

BACKGROUND PAPER



**UN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL:
DEVisING A FRAMEWORK TO CREATE ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PEOPLE IN A
POST-COVID-19 ECONOMY**



1. Welcome Letter

Distinguished delegates,

We would like to welcome you to GrunnMUN 2022 and to the ECOSOC Council, as it is our utmost pleasure to follow you on this academic journey and assist you through what will be one of the most exquisite experiences of your Model United Nations career!

As your chairpersons, we will take it upon ourselves to create a comfortable atmosphere in which you will all feel welcome to debate and evolve academically. It is our strong belief that MUN conferences represent more than just awards or competition – they are a great opportunity to meet new people who share the same passions with you, to go beyond your limits, and to think outside the box. Therefore, we will try our best to guide you through everything an MUN entails and how you can make the most out of the GrunnMUN experience.

The topic at hand is indeed broad and complex but, dare we say, also extremely compelling, and we expect that it will ignite high-quality debates. This study guide is meant solely as a starting point for your research, so keep in mind that you should try to accumulate as much valuable and relevant information to make use of during the debates. Nothing but excellence is expected from you, but we are confident that you will manage to exceed all of our expectations. In order to do so, we kindly ask you to *do your best to respect all deadlines and complete your assigned tasks seriously.*

Trust that your evolution will be assessed objectively and that we will make it our top priority to give you constructive feedback. What is more, feel free to ask us any questions that you may have at any point during the conference, as we wish to help you with truly understanding everything and anything and clarifying any misunderstandings and uncertainties. We will keep track of your activity and involvement in the Council. Thus, *trying to speak up and support your country's perspective, as controversial as it may be.*

Granted, the MUN format is structured to ensure a fair share of entertainment and bonding with the amazing people from the community. Thus, there will be no shortage of social interactions, and we encourage you to indulge in them as long as you keep a clear distinction between formal sessions and networking.

To conclude, we wish you the best of luck, and we are eager to hear you speak your mind and do your best to improve yourself during the conference!

Faithfully yours,

Diana Velea and Diliana Ochoa

2. Introduction to the ECOSOC Council



The Economic and Social Council, known shortly as ECOSOC, is one of the 6 principal organs of the United Nations System, having been established in 1945 by the UN Charter. It is the largest and most complex subsidiary of the UN and is responsible for both the direction and coordination of economic, social, humanitarian, and cultural affairs.

ECOSOC consists of 54 members elected for 3-year terms by the General Assembly, membership being based on geographic representation.

The Council is mandated to coordinate the work of the 15 UN specialised agencies and of its own subsidiary bodies: 10 functional commissions, five regional commissions, and numerous ad hoc and expert bodies. ECOSOC also serves as the central forum for devising policy recommendations addressed to the Member States and the United Nations as an entity. Some of the Council's attributions include:

- Promoting higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress;
- Identifying solutions to international economic, social, and health problems;
- Facilitating international cultural and educational cooperation; and
- Encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.¹

The UN Charter allows ECOSOC to grant consultative status to non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Beginning in the mid-1990s, measures were taken to increase the participation of such NGOs, and by the early 21st century, more than 2,500 NGOs had been granted consultative status.²

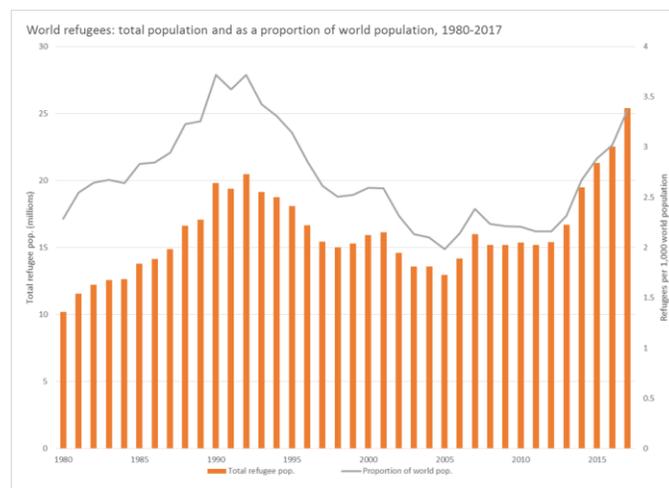
¹ ECOSOC Status, <https://csonet.org/>

² Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2013, July 22). Economic and Social Council. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Economic-and-Social-Council>

3. Introduction to the Topic

As defined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, a key legal document, a refugee is "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion".³

Reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) showcase the severity of the situation, with over 82.5 million people being forcibly displaced from their homes as of 2020, of which more than a quarter are refugees. What is more, a negative trend is easily observable, as these figures have more than doubled since 2010. That is despite concerted efforts to limit people's movement as a measure to limit the spread of the Coronavirus, but also despite the generalised impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over most sectors of activity.



Unlike refugees, Internally Displaced People (IDPs) have not crossed their respective national borders in order to seek safety but are nonetheless on the run within their own countries. While IDPs are legally protected by their governments, it is often these governments that determine them to flee their homes and seek protection elsewhere. These areas are often difficult to reach by humanitarian aid, making IDPs some of the most vulnerable categories.⁴ According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), over 48 million people were displaced during 2020 owing to armed conflicts, generalised violence, or human rights violation, among others.

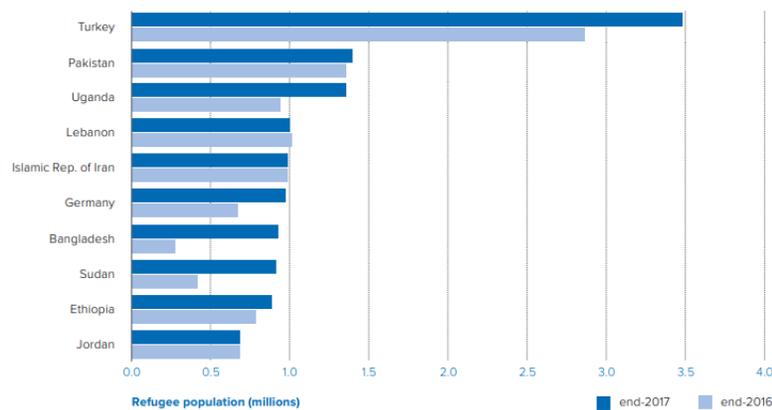
³ Zimmermann, A., Dörschner, J., & Machts, F. (2011). *The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol: a commentary*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/internally-displaced-people.html>

As previously mentioned, the causes of displacement are numerous and varied. Most of the time, it is due to conflict situations that people make the difficult decision to flee their homes and seek safety elsewhere. Despite efforts to maintain global peace, armed conflicts and wars have either been raging for years or looming as of recently, disrupting entire populations. Just as well, the political environment and the threat of persecution have continually pushed people away from their homes. Human rights violations continue to represent a primary cause of displacement, while natural disasters, famine, or droughts are equally important in people's forced decision to relocate.

The issues faced by refugees are many: the actual hardships of running away from a dangerous situation, xenophobia, lack of resources, of economic opportunities, hostility from locals, integration and assimilation problems, limited access to social security systems, education, or medical aid, poor housing conditions, etc. Nonetheless, a great burden is also placed on receiving states, which has led to discussions of a true 'refugee crisis'. In this situation, finding and adopting measures that would benefit both individuals and states is quintessential.

Figure 4 | Major host countries of refugees



While in the time of the pandemic, some populations managed to return to their homes, more often than not, lockdowns and Coronavirus-spread restrictions have played an important role in exacerbating the differences between refugees and others and making integration a difficult task.

All these aspects considered, it is evident that the problem of refugees and displaced people is one that is in dire need of discussion, especially through a COVID-19 pandemic-conscious lens.

4. Problem Specification

The COVID-19 pandemic constitutes not only a health crisis but also an economic, humanitarian, and security crisis. The UN has pursued a three-point response to overcome and recover from all of these crises, to focus on health, safeguarding lives, and addressing underlying vulnerabilities, with a view to emerging from the pandemic as a more resilient, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable world.⁵

Despite the development and the worldwide distribution of the vaccines, the virus has continued to spread and mutate all throughout last year, and in spite of pursued strategies, the world keeps struggling to recover after the pandemic. Unfortunately, these issues keep creating devastating consequences for the whole world, but more specifically for the most vulnerable groups, including the refugees and internally displaced persons.⁶

With the virus still affecting the health of millions, it is important to pay attention to the vulnerabilities and grave violations of the human rights that the refugees and internally displaced persons are suffering. For instance, the pandemic has led to the reduction of essential services for these groups, such as health care, disruption in water, hygiene, and sanitation services in refugees or displacement camps.⁷

Furthermore, the fear of transmission of COVID-19 has increased high levels of xenophobia, racism, and stigmatisation and has even given rise to attacks against refugees and migrants, accusing them of responsibility for the spread of the disease. This increasing xenophobia has even led employers to express reluctance to hire them because of fears that they might spread illness.⁸

The economic crisis that the pandemic created has increased the poverty and low resources of the refugees and internally displaced persons. The vast majority of the world's 84 million refugees face legal and practical barriers to economic inclusion, affecting not only them but placing stress on the overall economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the need for economic inclusion to prevent the most vulnerable from falling into poverty and delaying economic recovery.⁹

⁵ United Nations Comprehensive Response to COVID-19 (Saving Lives, Protecting Societies, Recovering Better), 2020, pg. 11.

⁶ 2021 Year in Review: “We underestimate this virus at our peril”, COVID-19 Response, United Nations, 2022.

⁷ COVID-19 has led to dramatic reduction in essential services and protection for migrant and displaced children in countries around the world, UNICEF Press Release, 2020.

⁸ A Pandemic of Exclusion: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Human rights of Migrants in Libya, UNHCR, 2021, pg. 23; Secretary-General, Policy brief on COVID-19 and People on the Move, 2020, pg. 3; IMREF, “Exploring the Impact of COVID19 on the Vulnerabilities of Migrants on the Central Mediterranean Route,” pg. 12.

⁹ Supporting refugees will help the private sector recover from COVID-19, Alberghini D. & Dempster H., Center for Global Development, 2020.

All of these issues that the pandemic has created or exacerbated need to be discussed by the international community since there is a responsibility of the States to rebuild after the multiple crises that the world has experienced.

5. Questions a Resolution Must Answer

5.1.QARMA 1: How can the government incentivise the inclusion of refugees and internally displaced persons in the private sector with an eye to economic recovery?

5.1.1. Background of the Problem

The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, also known as the Refugee Convention of 1951, is in charge of defining the characteristics of a refugee, outlines their rights, as well as the obligations of States to protect them.

The right to work is established in the convention, which is binding to State parties. It provides opportunities for wage-earning employment, self-employment, and employment in different professions. Nonetheless, one of the refugee's principal concerns remains access to employment. This problem stems from both the employer's and the human resources' lack of knowledge and support needed in navigating related regulations. Just as well, there is a belief that refugees are an economic burden, and the political discourse leads to the fear that refugees may be taking jobs, undercutting wages, and putting pressure on public resources.¹⁰

Giving refugees or internally displaced people the opportunity to work is one of the most effective ways in which they can rebuild their lives, especially since it is related to other integration matters such as access to housing, family reunification, language, and healthcare, among others.¹¹

5.1.2. Recent Developments

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic effect on employment, with millions of workers having lost their jobs, while the impact is falling disproportionately on those who were already in difficult circumstances to access a job. Employment was already a difficult matter for refugees in certain countries, but now they are absorbing the additional blow.¹²

¹⁰ Engaging with Employers in the Hiring of Refugees, UNHCR, 2018, pg. 5; Refugee's right to work: Necessary but insufficient for formal employment of refugees, Schuettler K., People Move, 2017

¹¹ IDEM

¹² Policy Brief: The world of work and COVID-19, UN, 2020, pg. 2.

Impact	Industry
High	Accommodation and food services
High	Manufacturing
High	Real estate; business and administrative activities
High	Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles
High-medium	Entertainment and other services
High-medium	Transport, storage, comms
Medium	Construction
Medium	Financial and insurance activities
Medium	Mining and quarrying
Low-medium	Agriculture; forestry and fishing
Low	Education
Low	Human health and social work activities
Low	Public administration and defense
Low	Utilities

Furthermore, the lockdowns, the mutations, and the high rate of disease spread have affected different industries where the refugees work. They were 60 percent more likely to be working in sectors highly impacted by COVID-19.¹³

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 70 percent of refugees live in countries with restricted or no right to work. Therefore, the pandemic is likely to increase poverty and the loss of livelihoods of this population.¹⁴

5.1.3 Relevant Actors / Institutions

The UNHCR provides assistance to displaced people, as well as to refugees that are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. They respond to the exceptional socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 by protecting incomes and livelihoods or employment opportunities.¹⁵

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) supports governments in their efforts to include refugees in the COVID-19 recovery by adapting rapid assessment tools to measure the impact of the pandemic on various countries, sectors, and groups such as refugees and internally displaced persons. These assessments help in understanding the effects of COVID-19 in the labour market, the economy, and the expectations and needs of the refugees.¹⁶

Refugees International is a global, independent organisation that challenges governments, policymakers, and administrations to improve the lives of displaced people over the world. It launched the *"Let them work"*

¹³ COVID-19's negative impact on refugees' employment prospects, Monash University, 2021.

¹⁴ Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion, UNHCR, 2020.

¹⁵ Coronavirus Outbreak, UNHCR, 2021.

¹⁶ Policy Brief: Protecting the rights at work of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons during the COVID-19 pandemic, ILO, 2020, pg. 10.

initiative, aiming to expand the labour market for refugees. Part of that initiative's objective is to understand the economic impact of the pandemic on refugees in low- and middle-income host countries.¹⁷

5.1.4. International Approaches Already Undertaken

The UNHCR has addressed a policy brief on promoting effective access to refugees in social protection during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on Europe. This was a direct result of numerous refugees losing their jobs during the outbreak and therefore being unable to cover their basic needs. The modification and improvement of the legal framework were promoted so as to strengthen evidence-collection on effective inclusion, in addition to building capacity for inclusion.¹⁸

ILO has determined that it is essential that refugee workers are integrated into recovery and development strategies. The agency has made different recommendations to the governments, such as identifying refugees needs, facilitating procedures to obtain or renew work permits, ensuring fair wages and access to justice, providing the necessary means and accessible information to apply workplace safety and health measures, taking measures to counter discrimination at work, among others.¹⁹

Just as well, Refugees International has made similar recommendations, such as ensuring refugees can access social safety nets and health care, continuing with the existing inclusion initiatives and combating misinformation, extending livelihood programming, increasing anti-xenophobia efforts, among others.²⁰

5.2. QARMA 2: How can States and International Organisations protect these groups against stigmatisation, discrimination, and xenophobic attacks regarding disease transmission?

5.2.1. Background of the Problem

Hate and discrimination have long been intertwined with the hardship's refugees face on a daily basis within their host countries. As their integration in the society is a two-way process involving both immigrants and

¹⁷ Locked Down and Left Behind: The impact of COVID-19 on refugees' economic inclusion, Dempster H., Ginn T. & Graham J., Refugees International, 2020.

¹⁸ Leave no one behind: promoting effective access of refugees in social protection systems in a post-pandemic Europe, UNHCR, 2021

¹⁹ Policy Brief: Protecting the rights at work of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons during the COVID-19 pandemic, ILO, 2020.

²⁰ Locked Down and Left Behind: The impact of COVID-19 on refugees' economic inclusion, Dempster H., Ginn T. & Graham J., Refugees International, 2020.

their respective host countries,²¹ events of xenophobic nature often hinder any chance of them becoming part of the community.

Xenophobia can be defined as "*attitudes, prejudices, and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity*".²²

A key aspect in understanding how hate discourse and xenophobic remarks and attacks are spread towards forcibly-displaced people is making the distinction between restrictive measures undertaken by the government and the sentiments of the general population. That is because xenophobic acts could be carried out by specific individuals or groups and receive broad popular support or, at the very least, complicity from the general public, whereas individual hate crimes are not a representation of the broader public opinion.

Xenophobic rhetoric is known to often portray immigrants and refugees as criminal, lazy, and uneducated, with hosts demanding that they assimilate to their culture. This leads to isolation and confusion in the refugees' sense of cultural identity.²³

Throughout history, examples of hate crimes, xenophobic and racist rhetoric, and action towards refugees and other migrants are easy to find. South Africa has well-documented cases of attacks on refugees and other migrants, including the extreme violence of 2008, which included the killing of a Mozambican national who was beaten, stabbed, and set alight.²⁴

In Australia, policies that place asylum seekers in detention are often underpinned and accompanied by the desire to preserve "white Australia" and have even been promoted explicitly by politicians who are against multiculturalism.²⁵

The recent refugee crisis that occurred in Europe has showcased the fact that migration is an inherent feature of our globalising world. However, public attitudes towards displaced people vary greatly within the continent. According to a survey conducted in 2016 amidst the European migrant and refugee crisis, Eastern and Central European countries were far more likely not to accept migrants than Western European

²¹ Steinhardt, M., 2018. The Impact of Xenophobic Violence on the Integration of Immigrants. *SSRN Electronic Journal*

²² International Labour Office (ILO), International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2001, 2).

²³ UN Migration Issue Brief on refugees and discrimination in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic - "*Countering Xenophobia and Stigma to Foster Social Cohesion in the Covid-19 Response and Recovery*"

²⁴ Mohamed, Shenilla. 2018. "South Africa: Ten years after xenophobic killings, refugees and migrants still living in fear." *Amnesty International News*, May 11.

²⁵ Davidson, Helen. 2016. "Australia's politicians have promoted xenophobia: UN expert." *The Guardian*.

countries. Some Europeans believe that refugees will burden their country by taking jobs and social benefits traditionally reserved for citizens.²⁶ Europeans also did not see growing diversity as something that would better their country but instead would make their nation worse.²⁷ Moreover, there has been an increase in right-wing activism and xenophobic political campaigns.

Just as well, in the United States, xenophobic rhetoric has increased during Donald Trump's presidency, most notably by means of the "Muslim ban", or the halting of people from numerous predominantly Muslim countries.

Likewise, reports in Latin America also note attacks against refugees from Venezuela who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.²⁸

5.2.3. Recent Developments

While the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted widespread expressions of solidarity and support from both States and civil society, it has also created new fears and worries that have fed off an existing culture of distrust and discrimination against refugees and displaced people. What is initially a small personal disagreement regarding social distancing rules, for example, could easily turn into racial slander or even violent acts against those of foreign origins. These incidents are often the direct result of broader systemic inequalities that have a great impact on public health.²⁹

The pandemic has also highlighted that refugees are far more likely to die from the disease, especially due to pre-existing inequalities related to access to adequate living conditions, social security, and medical systems. These inequalities place refugees at the receiving end of discrimination and stigmatisation. Concurrently, their mental and physical wellbeing are put at risk, as they are excluded from services that are otherwise available to the general population.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has also been called a "pandemic of misinformation", hate speech has been exacerbated owing to misinformation and fears associated with the risk of infection. Since the beginning of the pandemic, numerous xenophobic incidents, hate speeches, and crimes against persons, on the basis of their real or perceived national origin have been reported.³⁰ On 8 May 2020, the Secretary-General of the

²⁶ Jacob Poushter, *European opinions on the refugee crisis in 5 charts*, Pew Research Ctr (Sep.16, 2016), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/16/european-opinions-of-the-refugee-crisis-in-5-charts/>.

²⁷ E. Tendayi Achiume, *Governing Xenophobia*, 51 Vand. J. Transnat'l L. 333 (2018).

²⁸ Fieser, Ezra and Matthew Bristow. 2018. "Venezuelans, Go Home: Xenophobia Haunts Refugees." Bloomberg.

²⁹ UN Migration Issue Brief on refugees and discrimination in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic - "*Countering Xenophobia and Stigma to Foster Social Cohesion in the Covid-19 Response and Recovery*"

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, "COVID-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide" (12 May 2020).

UN referred to "a tsunami of hate and xenophobia".³¹ The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance expressed concern about these acts and underlined that they are inconsistent with States' international human rights law obligations.³²

It is important to understand that this type of discourse is dangerous, especially from the public health perspective, as groups become socially isolated and, consequently, experience the fear of seeking medical attention, which can, in turn, undermine the effective inclusion of displaced people in public health response. There is an increased risk of virus spread, and difficulties in tracking and controlling any new disease outbreak are common.

5.2.4. Relevant Actors / Institutions

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is in charge of supporting government efforts to assist those who have been displaced or who were affected by displacement. Just as well, the UN agency is responsible for conducting information campaigns, dismantling misinformation, promoting peace and cooperation with the purpose of preventing and responding to xenophobia, racism, and discrimination. For example, UNHCR released back in 2020 a "Guide on racism and xenophobia" and remained seized on the matter through actions such as monthly consultations with related NGOs. Just as well, in the case of South Africa, the UNHCR has introduced educational materials in schools so as to promote a better understanding of refugees and other migrants.

Amnesty International is actively campaigning for "a world where human rights can be enjoyed by everyone, no matter what situation they are in".³³ Their work has been undergoing for decades, with a specific focus on refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants. They put pressure on governments to honour their responsibility to protect every single person's rights so that refugees are not only safe but also not subjected to discrimination.

Human Rights Watch has a specialised division focusing on refugees and migrants' rights. They defend their rights and investigate any human rights violations pertaining to government attempts to "divert, expel, or contain these people and defend the right to seek asylum".³⁴ As stated in their official papers, "regardless of the reason for their movement, we insist that all people on the move be treated with dignity and respect for their basic human rights".³⁵

³¹ UN Press Note.

³² OHCHR, "States should take action against COVID-19-related expressions of xenophobia, says UN expert" (21 March 2020).

³³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/>

³⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/topic/refugees-and-migrants>

³⁵ IDEM

5.2.5. International Approaches Already Undertaken

The 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees as the prime international document pertaining to refugee status and rights

2009 Strategic Approach - Back in 2009, UNHCR adopted a strategic approach in order to address issues related to racial discrimination and related intolerance when they affect persons of concern, such as refugees. 7 steps were proposed that could be taken as a response to incidents of racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia:

- Monitor signs of racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance
- Analyse the underlying reasons;
- Assess the manifestations of these phenomena and their impact on the protection of persons of concern;
- Understand legal obligations to protect individuals from racial discrimination and multiple forms of discrimination;
- Engage a network of diverse organisations;
- Include affected communities in the strategic approach;
- Provide individual support to victims.³⁶

The Global Compact on Refugees was affirmed on 17 December 2018 by the United Nations General Assembly following two years of extensive consultations led by UNHCR with the Member States, international organisations, refugees, civil society, the private sector, and experts. This framework provides the basis for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, recognising that the refugee situation requires strong international cooperation. Just as well, it provides a blueprint for all parties to ensure that both host communities and refugees receive the support needed.

The Global Compact on Migration (Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration) is a document that calls for a series of actions to eliminate discrimination pertaining to public sector officials, including: establishing mechanisms to prevent racial and religious profiling of migrants by public authorities; training officials to detect and respond to hate crimes and to administer immigration detention

³⁶ UNHCR Guidance on Racism and Xenophobia

procedures in ways that respect human rights and non-discrimination; and taking steps to ensure non-discrimination in service delivery for migrants.

The International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) is the principal international human rights instrument defining and prohibiting racial discrimination in all sectors of public and private life.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action is the UN blueprint to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance globally.

5.3. QARMA 3: How can States that provide refugee camps improve the living and health conditions so as to ensure protection against COVID-19?

5.3.1. Background of the Problem

A refugee camp is a temporary space to provide immediate shelter and protection for the people that have been forced to flee their countries for one of the reasons established in the Refugee Convention of 1951. The refugee camps meet the most basic needs of the refugees, such as water and medical treatments during emergencies. Six million refugees live in refugee camps, which is twenty-two percent of their population.³⁷

Even though the camps need to provide healthcare, they cannot stop the spread of diseases such as COVID-19, and the medical services are not vast enough to treat them appropriately. This virus spreads faster in densely populated areas, like the camps.

Fortunately, there have not been any massive outbreaks. However, with constant new variants such as omicron that are more contagious, there is a great possibility that the disease spreads faster and affects refugees that live in the camps, especially those that are the most vulnerable. The quid of the problem is that the camps, even before the pandemic, had limited access to water and sanitation, which is essential to prevent the spread and to treat the disease.³⁸

Refugee camps tend to have poorer health conditions than the communities where the refugees come from. They have the highest risk of mortality after reaching their asylum country. If we combine the limited resource access of the camps and the constantly growing refugee population, it puts pressure on basic resources such as food, water, and sanitation. Furthermore, the high mobility of the refugee camps and the

³⁷ Camps, Refugee Facts, UNHCR, 2022.

³⁸ Have refugee camps escaped mass covid infections?, Ngabo V. & Guensburg C., VOA News, 2021.

constant inflow and outflow of people present a challenge since these circumstances can increase the spread, and also, it is very difficult to provide sustained healthcare over a period of time.³⁹



Moreover, several countries have dense barriers for refugees to access COVID-19 vaccines. The vaccine has not been distributed equitably in every country, specifically in the poorest of them, which some of them, unfortunately, are hosts and provide refugee camps. Other factors that prevent refugees from getting vaccinated include the real vaccine services costs, language barriers, and misinformation that can lead to vaccine hesitancy.⁴⁰

5.3.2. Recent Developments

The UNHCR reported that in 61 countries, 1,133,589 refugees have received a vaccine. However, they are still victims of the spread, and by November of 2021, 113,708 refugees had tested positive for COVID-19.⁴¹

Different organisations have equipped staff in different refugee camps with surgical masks and installed handwashing points. However, the UN calls for states to also get involved in the situation, asking them for decisive actions to improve and rectify unsafe and unsanitary conditions in the refugee camps.⁴²

The camps are trying to provide the basic needs of the refugees living there; however, the circumstances do not make the situation easier. Even recently, in Bangladesh, a devastating fire ripped through a COVID-19 treatment centre for Myanmar refugees.⁴³

³⁹ Healthcare in Refugee Camps and Settlements, Unite for Sight, 2019.

⁴⁰ UNHCR Calls on states to remove barriers to access to COVID-19 vaccines for refugees, UNHCR, 2021.

⁴¹ UNHCR Covid-19 Response, UNHCR, 2021.

⁴² New IRC analysis reveals risk that coronavirus transmission rates in Moria, Al Hol and Cox's Bazar refugee camps could outpace those seen on the Diamond Princess cruise ship, IRC, Press Release, 2020; UN Calls For 'Emergency Measures' to Improve Conditions in Greek Refugee Camps, Amid Overcrowding and Risk of Disease Outbreaks, Godin M., Time, 202

⁴³ Bangladesh: Fire rips through COVID treatment centre for Myanmar refugees, UN News, United Nations, 2022.

5.3.3. Relevant Actors / Institutions

Marcus Skinner, the Senior Policy Advisor for the International Rescue Committee, stated:

"Refugees living in overcrowded camps lack access to adequate healthcare, shelter, water, and sanitation, posing major challenges in efforts to protect them from the disease. In some cases, a person's legal status or gender could also impact whether they are able or willing to access healthcare services".⁴⁴

The International Rescue Committee is in charge of responding to humanitarian crises, helping to restore health, safety, education, economic wellbeing, and power to people devastated by conflict.⁴⁵

The UN Refugee Agency mobilises response teams to assess a situation of a person that was forced to leave their country after an emergency, acting within the first 72 hours, providing a safe humanitarian space, being the refugee camps.⁴⁶

The UNHCR delivers resources to the refugee camps such as tents, blankets, sleeping mats, mosquito nets, clothing, personal care kits, soap, jerry cans, water purification tablets, food, kitchen items, among others.⁴⁷

5.3.4. International Actions Already Undertaken

The UNHCR, in cooperation with its partners and host governments, offers certain health services in emergency situations, in long-term refugee situations, and in areas of refugee return. Some of the services that they offer are immunisations, supplementary and therapeutic feeding programmes, communicable disease control, and also mental health programmes.⁴⁸

A project funded by the African Development Bank led to the installation of high-capacity boreholes and a piped water system, known as a water reticulation system in the Zimbabwe Camp. This project also benefited the surrounding host communities where the camp is located.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ New IRC analysis reveals risk that coronavirus transmission rates in Moria, Al Hol and Cox's Bazar refugee camps could outpace those seen on the Diamond Princess cruise ship, IRC, Press Release, 2020.

⁴⁵ Who are We?, International Rescue Committee

⁴⁶ Refugee Camps, Refugee Facts, UNHCR, 2022.

⁴⁷ IDEM.

⁴⁸ Improving Refugee Health Worldwide, UNHCR, 2019.

⁴⁹ Better access to water improves lives for refugees and their hosts in Zimbabwe camp, UNHCR, 2021.

Oxfam, an international non-governmental organisation, worked with 400 camp-based volunteers to monitor conditions and promote women's rights and public health. They help with soap and water, also providing valuable information.⁵⁰

International organisations are the ones helping improve the conditions in the refugee camps all around the world. However, States have not been able to discuss this matter, specifically regarding the COVID-19 and how the conditions contribute to the spread of the disease.

5.4. QARMA 4: How will refugees and displaced people be included in national COVID-19 response and recovery plans?

5.4.1. Background of the Problem

Historically, refugees and displaced people have always been at risk of not being included in national socio-economic systems such as the educational, sanitary, or social security ones. Due to a plethora of reasons including, but not limited to, legislation and restrictions, lack of legal documents, or simply opportunities, discrimination, and stigmatisation, the path towards integration has been plagued with difficulty.

Naturally, not every single person having refugee status is willing to integrate within the host communities. Nonetheless, the great majority of people seek to attain rights similar to those enjoyed by the citizens of the country in which they have sought refuge. Some but not all are able to gain citizenship, notwithstanding the numerous challenges to local integration for both refugees and receiving communities.

While the situation of a refugee implies that a return to the home country is inherent, at the same time, it is essential that they are not singled out within the host countries and benefit from access to healthcare, among others.

5.4.2. Recent Developments

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of access to healthcare and the matter of inclusivity in national plans has become more than poignant. More often than not, these groups do not receive the same attention in the national COVID-19 response plans, having to carry the burden of limited access to hospitals, to basic hygiene goods, to information, but also of improper conditions, lack of social distancing measures and increased difficulties in their integration process.

⁵⁰ Four things to know about COVID in the world's largest refugee camp, Kotowski A., OXFAM, 2021

In order to be efficient, national response plans to the COVID-19 threat require an overall strengthening of the health system, as well as the development of National Vaccination Deployment Plans (NDVPs)⁵¹ that provide for vaccination according to human rights and ethical principles.

5.4.4. Relevant Actors / Institutions

UNHCR is responsible for improving primary healthcare for refugees by advocating for refugee inclusion into national health systems, strengthening health infrastructure, funding, and training health workers. Moreover, UNHCR provides guidance to governments to fund laboratory diagnostics, medicines, medical equipment, and supplies.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) works with numerous international partners so as to characterise the social, economic, and cultural barriers that refugees and IDPs face in trying to access vaccines and to monitor and evaluate vaccination policies.

Furthermore, WHO is actively working with the UN Network on Migration to ensure that refugees are included in the national COVID-19 vaccination programmes and that they have access to vaccines.

National governments - as the prime party responsible for devising response and recovery plans, as well as those in charge of ensuring the proper implementation of these measures, national governments carry the duty and responsibility of including everyone in their actions.

5.4.5. International Action Already Undertaken

Aiming to draw attention to the increased vulnerabilities that refugees face during the pandemic and promote their right to health, WHO has launched the Apart Together survey, a first inquiry into the social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees globally. There were over 30 000 respondents in 170 countries originating from 159 countries and territories that have participated in the survey.

Furthermore, WHO launched "Refugees and migrants in times of COVID-19: mapping trends of public health and migration policies and practises" in June 2021. This is a report that highlights how many refugee-sensitive policies have coexisted with discriminatory practices during the COVID-19 pandemic that compromises the rights of refugees and migrants and illustrates a significant range of practices in line with international conventions protecting the rights of refugees.

⁵¹<https://www.who.int/emergencies/what-we-do/promoting-the-health-of-refugees-and-migrants-during-covid-19-pandemic>

6. Useful Resources

6.1. Reports

International Organisation for Migration (IOM), UN Migration Issue Brief on refugees and discrimination in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic - "*Countering Xenophobia and Stigma to Foster Social Cohesion in the Covid-19 Response And Recovery*" (https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/documents/countering_xenophobia_and_stigma_130720.pdf)

World Refugee Council Research Paper - "*Xenophobia toward Refugees and Other Forced Migrants*" <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WRC%20Research%20Paper%20no.5.pdf>

The Integration of Refugees - A discussion Paper by UNHCR https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/02/integration_discussion_paper_July_2014_EN.pdf

Background Paper - Economic Inclusion of Refugees [Microsoft Word - Guide-EconomicInclusion-MUN-Refugee-Challenge.docx \(unhcr.org\)](#)

6.4. Relevant Agencies and Organisations

Amnesty International <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/>

Human Rights Watch <https://www.hrw.org/topic/refugees-and-migrants>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) <https://www.unhcr.org/>

International Labour Organisation (ILO) https://www.ilo.org/africa/areas-of-work/labour-migration/policy-frameworks/WCMS_671737/lang--en/index.htm

World Health Organisation https://www.who.int/health-topics/refugee-and-migrant-health#tab=tab_1

6.5. Past International Action and Important Documents

The Global Compact on Refugees <https://www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>

The International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx>

Durban Declaration and Programme of Action <https://www.un.org/en/fight-racism/background/durban-declaration-and-programme-of-action>

6.6. Other Useful Websites and Articles

Understanding the refugee issue <https://www.gicj.org/gicj-reports/1588-understanding-refugee-issue>

<https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/refugees-racism-and-xenophobia-what-works-to-reduce-discrimination>

<https://lawblogs.uc.edu/ihr/r/2021/10/28/the-inhumane-treatment-of-forced-migrants-and-its-roots-in-xenophobia/#post-317-footnote-52>

Dashboard regarding the inclusion of refugees into national health systems

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiMWQ0OGM4YWVtNzYxZS00MTVILTk4ZTIiMjk4YzU5NTkwYjhhIiwidCI6ImU1YzZMOTgxLTY2NjQ0tNDEzNC04YTBlLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSIsImMiOiJh9&pageName=ReportSection>

Access to healthcare <https://www.unhcr.org/access-to-healthcare.html>

6.7. Videos

What should the Covid-19 response look like in refugee camps?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvxdfWNzuzw>

Refugees face added stresses during COVID-19 pandemic

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diBRqgx4fYc>

What does it mean to be a refugee? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25bwiSikRsl>

Going Dutch. Holland's refugee integration success story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8KR4Bry2kA>

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<https://www.hrw.org/topic/refugees-and-migrants>

Human Rights Watch, "COVID-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide" (12 May 2020)

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OHCHR, "States should take action against COVID-19-related expressions of xenophobia, says UN expert" (21 March 2020)

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UN Migration Issue Brief on refugees and discrimination in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic -
"Countering Xenophobia and Stigma to Foster Social Cohesion in the Covid-19 Response And Recovery"

UNHCR Guidance on Racism and Xenophobia

<https://www.unhcr.org/internally-displaced-people.html>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/what-we-do/promoting-the-health-of-refugees-and-migrants-during-covid-19-pandemic>

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