



**UNHCR**

**STUDY GUIDE**

**Haileybury Astana**

**Model United Nations**

**28 February - 1 March 2020**



Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the first Haileybury Astana Model United Nations 2020 (HASMUN)! We are pleased to welcome you to the UNHCR. This year's chairs are:-----.

The topics under discussion for the UNHCR are:

1. **Legal advice, guidance and the development of norms** to support the enhanced protection of the rights of people displaced in the context of disasters and climate change.
2. **Promoting policy coherence** to ensure that issues of disaster displacement are effectively mainstreamed across relevant areas.
3. **Research** to fill gaps that underpin this operational and policy work.
4. **Field-based activities to address** internal and cross-border disaster displacement; **to reduce the environmental impact of refugee settlements and ensure sustainable responses to displacement; risk reduction activities** and others **which may contribute to efforts to avert, minimize and address displacement.**<sup>1</sup>

UNHCR plays a leading role in the Global Protection Cluster for protecting and assisting people who are forcibly displaced inside their countries and cannot return safely home. When called upon to intervene, can deploy emergency teams and provide concrete support in terms of registration, documentation, family reunification and the provision of shelter, basic hygiene and nutrition. UNHCR is also a standing invitee to the Steering Group of the Platform on Disaster Displacement, in follow-up to the Nansen Initiative on cross-border disaster displacement. The Platform on Disaster Displacement is a State-led initiative focused on the implementation of the Nansen Initiative's Protection Agenda.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the Conference, each delegation will submit a Position Paper by 11:59 p.m. (Nur-Sultan) on the 26th of February 2020.

We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated.

If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the Conference itself, please contact-----

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Chairs-----

## Committee overview

### Introduction

UNHCR is playing a growing role in addressing climate change displacement. And despite more and more frequent headlines, it's not a new focus: UNHCR has been working on how to tackle the issue since the mid-2000s.

UNHCR continues to work with states to develop the legal and policy approaches that would provide protection for people affected by climate change displacement. A lot of this work involves enhancing protections for IDPs, supporting the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda and the Platform on Disaster Displacement.

The term “climate refugee” is often used in the media and other discussions. However, this phrase can cause confusion, as it **does not exist in international law**. A “refugee” is defined as a person who has crossed an international border “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” ([1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees](#)).

UNHCR has also developed guidelines for temporary protections like the ones the persons displaced across Panama border in the simulation exercise might have needed.

Another critical forum where UNHCR engages on this issue is by providing technical support at the climate change negotiations to Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

## ENVIRONMENTAL DISPLACEMENT

1990s

From a policy perspective, UNHCR's concerted engagement with climate change and disaster-related displacement began in 2007, although some work was done in the 1990s on environmental displacement.<sup>2</sup> A 1991 report by an Executive Committee WorkingGroup on Solutions and Protection identified a number of categories of displaced people, including those ‘forced to leave or prevented from returning because of man-made disasters’, and those ‘forced to leave or prevented from returning because of natural or ecological disasters or extreme poverty. The WorkingGroup identified key features of such displacement, including that

---

<sup>2</sup>This was discussed in 1990–91 in a UNHCR Executive Committee Working Group on Solutions and Protection: for an overview, see Nina Hall, *Displacement, Development, and Climate Change: International Organizations Moving beyond Their Mandates* (Routledge 2016) 55–56. Perusal of Executive Committee records from this period, however, show that the linked terms of ‘environment’ and ‘displacement’ were most commonly raised in relation to the environmental impact of refugee camps on host communities.]

most disaster-related displacement would be internal; some would result from ‘long-term, cumulative and cyclical processes’ (not just sudden occurrences); States’ coping capacity would be dependent in part on their level of development; States have a responsibility to implement national disaster preparedness management programmes to plan for, and mitigate the effects of, disasters; and greater coordination was needed between agencies to respond systematically and promptly to victims of disasters.<sup>3</sup>

2000s

The strong personal conviction of High Commissioner António Guterres (2005–15) in large part drove UNHCR’s engagement with the issue. His opening statement to the Executive Committee in 2007 was the first to mention environmental degradation and climate change as drivers of displacement.<sup>4</sup> He subsequently called on States to address contemporary circumstances in which there are ‘more and more people forced to move because of extreme deprivation, environmental degradation and climate change’<sup>5</sup>

In his reply of 27 September 2010, the High Commissioner sought to allay these concerns, emphasizing the primacy of UNHCR’s mandated activities, the steps taken to protect resources for those purposes, and the need to raise new funds for disaster situations. He also underlined UNHCR’s investment in recruitment, training and partnerships, so as to be able to respond simultaneously to mandate and IDP challenges; and stressed the ‘value-added’ for refugees which came from UNHCR’s engagement in broader humanitarian activities undertaken at the request of the State.

In the lead-up to the Ministerial meeting in December 2011 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Refugee Convention, UNHCR sought to renew States’ interest in normative developments. It wanted States to agree to the development of a global guiding framework on cross-border displacement for situations not covered by the Refugee Convention, including in the context of climate change and disasters. This was given impetus by a number of developments in 2010–11, including the adoption in December 2010 of paragraph 14(f) of the Cancún Adaptation Framework, pursuant to which States were invited to ‘enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation, where appropriate, at national, regional and international levels’.

In February 2011, UNHCR organized an Expert Meeting on Climate Change and Displacement in Bellagio. Arguably, one of its strategic purposes was

to equip UNHCR with a sound and contemporary expert evidence base to provide some endorsement for its end-of-year objective. Participants broadly agreed that: *There is a need to develop a global guiding framework or instrument to apply to situations of external displacement other than those covered by the 1951 Convention,*

---

<sup>3</sup> See Report of the Working Group on Solutions and Protection, 42<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme, UN Doc EC/SCP/64 (12 August 1991) para 8.

<sup>4</sup> Key Executive Committee discussions occurred in 2007 and 2011, beginning with the Opening Statement by Mr António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme (Geneva, 1 October 2007) <http://goo.gl/wCztyq> in which he listed environmental degradation and climate change among reasons for flight.

<sup>5</sup> Statement by Mr António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, 62<sup>nd</sup> Session (New York, 8 November 2007) <http://goo.gl/MvJLZz>.

*especially displacement resulting from sudden-onset disasters. States, together with UNHCR and other international organizations, are encouraged to explore this further. Consideration would need to be given to whether any such framework or instrument ought also to cover other contemporary forms of external displacement.*

*Further: Given the magnitude of the issues involved, there is a need for a collaborative approach based on principles of international cooperation and burden-and responsibility-sharing. UNHCR's expertise on the protection dimensions of displacement makes it a particularly valuable actor.*

These findings provided important stimuli for the Nansen Conference on Climate Change and Displacement in the 21st Century, which was held in Oslo in June 2011 and strongly supported by UNHCR. Its outcome – the Nansen Principles – reflected many of the key messages from UNHCR's Bellagio expert meeting, including the idea of a global guiding framework. They also emphasized States' responsibility to ensure that adequate legislation, institutions, and resources were put in place, especially with respect to disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies.

## Mandate

There was broad agreement that a protection gap existed in natural disaster situations and that UNHCR was well placed to fill it where no clear leadership was present and where the affected State specifically requested assistance. This was a job UNHCR was already doing, and formalizing the existing arrangements would facilitate a more predictable, prompt, and prepared protection response in natural disaster situations;

Further clarification was nevertheless required from UNHCR before States could give their support to UNHCR assuming a formal protection role;

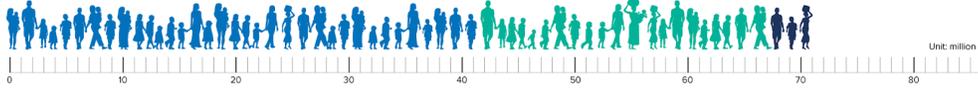
Some were concerned that formalizing UNHCR's protection role in natural disaster situations could adversely affect its core capacity. Some also were of

the view that UNHCR should focus on fulfilling its existing mandate;

- States were very keen on further information and analysis about the impact of a formal protection role on UNHCR's capacity to fulfil its core mandate, and on its financial and human resources;
- It was felt that UNHCR should map out more clearly its operational relationship with partner organizations, including OHCHR, OCHA, and UNICEF;
- Some States thought that the proposal should be considered in the context of a larger debate on resourcing for natural disasters and climate change, particularly given the difficulty of predicting the future scope and scale of UNHCR's engagement. Moreover, the UNHCR proposal should not detract from building States' own disaster risk reduction, management, and response capacity, and the protection capacity of other organizations;
- Finally, there was no appetite to revisit UNHCR's mandate.

# Statistics

**70.8 million** forcibly displaced people worldwide



Internally Displaced People  
**41.3 million**

Refugees  
**25.9 million**

Asylum-seekers  
**3.5 million**

20.4 million under UNHCR's mandate  
5.5 million Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's mandate

<p><b>Where the world's displaced people are being hosted</b></p> <p><b>80%</b></p> <p>About 80 per cent of refugees live in countries neighbouring their countries of origin</p>	<p><b>57%</b> of UNHCR refugees came from three countries</p> <p>Syria 6.7M Afghanistan 2.7M South Sudan 2.3M</p> <p><b>341,800</b> new asylum seekers</p> <p>The greatest number of new asylum applications in 2018 was from Venezuelans</p>	<p><b>Top refugee-hosting countries</b></p> <p>Germany 1.1m Sudan 1.1m Uganda 1.2m Pakistan 1.4m Turkey 3.7m</p>
<p>UNHCR has data on</p> <p><b>3.9 million</b> stateless people</p> <p>but there are thought to be millions more</p>	<p><b>92,400</b> refugees resettled</p>	<p><b>37,000</b> people a day forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution</p>
<p><b>16,803</b> personnel</p> <p>UNHCR employs 16,803 people worldwide (as of 31 May 2019)</p>	<p><b>134</b> countries</p> <p>We work in 134 countries (as of 31 May 2019)</p>	<p>We are funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions, with <b>86 per cent</b> from governments and the <b>European Union</b> and <b>10 per cent</b> from private donors</p>

Source: UNHCR / 19 June 2019 UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

Full-time statisticians in UNHCR's Field Information and Coordination Section track the

number of people forced to flee so that when a major displacement crisis erupts, we are able to predict how many people need help, how much help they need and how many staff we must deploy. These figures are released every year in our Global Trends and Global Appeal reports.

The member states of the European Union (EU) usually set ambitious objectives in terms of the reduction of GHG. These developed countries, alongside Nordic countries like *Sweden, Norway* and *Iceland* (the last two are not EU members) are highly effective in reducing their GHG, using alternative sources of energy production such as geothermal energy or offshore wind power for instance in *Denmark* or in the *United Kingdom* (UK). *France* was at the origin of the success of COP21 thanks to the efficiency of its diplomacy and its new environmental policies. The EU is also historically highly sensitive to issues concerning human rights, with *Germany* accepting more than a million refugees since 2014 in response to the migration wave coming from the Middle East. Sweden welcomed hundreds of thousands of people as well. Climate and human rights are thus issues that European countries take very seriously and their common position is very progressive on the subject. They also have the financial and technological means to help developing countries move towards a greener energy production as they are already doing.

*South Korea, Singapore* and *Japan* are on the same line as the European countries. They all face the consequences of climate change. Rising water in the *Netherlands* or in *Italy* (Venice), heat waves or forest fires in continental Europe are pressing issues in Europe. Torrential rains in South Korea and Japan are worrying as well. Global warming will hit all countries in the world, and delegates are invited to look at how their country is affected by climate change.

Other developed countries such as the *United States of America* (USA), *Canada, Russia* or *Australia* have a completely different stance on climate and refugees. That is because as of 2016, Russia was the world's largest oil producer with more than 10 million barrels per day, the USA came third and Canada at the seventh place<sup>25</sup>. In terms of GHG emissions per capita, Australia is the seventh country as of 2015, the USA, Canada and Russia are also amongst the 20 countries that are performing badly. These countries have a record of high GHG emission, an oil dependent industry and a lack of political willingness to diversify their energy production. They could face environmental refugees on their own soil with droughts, hurricanes or extreme temperatures. Concerning refugees, if Canada is more liberal and progressive on the issue, the others do have tougher and more conservative stance on the welcoming of refugees despite the fact the USA and Russia were the top two destinations for refugees as of 2010.

*China* and *India* have as a mid-term objective to place themselves as potential world leaders, and they both have increasing financial and technological means to achieve this in the coming decades. To increase their credibility on the international scene and be a model for all, they will position themselves as proactive in tackling global warming. This was made clear when China ratified the Paris Agreement before the USA did. Both countries still have a great amount of effort to undertake in order to minimise their GHG production but they have the human potential and political support to do so.

China and India will face environmental refugees in their own countries, and their large populations will be subject to floods, droughts or natural disasters.

South East Asian countries such as *Vietnam*, *Thailand*, the *Philippines*, or *Malaysia* are still developing countries, and thus usually lack the appropriate infrastructure to face frequent floods, typhoons, volcanic eruptions or earthquakes (due to the overlapping of the region to the “Ring of Fire” or the “circum-Pacific Belt”). In South Asia, India and *Bangladesh* are considered to be the two countries most vulnerable to climate change<sup>27</sup>, *Pakistan* already welcomes millions of refugees and *Afghanistan* is in the middle of a devastating war.

Middle Eastern countries already face high temperatures and water scarcity, and are highly dependent on their oil and gas production. The unstable region is also the ground of destructive wars that have led to recent refugee crisis. The richer countries in the area such as *Jordan*, *Lebanon*, *Iran*, *Israel*, *Saudi Arabia* and the *Gulf States* are welcoming millions of refugees, and they will surely welcome more and more in the years to come.

Countries in Sub Saharan and Eastern Africa are poorer and on their way to development; they will also surely be affected in the coming years. From an environmental perspective, the emergency is obvious as well as from a humanitarian one. *Uganda*, *Chad* or the *Democratic Republic of Congo* are currently hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees from neighbouring countries. These countries need help from the more developed ones, help that could come in the form of money or technology.

Latin American countries are usually progressive on climate change (like *Costa Rica* or *Uruguay*), with the notable exceptions of *Brazil* and *Venezuela*, large oil producers. Brazil deforests thousands of acres of primary forest for agricultural purposes; this produces a lot of GHG. The area is also subject to natural disasters: *Chile* faces the risk of earthquakes and the melting *Argentiniens'* glaciers might cause sea levels to rise, while the *Caribbean Islands* are also exposed. When solely focusing on refugees, *Mexico* is already an important migration route from South America to North America. The region is under the constant threat of organized crime, traffic of all kinds, and decades of conflict which put the local population under pressure. More than seven million people can be considered as displaced, especially in Central America (*Honduras*, *Guatemala*, *El Salvador*...).

Finally, the people living in the various Pacific islands are facing devastating hurricanes and rising sea levels, which could cause some islands to disappear. There is already a lot of migration between islands, from poor and remote islands to bigger and richer ones. It is to be noted that *Fiji* will welcome COP23, hosted in Bonn (Germany) in November 2017, underlining the growing importance for these islands of a better recognition of their situation.

## Questions to discuss

Keeping in mind the mandate and scope of the committee a resolution should address the following questions:

- What should the definition of climate refugees be?
- What initiatives should be undertaken to prevent the issues that cause environmental migration?
- Should resources be utilised to create the appropriate infrastructure in the countries expected to be the sources and destinations of environmental refugees?
- Should countries that are big polluters be responsible for granting asylum to environmental refugees

## Further research

[Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating...](#) - important procedures for UNHCR

[Planned relocation Guidance \(October 2015\)](#) relocation guidance

[Why UNHCR is taking action on climate change displacement](#)

[CLIMATE CHANGE, DISASTERS AND DISPLACEMENT](#) - UN on climate change displacement

[Model UN Refugee Challenge background guide - Climate change and displacement](#) - UN thorough background guide