety measures should host states take to prevent any internal crisis within their borders and how can international organizations assist them?
- 13- How do economic pressures affect refugee policies of member states?
- 14- How do refugees affect labor markets in host states?
- 15- What human rights are violated while employing refugees and how can they be overcome?
- 16- How can long-term solutions replace short-term crisis management?
- 17- What defines a sustainable refugee hosting model?
- 18- How can responsibility for refugees be more equitably shared?

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