

High Commissioner for Refugees Committee

MADMUN XIV

Chairs: Maitri Patel Micah Kindschi



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Introduction to your Chairs:

Hello! I'm Maitri Patel, one of the chairs for UNHCR this year. I am a senior at Verona Area High School and this is my first time chairing! I'm extremely excited for this opportunity and look forward to the upcoming conference. This is my third year participating in Model UN and my second year participating in MADMUN. The first time I participated was in my sophomore year and it was one of the best experiences I've had in Model UN. It was amazing to meet new people and work outside of my comfort zone. In my free time, I love to read, listen to K-pop, play the piano, and do some seasonal gardening. I am eager to see all that you guys will bring to the table, and feel free to reach out if you have any questions! Best of luck, sending positive vibes your way!

Hello! I'm Micah Kindschi, the other chair for UNHCR this year! I am a sophomore at McFarland High School, and this is also my first time chairing. I'm very excited to interact with you all and hear about your countries. This is my second year in Model UN, my favorite conference was MADMUN last year. I got to meet new people and I loved creating a plan of action and learning how some countries act with others, and their values. Remember to take a deep breath and have fun!

Letter from your Chairs:

Hello delegates, we welcome you to MADMUN XIV! This is Maitri Patel and Micah Kindschi, your chairs for the UNHCR committee. We are greatly excited to work with you all, and look forward to seeing the kinds of solutions and ideas you will create in this committee. This is our first time chairing for MADMUN and so we hope that we can all make a memorable experience for you all as you begin your journey as fellow delegates.

For the High Commissioner of Refugees Committee, there will be two topics that we will be focusing on surrounding the theme of challenging authority. Topic A focuses on the criminalization of refugees, while topic B focuses on support for refugees who have been denied asylum. Both of these topics not only address the main issues in regards to refugees and resisting unjust authority, but have been significantly detrimental to refugee populations across the globe. When researching these topics, we encourage you to pay close attention to perspective, and challenge you to create unique solutions in response to these crises.

We hope that regardless of whether this is your first MADMUN conference, that it is an opportunity and experience that connects you to new people and allows you to have fun and be creative. We hope that you can bring your ideas to the table and we ask that you be respectful and open to other's perspectives. At this conference, we will be exploring multiple perspectives and it is of great importance that we are courteous and attentive to others and their ideas. As your chairs, we attach great significance to this to ensure that this committee remains a safe and welcoming space for all.

As always, feel free to reach out to us with any questions or concerns you may have, and we look forward to working with you and meeting you in the near future!

Good Luck,
Maitri and Micah

General committee info: UNHCR

The *United Nations Commissioner for Refugees* (UNHCR) was established in 1950, to help refugees from European countries that were affected by World War 2. The UNHCR works to “deliver life-saving assistance in emergencies, safeguard fundamental human rights, and help find long-term solutions so they can find a safe place to call home.”-UNHCR. They also advocate for better refugee conditions and improved asylum laws/systems. The UNHCR currently has 18,879 personnel working in 137 countries. They have helped more than 50 million refugees effectively renew their lives, they also work to continue protection and provide support for the people who are currently displaced. The organizations and governments that the UNHCR works closely with are the USA, European Union, Germany, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Denmark, Ikea, Uniqlo, Sony, and countless other brands, foundations, and non-government organizations. In countries with an influx of refugees, UNHCR personnel provide shelter, clean water, food, and help them cross borders. After refugees reside in new countries the UNHCR works to help minors with getting accommodations for their education and help refugees earn liveable wages. The UNHCR also helps refugees decide if they want to return once it is safe for the refugee to return to their country of origin. Other options that UNHCR helps with are resettlement to another country or integration to the hosting country. With this year's theme of *Challenging Authority*, we aim to make you think more about humanitarian issues and whether organizations and governments are doing more good in the world than harm.

Topic A: Criminalization Of Refugees

The criminalization of refugees has been a prominent and significant topic that has hindered the lives of many refugees in this world today. The criminalization of refugees is defined by the act of treating a refugee as a criminal, rather than an individual exempt from negative bias. Many refugees are forced to flee their home country due to the fear of persecution, in cases of war, in search of better living, hunger, climate change, and much more. Already facing new challenges, many refugees struggle to integrate into a newer society due to the stigmatization and mistreatment they face. Additionally, many countries have laws mitigating refugees from achieving the rights of normal citizens, due to misconceptions that a large percentage of migrants are involved in crimes. On one hand, refugees are being denied rights due to laws that negatively affect their citizenship status, and on the other hand, they are being dealt with a stigma that intensifies the cultural, language, and societal barriers that already exist. Imminent issues with general asylum processes for refugees in many countries are left unresolved due to the idea that refugees are an economical burden and a threat to national security. As an example, many nations illegalize the act of asylum seeking in efforts to actively reduce the amount of refugees, or complicate their citizenship status once given entry into the country. On the flipside, countries may choose to allow refugees to obtain citizenship and equal rights, and see them as an economic opportunity. Either way, it is evident that this is an issue that is affecting not only the refugees themselves, but countries who choose to forgo human rights.

History:

The criminalization of refugees has been an issue that has been occurring for quite some time. In history, much of the mistreatment of refugees has stemmed from wars, or conflicts between countries that become apprehensive towards incoming migrants over concerns to their security.

As an example, in 1797, the US had been in an unofficial quasi-war with France, after tensions due to France seizing US vessels. This had led to the creation of the Alien Acts, that would allow the president to deport any person from any nation. While this is not a significant example of the criminal treatment of refugees, it highlights the conditions in which complicated policies have developed for this purpose.

One of the earliest accounts of the criminalization of refugees is the Immigration Act of 1917. This act, which had arisen after World War I, had been one of the most restrictive immigration policies of the era. This act had many constraints and requirements immigrants would need to fulfill before being granted legal status within the country. Some of the criteria was that each immigrant over the age of 16 must demonstrate basic reading and comprehension skills in any language, and taxes for new immigrants and refugees during their entry into the country was higher. There were also immigrant quotas that existed that aided in limiting the amount of immigrants in the country. These practices were methods of filtering out immigrants and allowing officials more leeway in choosing who to allow entry to.

Additionally, after World War II, accounts of refugees being denied and labeled as illegal asylum seekers had been increased. One such notion of this was during the 1930s, in which Canada had refused a boat of immigrants that had fled Germany and were in hopes of seeking asylum. They had been dismissed due to perceptions of criminals onboard, and had been sent back to their home country on the notion that they had illegally sought asylum.

During the 20th century, there had also been more drastic accounts of the criminal treatment of refugees. In particular, the mass immigration of Syrians in Lebanon had also been a case in which refugees had been mistaken as criminals. While Lebanon had allowed entry for many Syrian Refugees, before this many countries had refused asylum for them. Now in Lebanon, the Syrian Refugee Crisis has been described as a “crisis within a crisis.” In which 73% of Syrians lack legal status, and around 2,500 refugees have been forcefully deported. There have also been severe human rights violations that have not been rightfully addressed. Much of the modern criminalization of refugees now violates the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) that states “refugees have the right to seek and enjoy asylum in other countries.”

Recent Actions by the UN:

The UNHCR has been working to provide and protect the rights of refugees across the globe. In 2020, the UNHCR partnered with UNICEF to develop the Blueprint for Joint Action. This blueprint was created in an attempt to give and protect the rights of refugee children. This blueprint outlined methods of funding, services, and other global plans in regards to the matter.

Some more recent actions made by the UN have prioritized the safety of refugees at the border, and preventing unjust violence against them. On January 10, 2022, the UNHCR made an appeal urging European countries “to prioritize the better protection of people fleeing war, conflict and persecution.” This was after the numbers of refugees that had been displaced during that year had reached an all time high.

As of now the UNHCR has been heavily focused on the Ukraine Emergency. As of June 2023, it has been reported that there are around 6.3 million refugees from Ukraine. In response, the UNHCR has been working with neighboring countries to provide aid to incoming refugees. The UNHCR has also been working with UNICEF to create the Blue Dot Safe Space Network, which provides hubs that “provide a safe space, as well as support and referrals for health care, education, psychosocial assistance and more.” Other efforts, like encouraging countries to provide adequate treatment of refugees have also been implemented.

The Rohingya Crisis:

The Rohingya Crisis is one of the most detrimental refugee crises in the world today. The Rohingya are a muslim ethnic minority who originally emigrated from Bengal and now live in Myanmar. This crisis occurred when the Rohingya, despite having ties with the state, had been rejected for lawful citizenship status and had been dismissed by the government. There are now a number of them that are part of the world's largest stateless population.” Without citizenship status, the Rohingya have struggled to have access to proper education, job opportunities, health care, and much more. Over the years, violence against the rohingya increased to such a degree that around 700,000 fled to Bangladesh, and other neighboring countries. The many in Bangladesh have also faced struggles in regards to receiving proper shelter and services, leaving the majority in isolation. This crisis is still ongoing today, with multiple issues unresolved.

Guiding Questions:

- What are some laws that either support or prevent the criminalization of immigrants and refugees in your country?
- Why would preventing entry of refugees and labeling asylum seekers as criminals be beneficial or disadvantageous to your countries economical and political prospects?
- What is the history of this issue in your country? What has your country done to resolve concerns regarding this issue?
- How has this issue affected the percentage of refugees in your country in regards to achieving the same rights as regular citizens?
- How does this issue affect your countries relations with other countries, as well as global ties between your allies?

Topic B: Support for Refugees who have been denied asylum

Refugees are persons fleeing the risk of serious harm, including human rights violations such as those in Myanmar, armed conflict- such as people in Ukraine and Afghanistan, or persecution. In the absence of protection in their countries of origin, which the State is unwilling or unable to provide, they are forced to cross an international border and seek safety in other countries. As of May 2023, there are more than 110 million refugees in the world. Fortunately, 76% of asylum seekers are granted asylum. That means that there are ~26 ½ million refugees without protection—refugees who are denied asylum risk being deported and sent back to their country of origin. Countries have previously denied refugees at the border or have limited the amount of refugees they let in their countries due to feeling that the refugees do not help their country, and take opportunities from the people already living there. In recent years many countries can no longer immediately deny as many refugees at the borders due to the European Commission threatening punishment to countries that have closed borders. Some European countries are non-believers of refugees needing asylum and support. Countries like Greece, Italy, North Macedonia, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro have been ranked the least tolerant countries of refugees and migrants. They would turn refugees away without giving them any support to find a different country to try and seek asylum in. Recently poorer countries have been taking in more refugees than large, rich countries. Countries such as China, and Japan reject 99% of refugee applicants. Even though China is a neighboring country to one of the countries people are fleeing from.

Throughout history, refugees have been mistreated. In more current times Syrian refugees are treated with the most disdain. Syrian children instead of having an education in their host countries have to engage in labor. Housing for Syrian refugees is less than ideal as many are living in long-term detention centers with inadequate living conditions, and suffering from physical and mental abuse. A country that has treated refugees the worst during the modern age is Libya. In Libya, “refugees have been exposed to unsanitary conditions, severe overcrowding, poor food and water quality, lack of nutrition and healthcare, violence, and torture by guards. There have even been instances of beating, raping, and smuggling children.”(id.) Although that is drastic, other countries are more subtle and treat refugees without compassion and as if they are responsible for what is happening in their own countries. Follow what your country’s beliefs are and make sure you stand up for your country's ideals.

History

The UNHCR has helped with many crises throughout the last 70 years. UNHCR helped with resettling Hungarians during the 1956 Hungarian revolution. During the 1960’s the UNHCR supported African countries during decolonization. In recent years the UNHCR has worked on amending and strengthening the past legal actions made such as refugees not be returned to countries where they are still at serious risk to their life or freedom. The 1951 convention they held states what is a refugee, and the bare minimum of treatment that must be given to them like food, water, work, and education. Although the UNHCR worked to protect refugees they were still mistreated. In current times places like ICE that let abuse run rampant. Refugees suffer assaults, muggings, or being killed on journeys throughout the west and east countries of Africa.

Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Syrian refugee crisis started in 2011 and has 6.8 million refugees in host countries as of June 2023. Countries like Croatia, Greece, and Italy have turned Syrian refugees away from their countries. In Lebanon Syrians aren't provided sufficient camps to live in, and cannot find proper jobs. European countries have been critical of the refugees, and harsh, unwilling cooperators. Many believe this is due to the fact that most Syrian refugees are Muslim. There has been an uptick in islamophobia during the last 25 years. Osama Bin Laden and other extremist political groups in the middle east have caused misinformation and fear of anyone from Islamic culture.

Guiding questions:

- What are some actions made by your country to provide support for refugees that have been denied asylum?
- How has this issue affected your country's ties with other countries?
- How has this issue affected the current population of refugees residing in your country? How does this relate to the support, or lack of support being given to them?
- What are some methods in which your country can resolve this issue?

Recommended Sources

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- <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues>
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