

# The General Assembly

## Protecting the Rights of Refugees



**MODEL UNITED NATIONS**  
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## Introduction

As of 2024, at least 108.4 million people have been displaced (UNHCR, "Figures at a Glance"). The refugee crisis has surged to unprecedented heights and thus, the topic of protecting and enhancing the rights of refugees is more important than ever before. When displaced, refugees are often not given access to adequate education or medical services and are mistreated by police and guards (Human Rights Watch, "Migrant and Refugee Children | Human Rights Watch"). As such, it is the job of the United Nations to ensure that refugees can have the basic human rights that they are entitled to under the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

This report will provide delegates with significant real-world examples of refugee maltreatment, highlighting the key terms and parties in this problem. The general overview section of the report will look at the refugee situation in Iran, Lebanon, and Germany respectively, hoping to give delegates a wider view of the issue by showing examples of countries that play a significant role in providing asylum.

The report will conclude by introducing delegates to some possible solutions in hopes that delegates can then conduct their research on the issue. The issue of protecting and enhancing the rights of refugees is far too complex and multifaceted to encompass all the possible solutions in great detail and therefore this section of the report hopes to inspire delegates to provide their resolutions to the problem through multilateral solutions, in the spirit of the general assembly.

## Key Terms

### Human Rights Dimensions

The aspects and considerations related to the protection and promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals, particularly immigrants and refugees.

### Human Rights Framework

A structure and set of principles that guide the protection and promotion of human rights within legal and institutional frameworks.

### Global Institutional Architecture

The organisational structure and mechanisms at the international level that govern and manage issues related to migration, human rights, and development.

### Asylum Seekers

Individuals who seek international protection and recognition as refugees due to fear of persecution or harm in their home countries.

### Prolonged Detention

The extended confinement of individuals, often migrants, without a prompt legal process or resolution.

## Key Parties

### United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees:

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) plays an important role in protecting refugees worldwide. It works to protect refugees and asylum seekers by advocating for their rights and working with governments and partners to do this.

### Human Rights Watch:

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is a leading NGO dedicated to defending and promoting human rights worldwide. They work to uncover abuse in all corners of the world, including the abuse of asylum seekers and refugees.

### **Türkiye:**

Türkiye (along with the Islamic Republic of Iran) currently host the most refugees in the world. They are an important nation in enhancing the rights of refugees and act as a model nation that all countries can hope to take inspiration from.

### **Germany:**

Germany currently hosts the 3rd most refugees worldwide and of the 12 countries that host the most refugees, Germany is the only high-income country. Germany acts as a marker for what other high-income countries should hope to do with refugees, seeing as they are the best equipped to provide them with their basic needs.

## **General Overview:**

There are several different reasons why one can become a refugee: war, oppression, natural disasters and climate change are just some of the reasons that cause global displacement. With 32 concurrent armed conflicts globally and a surge in global temperatures, there is no doubt that the refugee crisis will continue to grow. Working towards mitigating the livelihood of refugees and asylum seekers is a pressing global issue, an issue that requires the General Assembly to foster multilateral relations to secure human security.

### **Iran**

Iran currently hosts the most refugees in the world (UNHCR), with a high amount of Afghan refugees seeking asylum in Iran following the events in 2021. It is estimated that Iran hosts 2.6 million Afghans, with this number increasing to 3.1 million due to many unregistered asylum seekers not participating in the original headcount. Whilst the overall treatment of refugees in Iran is adequate, due to the poor socioeconomic conditions that refugees face, they are often mistreated. Displaced Afghan people face risks of family separation, violence and persecution (European Union Agency for Asylum). In Iran, Afghans are often subject to ethnic profiling and xenophobic attitudes (Jalilvand). Furthermore, the economic sanctions placed on Iran by the USA are shrinking the ability of Iran to

provide for Afghan refugees. Furthermore, the growing unemployment rate of Iranians and the exploitation of Afghan refugees for less costly labour creates a social disparity between Afghans and Iranians (Ziabari).

Whilst Iran had acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it made reservations to four articles, most notably Article 17 (wage-earning employment) and Article 21 (freedom of movement). Furthermore, in 2001, the Iranian Government had already restricted the freedom of movement of foreign nationals. The policy foresaw the establishment of both full and partial no-go areas (NGAs), which banned Afghans from going to or living in the no-go provinces. Since 2007, 17/31 of Iran's provinces are full NGAs, and 11/31 are partial NGAs, meaning that only 3/31 provinces in Iran have full freedom of movement for refugees (Jauhiainen). Afghan refugees are also paid far less than citizens, often hired by entrepreneurs for cheap labour. An educated Afghan worker would make £81 a month, whereas the base salary is £2128 for an Iranian (SalaryExplorer) (Latifi and Heydari). This clear disparity indicates the difference between the rights of refugees and citizens in Iran.

## Lebanon

Lebanon hosts the most refugees per capita worldwide, as well as the most refugees per square kilometre. The largest refugee population in Lebanon are the Syrian refugees, with over 1.5 million refugees currently living in Lebanon (UNHCR, "Lebanon"). Therefore, similarly to Iran, it has a very important role in protecting the rights of refugees. However, Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in constant fear of being deported, regardless of their Refugee status (Human Rights Watch). Lebanon has also not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, meaning that the only laws on asylum seekers are highly politicised, falling short of international standards (Kheshen). The informal relationship between the Lebanese government and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) allows them to make unilateral decisions affecting refugees; emphasising the need for multilateral cooperation in protecting and enhancing the rights of refugees.

In the summer of 2022, the Lebanese government issued a policy for the mass return of Syrian refugees to Syria. Government officials said that this return would be voluntary and that refugees with security concerns would be able to appeal to stay in Lebanon. However, considering that Syria is still considered unsafe and that Lebanon did this without the involvement of the UNHCR, this is a clear breach of Lebanon's international duties to provide for asylum seekers and refugees (Human Rights Watch). Out of 1700 registered refugees, 511 were returned to Syria (Kheshen) and while the low amount of refugees is indicative of the choice for refugees to stay in Lebanon, there is still a

significant amount who are being returned to a hazardous situation, perhaps unbeknownst to said refugees. Moreover, 90 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in extreme poverty (Human Rights Watch). However, it is important to note that Lebanon is in the midst of an economic crisis and does not have the resources to host the most refugees per capita worldwide; Lebanon would greatly benefit from foreign aid programmes to ensure the livelihood of Syrian refugees. Nevertheless, it is no excuse for the sub-human conditions that the refugees are living in and emphasises the need to improve the conditions of refugees around the world.

### Germany

Of the 12 countries that host the most refugees in the world, Germany is the only one classified as a high-income country (Concern Worldwide). The recent influx of asylum seekers in Germany can be attributed to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, with roughly 1000000 Ukrainian refugees currently living in Germany (Amnesty International). Germany is also the second highest donor country to the UNHCR, showing support towards ensuring the rights of refugees in the country (UNHCR, "Germany"). There are no restrictions on the freedom of movement of refugees in Germany, meaning that they can travel freely within Germany without permission from authorities (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik and Stiller). However, amid the inundation of refugees, the German government has started to impose stricter laws on asylum seekers (Marsh et al.). Putting pressure on other HICs to begin to accept higher refugee populations, especially nations neighbouring Germany, such as France, Austria and Italy.

However, while the German government shows support for refugees and asylum seekers, in day-to-day life, refugees are very vulnerable to discrimination. Almost 90 per cent of refugees in Germany reported that they had faced discrimination; particularly affected by discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin or race. Furthermore, refugees are also subject to discrimination in working life, in access to goods or services and support from authorities (Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (FADA)). Here, 80 per cent of organisations reported that they had seen discrimination against refugees, 68 per cent that state agencies and authorities are spheres of life where refugees are affected by discrimination and 64 per cent said the same about working life. The example of Germany demonstrates that government support isn't the only thing that is vital in ensuring the rights of refugees and that ensuring belonging and integration into society is necessary in protecting refugees.

## Summary of General Overview

Overall, it is clear that the issue of refugees is multifaceted and complex; no two nations will harbour identical flaws in their asylum-seeking process. The issues range from regular discrimination and prejudice to restriction of freedom of movement, all the way to forceful deportation. It is clear that refugees are at severe risk when seeking asylum and that the general assembly must play a role in ensuring that the rights of refugees are protected under any circumstance; making sure that they can keep their rights in moving to different countries. It is the job of the United Nations to guarantee the safety of refugees worldwide and take pressure off lower-income countries to allow refugees to more easily seek asylum in HICs. Conclusively, the key to working towards a better future for refugees is multilateral and global cooperation, so that we can protect and enhance the rights of refugees.

## Timeline of Key Events

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|------|--|
| 1950 | Founding of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, marking the beginning of UN involvement in ensuring the rights of refugees.   |
| 1951 | Adoption of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which established the legal framework for refugees, including the definition of a refugee.                                   |
| 1967 | The Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees was made to enhance the framework outlined in the 1951 Convention, removing geographical restrictions and broadening the scope of the convention.          |
| 1989 | The United Nations adopts the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, addressing the rights and protection of child refugees.   |
| 1997 | The United Nations adopts the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, recognising the rights of internally displaced peoples.   |
| 2001 | The United Nations Security Council passes Resolution 1373, which aims to combat terrorism but inadvertently complicates refugee movements by tightening border controls and increasing security measures. |

- 2015 The European Migrant Crisis intensifies as conflicts in Syria and elsewhere drive millions to seek refuge in Europe, prompting debates and policy changes regarding asylum and immigration in the European Union.
- 2018 The Global Compact on Refugees is formally adopted, aiming to enhance international cooperation and burden-sharing in addressing refugee crises and providing durable solutions.
- 2023 The United Nations launches the Decade of Action for Refugees and Migrants, a global initiative focused on improving refugee protection, promoting socio economic inclusion, and fostering long-term solutions for displaced populations.

## Possible Solutions

### Foreign Aid

Foreign aid is the most traditional solution to protecting refugees worldwide, large amounts of donations have been made to notable refugee organisations, such as the UNHCR and International Rescue Committee. Foreign aid such as tied aid, multilateral and bilateral aid and project aid are all good ways to help nations cope with the economic burden of housing refugees. An example of this is in Lebanon, which amid an economic crisis has received a lot of aid from the US, UK and France. This aid is inherently multipurpose and to mitigate the risk that this money may be spent for ulterior purposes, providing nations can control what the receiving nations do with the money in their country. This would be necessary for improving education, housing and general welfare for refugees in lower-income countries, which is where most refugees are concentrated. Moreover, in ensuring that refugees can leave their country, humanitarian aid may be useful. More than 50000 migrants have died trying to leave their countries and the first step in ensuring the rights of refugees is protecting them as they leave zones of armed conflict.

### Policy Creation

The creation and implementation of stricter and more focused policies may also be a way in which we could protect and enhance the rights of refugees. Countries often do not adopt the framework outlined in the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees, the example in this report being Iran, which has not integrated the right to freedom of movement and wage-earning work. It is key to protecting and enhancing the rights of refugees that the policies on them are seen



as concrete rather than recommendations. Furthermore, policy creation could be extended to take the pressure off lower-income nations to house as many refugees as they currently do. It is clear from the example of Germany that HICs are far more suitable for refugees than LICs, as they do not often need the aid that LICs do and can provide for the basic rights of refugees. Policies must also extend into domestic law, as the discrimination of refugees is seen in all nations that do accept them. The adoption of a legal framework that allows refugees to integrate themselves into society is of unparalleled importance in working towards a solution. Of course, global policy creation is underlined with international cooperation and without the coordination and cooperation of UN member states, solving the issue of protecting refugees will be far more pronounced.

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