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Study Guide



**United Nations
Human Rights Council**

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“Deliberating upon Human Rights Violations in the Global Migration Crisis with Special Emphasis on Forced Deportations, Xenophobia, and Refugee Protection”

Committee Overview

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is the principal intergovernmental body within the United Nations system responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. Established by the United Nations General Assembly on 15 March 2006 through Resolution 60/251, the Council replaced the former Commission on Human Rights and was created to strengthen the international community’s ability to address both persistent and emerging human rights challenges.

Headquartered at the United Nations Office in Geneva, Switzerland, the Council consists of 47 Member States elected directly and individually by the General Assembly for staggered three-year terms. Membership is based on equitable geographical representation, ensuring participation from all regions of the world. Member States are expected to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and to cooperate fully with the Council’s mechanisms and procedures.



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The Human Rights Council serves as the primary United Nations forum for discussing and responding to human rights concerns. It addresses a broad range of issues, including discrimination, freedom of expression, gender equality, minority rights, humanitarian crises, migration, refugee protection, and violations arising from armed conflicts. Through dialogue, cooperation, and accountability mechanisms, the Council seeks to ensure that human rights remain central to international decision-making.

One of the Council's most significant functions is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a unique mechanism through which the human rights records of all 193 United Nations Member States are reviewed on a regular basis. The Council also operates through Special Procedures, including Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts, Fact-Finding Missions, and Commissions of Inquiry, which investigate specific human rights situations and thematic issues.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides administrative, technical, and substantive support to the Council and plays a vital role in monitoring human rights conditions worldwide. Together, these mechanisms allow the Council to investigate allegations of abuse, provide recommendations to governments, and facilitate international cooperation aimed at strengthening the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.



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In recent years, the Human Rights Council has become increasingly engaged in addressing the human rights implications of migration and displacement. Record levels of forced migration, growing refugee populations, rising xenophobia, and concerns regarding forced deportations have highlighted the need for stronger international cooperation and more effective protection mechanisms. As a result, migration-related human rights issues have become an increasingly important component of the Council's work.

Within the context of this agenda, delegates are expected to examine the intersection between migration governance and human rights protection. Discussions will focus on how states and international organizations can safeguard the rights and dignity of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers while addressing challenges relating to forced deportations, discrimination, refugee protection, and international responsibility-sharing.

Mandate of the Committee

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is responsible for promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms for all individuals worldwide. It works to prevent human rights violations, respond to humanitarian and rights-related crises, strengthen international cooperation, and encourage states to uphold their human rights obligations. Through mechanisms such as the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**, the Council reviews the human rights records of all UN Member States and provides recommendations and technical assistance to improve compliance.



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Powers:

- Investigate human rights violations by establishing **Commissions of Inquiry, Fact-Finding Missions,** and appointing **Special Rapporteurs** or other Special Procedures.
- Adopt resolutions and issue recommendations urging states to end human rights abuses, repeal discriminatory laws, release political prisoners, and improve human rights protections.
- Conduct the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** of every UN Member State to assess compliance with international human rights standards and recommend reforms.
- Convene **Special Sessions** to address urgent or large-scale human rights crises.
- Request the **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** to provide technical assistance, legal expertise, judicial reforms, and capacity-building to member states.
- Issue **Urgent Appeals** through independent experts, requesting immediate government action to prevent or stop serious human rights violations.

Limitations:

- Enforce its resolutions or legally compel states to comply with its recommendations.
 - Authorize military intervention, peacekeeping operations, or impose economic sanctions; these powers rest with the **UN Security Council (UNSC)**.
 - Pass legally binding international laws or treaties.
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- Function as an international court or provide individual legal remedies, compensation, or criminal prosecution for victims.
- Directly prosecute states or individuals for human rights violations.

Agenda Overview

The global migration crisis has emerged as one of the most pressing humanitarian and human rights challenges of the twenty-first century. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 120 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced by the end of 2024, representing the highest level of displacement ever recorded. This figure includes refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and stateless individuals who have been forced to leave their homes due to conflict, persecution, violence, human rights violations, environmental disasters, and economic instability.

While migration itself is not inherently a crisis, inadequate protection systems, dangerous migration routes, and the increasing vulnerability of displaced populations have transformed migration into a significant international concern. Millions of migrants and refugees face discrimination, exploitation, trafficking, arbitrary detention, restricted access to essential services, and other violations of their fundamental rights throughout their journeys and within host countries.



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This agenda focuses specifically on three interconnected dimensions of the migration crisis: forced deportations, xenophobia, and refugee protection. Forced deportations and practices that may violate the principle of non-refoulement continue to raise concerns regarding the safety and rights of migrants and asylum seekers. At the same time, rising xenophobia and anti-migrant sentiment in various regions have contributed to discrimination, social exclusion, hate speech, and violence against displaced populations. Additionally, increasing displacement has placed significant pressure on refugee protection systems, creating challenges for asylum procedures, humanitarian assistance, and international burden-sharing.

The agenda seeks to examine how states and the international community can ensure the protection of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers while balancing national sovereignty, border management, and international legal obligations. Delegates are encouraged to explore practical, rights-based solutions that strengthen protection mechanisms, combat discrimination, promote international cooperation, and uphold the dignity and rights of all individuals affected by displacement.



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Historical Background

Human migration has existed throughout history and has played a crucial role in shaping societies, economies, and civilizations. People have long moved across borders in search of safety, economic opportunities, resources, and improved living conditions. However, the scale and complexity of contemporary displacement have transformed migration into one of the most significant humanitarian and human rights challenges of the modern era.

The foundations of modern refugee protection emerged following the devastation of the Second World War, which displaced millions of people across Europe and exposed the need for a comprehensive international protection framework. In response, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which recognized the right of individuals to seek asylum from persecution. This was followed by the establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1950 and the adoption of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which remains the cornerstone of international refugee law.

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, displacement was largely driven by decolonization, interstate conflicts, civil wars, and political instability. Refugee crises emerged across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, prompting the international community to expand mechanisms for humanitarian assistance and refugee protection.



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The adoption of the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees further broadened the scope of international refugee protection by removing the geographical and temporal limitations contained within the 1951 Convention.

In the twenty-first century, migration patterns have become increasingly complex. Armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Myanmar, and Ukraine have displaced millions, while economic instability, environmental degradation, climate change, and weak governance structures have created additional migration pressures. The Syrian Refugee Crisis and the European Migration Crisis of 2015 brought unprecedented international attention to migration and refugee protection, exposing weaknesses in asylum systems and intensifying debates regarding border security, burden-sharing, and humanitarian obligations.

Today, global displacement has reached record levels. According to UNHCR, more than 120 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide by the end of 2024. As migration continues to intersect with issues of conflict, human rights, development, and climate change, the international community faces growing challenges in ensuring the protection, dignity, and rights of displaced populations. The modern migration crisis, therefore, represents not only a humanitarian emergency but also a broader test of international cooperation and commitment to human rights.



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Current State of Global Displacement

The world is currently experiencing the highest levels of forced displacement ever recorded. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 120 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced by the end of 2024. This figure includes refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and other populations requiring international protection.

Among the displaced population, approximately 43 million are refugees who have crossed international borders in search of safety, while more than 8 million are asylum seekers awaiting decisions regarding their claims for protection. Additionally, over 68 million people remain internally displaced within their own countries, often facing similar risks and vulnerabilities as refugees but without crossing an international border.

A significant characteristic of contemporary displacement is that it is concentrated within a relatively small number of countries. Nearly 70% of the world's refugees originate from countries experiencing prolonged conflict, political instability, or widespread human rights violations, including Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Myanmar.



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Contrary to common perceptions, the majority of refugees are not hosted by developed countries. More than 70% of refugees are hosted by low- and middle-income countries, many of which face significant developmental and economic challenges. Furthermore, approximately 75% of refugees remain in countries neighboring their countries of origin, placing considerable pressure on host communities, infrastructure, and public services.

Children constitute one of the most vulnerable groups affected by displacement. Approximately 40% of all forcibly displaced persons are under the age of 18. Millions of refugee children remain out of school, while many face heightened risks of exploitation, trafficking, child labor, and early marriage. Women and girls are similarly vulnerable, particularly in displacement settings where access to protection mechanisms may be limited.

Migration routes have also become increasingly dangerous. The Mediterranean Sea remains one of the deadliest migration corridors in the world, with thousands of migrants and refugees having lost their lives attempting dangerous crossings in recent years. Similar risks exist across routes in North Africa, Central America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, where migrants frequently encounter smugglers, traffickers, criminal networks, and unsafe travel conditions.



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At the same time, growing migration flows have intensified political and social debates surrounding migration governance. Concerns relating to border security, economic competition, national identity, and public services have contributed to rising xenophobia, discrimination, and anti-migrant rhetoric in several regions. These developments have significant implications for refugee protection and continue to influence national migration policies worldwide.

The current state of global displacement highlights the urgent need for comprehensive and cooperative international responses. Humanitarian assistance alone is insufficient to address the scale of the crisis. Sustainable solutions require stronger protection mechanisms, equitable responsibility-sharing, conflict prevention efforts, and greater commitment to upholding international human rights standards.

Key Dimensions of the Agenda

The global migration crisis encompasses a wide range of humanitarian, political, economic, and legal challenges. However, this agenda specifically focuses on three interconnected dimensions that have emerged as major human rights concerns within contemporary migration governance: forced deportations and refoulement, xenophobia and discrimination, and refugee protection. Together, these issues influence the safety, dignity, and fundamental rights of millions of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers worldwide.



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1. Forced Deportations and Refoulement

Forced deportation refers to the compulsory removal of a foreign national from a state's territory by government authorities, usually due to immigration violations, national security concerns, or the rejection of an asylum claim. While states have the sovereign right to regulate migration and control entry into their territories, this authority must be exercised in accordance with international human rights and refugee law.

A major concern within the global migration crisis is the forced deportation of individuals to countries where they may face persecution, torture, armed conflict, or other serious threats to their lives and safety. Such unlawful returns are known as refoulement. **Refoulement** is the act of returning or expelling a person to a country where they are at risk of persecution, torture, or other serious human rights violations.

The principle of **non-refoulement**, established under Article 33 of the 1951 Refugee Convention, prohibits states from returning individuals to territories where their life or freedom may be threatened. Widely regarded as the cornerstone of international refugee protection, this principle applies regardless of a person's legal status and has been reinforced through various international human rights instruments.

Despite these protections, concerns continue to arise regarding deportations carried out without adequate assessment of protection needs, limited access to legal representation, accelerated removal procedures, and collective expulsions.



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Such practices may expose vulnerable individuals to grave human rights violations and undermine international obligations designed to protect refugees and asylum seekers.

As migration pressures increase, governments often face the challenge of balancing border security and immigration enforcement with their responsibility to uphold international human rights standards. Ensuring fair asylum procedures, preventing refoulement, and safeguarding the rights of refugees and asylum seekers therefore remain central issues within contemporary migration governance.

2. Xenophobia and Discrimination

Xenophobia refers to fear, hostility, prejudice, or discrimination directed toward foreigners or individuals perceived as outsiders. Throughout history, migrants and refugees have often faced negative stereotypes and social exclusion; however, rising displacement levels and increasing political polarization have intensified xenophobic attitudes in many parts of the world.

Migrants and refugees frequently encounter discrimination in employment, education, healthcare, housing, and access to public services. During periods of economic uncertainty or political instability, migrant populations are often portrayed as threats to national security, employment opportunities, or cultural identity. Such narratives may contribute to public hostility, hate speech, social exclusion, and, in some cases, violence.



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The rapid spread of misinformation through digital media platforms has further amplified anti-migrant sentiment. Online hate speech and disinformation campaigns frequently reinforce negative stereotypes and contribute to the marginalization of displaced populations.

Beyond its social consequences, xenophobia poses a significant human rights concern. Discrimination can restrict access to opportunities, undermine social cohesion, and increase vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Combating xenophobia, therefore, requires not only legal protections but also public awareness initiatives, education, community engagement, and efforts to promote inclusion and social integration.

3. Refugee Protection and Asylum Systems

Refugee protection refers to the legal and humanitarian framework designed to safeguard individuals who have been forced to flee their countries due to persecution, conflict, violence, or widespread human rights violations. The right to seek asylum is recognized under international law and forms a fundamental component of the global protection system.

The contemporary refugee protection framework is largely based on the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which establish the rights of refugees and the obligations of states. These instruments seek to ensure that individuals requiring protection have access to fair asylum procedures, basic rights, and protection from refoulement.



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Despite these international standards, refugee protection systems worldwide face significant challenges. Rising displacement has placed considerable pressure on asylum systems, resulting in lengthy processing times, overcrowded reception facilities, funding shortages, and administrative backlogs. In some cases, migrants and asylum seekers face legal, physical, or procedural barriers that prevent them from accessing asylum procedures altogether.

A further challenge is the unequal distribution of responsibility among states. While refugee protection is a shared international obligation, developing countries host the majority of the world's refugees despite often possessing limited financial and institutional resources. This imbalance places significant strain on healthcare systems, educational institutions, infrastructure, and public services.

Strengthening refugee protection, therefore, requires greater international cooperation, equitable responsibility-sharing, increased support for host communities, and measures that ensure displaced populations can access protection, services, and durable solutions. As displacement continues to rise globally, the effectiveness of refugee protection systems will remain a critical issue for the international community.



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Root Causes of Modern Migration

Migration is often driven by a combination of interconnected political, economic, social, and environmental factors rather than a single cause. Understanding these underlying drivers is essential for addressing the migration crisis effectively, as sustainable solutions must focus not only on managing displacement but also on addressing the conditions that force people to leave their homes in the first place.

1. Armed Conflict and War

Armed conflict remains the leading cause of forced displacement worldwide. Wars and civil conflicts frequently result in widespread destruction of infrastructure, economic collapse, insecurity, and large-scale human rights violations, leaving civilians with little choice but to flee in search of safety.

Contemporary conflicts in Syria, Sudan, Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Myanmar have displaced millions of individuals both within and beyond their national borders. In many cases, displacement becomes protracted, with refugees spending years or even decades in host countries due to the absence of safe conditions for return.

Conflict-related displacement often creates additional vulnerabilities, including family separation, disruption of education, loss of livelihoods, and increased exposure to trafficking and exploitation. As a result, armed conflict continues to be one of the most significant challenges confronting refugee protection systems globally.



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2. Political Persecution and Human Rights Violations

Political repression, ethnic discrimination, religious persecution, and widespread human rights abuses remain major drivers of forced migration. Individuals frequently flee their countries when governments or non-state actors target them on the basis of their political beliefs, religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or membership in a particular social group.

Examples such as the Rohingya in Myanmar and concerns regarding the treatment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang illustrate how systematic discrimination and restrictions on fundamental freedoms can contribute to displacement and asylum-seeking movements.

In many situations, affected individuals cannot rely on national authorities for protection, making international refugee protection mechanisms essential for ensuring their safety and rights.

3. Economic Instability and Poverty

Economic hardship is another significant factor influencing migration patterns. Poverty, unemployment, inflation, food insecurity, and limited access to economic opportunities often encourage individuals to seek better living conditions elsewhere.



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Although economic migrants do not necessarily qualify as refugees under international law, economic instability frequently interacts with conflict, environmental degradation, and weak governance structures, making migration decisions increasingly complex. In many regions, economic crises have intensified migration flows and placed additional pressures on receiving states and migration management systems.

4. Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

Climate change is increasingly recognized as an emerging driver of displacement. Rising sea levels, prolonged droughts, floods, desertification, and extreme weather events have disrupted livelihoods and forced communities to relocate both within and across national borders.

Environmental factors can also intensify existing tensions by increasing competition over scarce resources such as water, land, and food. Small island developing states, coastal communities, and regions heavily dependent on agriculture are particularly vulnerable to climate-related displacement.

While international law does not currently recognize a specific legal category for climate refugees, climate change is expected to become an increasingly important factor shaping global migration patterns in the coming decades.



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5. Weak Governance and State Fragility

Weak institutions, corruption, political instability, and inadequate governance can contribute significantly to migration pressures. States experiencing governance challenges often struggle to provide security, uphold the rule of law, protect human rights, and deliver essential public services.

In fragile states, populations may face insecurity, economic decline, and limited access to justice, prompting migration in search of safety and stability. Weak governance can also hinder effective responses to humanitarian crises and increase the likelihood of conflict, displacement, and human rights violations.

Furthermore, governance failures may enable criminal organizations, armed groups, and trafficking networks to exploit vulnerable populations, creating additional risks for migrants and refugees.

The root causes of migration are deeply interconnected and frequently reinforce one another. Conflict may trigger economic collapse, environmental pressures may worsen political instability, and weak governance may increase vulnerability to human rights abuses. Consequently, addressing the global migration crisis requires comprehensive approaches that not only protect displaced populations but also tackle the structural conditions that drive displacement in the first place.



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Case Studies

The following case studies highlight some of the most significant displacement crises of the twenty-first century. Each case demonstrates how conflict, persecution, discrimination, and inadequate protection mechanisms contribute to forced migration while illustrating the challenges faced by states and international organizations in responding to humanitarian crises.

1. *The Rohingya Refugee Crisis*

The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority group who have lived in Myanmar's Rakhine State for generations. Despite their longstanding presence in the country, they were effectively denied citizenship under Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law, rendering the majority of the population stateless. Over several decades, the Rohingya experienced restrictions on movement, education, employment, healthcare, and political participation, contributing to widespread marginalization and vulnerability.

The crisis escalated significantly in August 2017 when military operations in Rakhine State triggered a mass displacement of Rohingya civilians into neighboring Bangladesh. Reports from international organizations documented allegations of widespread human rights violations, including violence against civilians, destruction of villages, and forced displacement. Within a matter of months, more than 740,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar.



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Today, more than one million Rohingya refugees reside in Bangladesh, primarily within the camps of Cox's Bazar, which constitute the largest refugee settlement in the world. Approximately 54 percent of the refugee population consists of children, while women and children together account for more than three-quarters of the displaced population.

The Rohingya crisis demonstrates the relationship between discrimination, statelessness, and forced migration. It also highlights the challenges associated with long-term refugee protection, responsibility-sharing, voluntary repatriation, and the protection of populations lacking legal nationality. The continued displacement of the Rohingya remains one of the most prominent refugee crises on the international agenda.

2. Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, China

The Uyghurs are a predominantly Muslim Turkic ethnic group residing primarily in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. For several years, international attention has focused on allegations concerning restrictions on religious freedom, cultural expression, and minority rights affecting Uyghur communities.

Since 2017, researchers, human rights organizations, and several governments have raised concerns regarding the existence of large-scale detention facilities and extensive surveillance measures within Xinjiang. Estimates from researchers and advocacy groups suggest that more than one million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims may have been detained in what Chinese authorities describe as vocational education and training centers.



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Additional concerns have been raised regarding allegations of forced labor, restrictions on religious practices, family separation, and limitations on cultural expression. The Chinese government has consistently maintained that its policies are intended to combat extremism, terrorism, and separatism while promoting stability and economic development in the region.

The Uyghur case highlights broader discussions regarding minority rights, religious freedom, cultural preservation, and state obligations under international human rights law. It is also relevant to this agenda due to concerns regarding protection for individuals seeking asylum abroad and allegations of deportations or returns that may expose individuals to persecution or discrimination.

3. The Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Syrian refugee crisis is widely regarded as one of the largest displacement crises in modern history. It began in 2011 following the outbreak of anti-government protests that escalated into a prolonged civil war involving multiple domestic and international actors.

Years of armed conflict, widespread destruction, economic collapse, and insecurity forced millions of Syrians to flee their homes. More than 14 million Syrians have been displaced since the beginning of the conflict, including approximately 5 to 6 million refugees currently residing outside Syria and millions more who remain internally displaced.



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The majority of Syrian refugees are hosted by neighboring countries, particularly Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan. Türkiye alone hosts the largest refugee population in the world. Unlike many refugee situations, the majority of Syrian refugees reside in urban and rural communities rather than formal camps, creating significant challenges relating to employment, housing, education, and healthcare access.

The Syrian refugee crisis has generated extensive international debate regarding burden-sharing, refugee integration, humanitarian assistance, and voluntary repatriation. While political developments within Syria have prompted discussions regarding refugee returns, international organizations continue to emphasize that any return must be voluntary, safe, dignified, and informed.

The crisis remains a significant example of how conflict, displacement, refugee protection, and xenophobia intersect within contemporary migration governance.

4. The European Migration Crisis

The European Migration Crisis reached its peak in 2015 when more than one million migrants and refugees arrived in Europe by sea. The majority were fleeing conflict, persecution, and instability in countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Eritrea, while others migrated in search of safety and improved living conditions.



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Many migrants traveled through Türkiye before undertaking dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea. The humanitarian consequences of these journeys drew significant international attention, particularly following numerous shipwrecks and the deaths of thousands of migrants attempting to reach Europe. More than 3,700 deaths were recorded in the Mediterranean during 2015 alone.

The crisis exposed weaknesses within asylum systems and intensified debates regarding migration governance, border management, burden-sharing, and refugee protection across Europe. Different states adopted varying responses, ranging from expanded humanitarian admissions and asylum programs to stricter border controls and migration restrictions.

The crisis also contributed to rising xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment in several countries. Political debates surrounding migration are increasingly focused on concerns relating to national identity, security, employment, and public services. These developments demonstrated how migration can become a source of political polarization and social tension.

The European Migration Crisis remains an important case study because it highlights the challenges associated with balancing humanitarian obligations, refugee protection, border security, and international cooperation. It continues to shape migration policy discussions both within Europe and globally.



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Collectively, these case studies demonstrate that forced displacement is rarely the result of a single factor. Rather, it emerges from a combination of conflict, persecution, discrimination, governance failures, and humanitarian crises. They also illustrate the importance of effective refugee protection mechanisms, international cooperation, and adherence to human rights principles in responding to contemporary migration challenges.

5. *Venezuelan Migration Crisis*

The Venezuelan migration crisis is one of the largest displacement crises in the world. Since 2015, over 7 million Venezuelans have fled the country due to economic collapse, political instability, hyperinflation, shortages of food and medicine, and widespread human rights violations. Most have sought refuge in neighboring countries such as Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, and Chile, placing considerable pressure on the region's humanitarian resources and public services.

While many host countries initially adopted open-border policies and temporary protection measures, increasing migration numbers and domestic economic challenges led some governments to tighten border controls, restrict asylum access, and deport undocumented migrants. Human rights organizations have raised concerns that some deportations were carried out without proper assessment of individuals' protection needs, increasing the risk of **refoulement** by returning people to situations where they could face persecution or other serious human rights abuses.



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The crisis highlights the need to balance border security with humanitarian obligations. The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has expressed concern over the situation, established investigative mechanisms to examine alleged human rights violations in Venezuela, and urged states to ensure fair asylum procedures and uphold the principle of non-refoulement, preventing the forced return of individuals to unsafe conditions.

Major Actors

1. *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)*

Established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1950, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the principal international organization responsible for protecting refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, returnees, and internally displaced persons. Initially created to address displacement following the Second World War, UNHCR has evolved into the leading global agency coordinating refugee protection and humanitarian assistance.

UNHCR's mandate is based on ensuring that every individual has the right to seek asylum and receive protection from persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights abuses. The organization provides emergency assistance, including shelter, healthcare, food, education, legal aid, and protection services to displaced populations worldwide.



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Within the context of the global migration crisis, UNHCR plays a critical role in monitoring refugee movements, documenting protection concerns, advocating against forced deportations, and promoting adherence to the principle of non-refoulement. The agency also supports governments in developing asylum systems and refugee protection frameworks consistent with international law. Through initiatives such as the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR seeks to strengthen international responsibility-sharing and improve long-term solutions for displaced populations.

2. International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) was established in 1951 to assist displaced populations and facilitate migration management in the aftermath of the Second World War. Today, it is the leading intergovernmental organization working on migration-related issues and became a related organization of the United Nations in 2016.

IOM works across a broad range of migration issues, including humanitarian assistance, migration governance, border management, migrant protection, emergency response, and data collection. The organization assists millions of migrants affected by conflict, environmental disasters, economic instability, and humanitarian emergencies.



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In relation to this agenda, IOM focuses on promoting safe, orderly, and regular migration while reducing vulnerabilities faced by migrants throughout their journeys. The organization works closely with governments to combat human trafficking, strengthen migration management systems, support voluntary return and reintegration programmes, and address discrimination against migrants. Through its contribution to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, IOM remains a key actor in international migration governance.

3. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) serves as the principal United Nations entity responsible for promoting and protecting human rights globally. It provides administrative, technical, and substantive support to the Human Rights Council and its various mechanisms.

OHCHR monitors human rights situations, investigates violations, supports accountability efforts, and assists states in implementing international human rights obligations. The office also supports Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts, Fact-Finding Missions, and Commissions of Inquiry established by the Human Rights Council.

In the context of migration, OHCHR has consistently emphasized that migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are entitled to the full protection of international human rights law regardless of their migration status.



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The office has repeatedly raised concerns regarding arbitrary detention, discrimination, xenophobia, unsafe returns, and barriers to asylum procedures. As a result, OHCHR plays a central role in ensuring that migration governance remains consistent with international human rights standards.

4. Host States

Host states are countries that receive and accommodate refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced populations. They play a crucial role in the international protection system by providing safety, humanitarian assistance, and access to essential services for individuals fleeing conflict, persecution, and instability.

Many of the world's largest refugee-hosting countries are developing states with limited resources. Countries such as Türkiye, Pakistan, Iran, Uganda, Bangladesh, Lebanon, and Jordan collectively host millions of displaced individuals despite facing significant economic and developmental challenges of their own.

Host states frequently face pressures relating to healthcare, education, housing, employment, infrastructure, and social services. As displacement becomes increasingly prolonged, governments may also encounter domestic political challenges and social tensions associated with large refugee populations. Consequently, host states remain central stakeholders in discussions regarding burden-sharing, refugee protection, humanitarian assistance, and durable solutions.



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5. Civil Society Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in responding to displacement crises and protecting the rights of migrants and refugees. These organizations often operate directly within affected communities, providing humanitarian assistance, legal aid, healthcare, education, psychosocial support, and advocacy services.

Organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and numerous local organizations contribute significantly to documenting human rights violations and supporting displaced populations.

NGOs frequently act as a bridge between affected communities, governments, and international institutions. They play an important role in monitoring human rights conditions, advocating for policy reforms, combating xenophobia, supporting integration efforts, and ensuring that the experiences of displaced populations remain represented within international discussions.

Collectively, these actors form the backbone of the international response to migration and displacement. While their roles and responsibilities differ, effective cooperation among states, international organizations, and civil society remains essential for ensuring the protection, dignity, and rights of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers worldwide.



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Existing International Initiatives and Past Actions

Over the past several decades, the international community has developed a range of legal instruments, policy frameworks, and cooperative mechanisms aimed at strengthening refugee protection, improving migration governance, and addressing the humanitarian challenges associated with displacement. These initiatives form the foundation of contemporary international responses to migration crises and continue to shape discussions within the Human Rights Council.

1. 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol remain the cornerstone of international refugee protection. Together, these instruments establish the internationally recognized definition of a refugee, outline the rights of refugees, and define the obligations of states toward individuals seeking protection. One of the Convention's most significant contributions is the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the return of individuals to territories where they may face persecution, violence, or other serious threats to their safety. The Convention continues to serve as the primary legal framework governing refugee protection worldwide.



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2. New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016)

In September 2016, all United Nations Member States unanimously adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The declaration represented a major political commitment to improving international responses to large-scale movements of refugees and migrants. The declaration reaffirmed the importance of protecting the human rights of all refugees and migrants, regardless of status, while emphasizing international solidarity, responsibility-sharing, and cooperation. It also condemned acts of xenophobia, racism, and discrimination directed toward displaced populations. Importantly, the New York Declaration laid the foundation for the development of both the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

3. Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) (2016)

Developed through the New York Declaration, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) was designed to improve international responses to refugee situations by promoting a more predictable and sustainable approach.

The framework focuses on four key objectives:

- Easing pressure on host countries.
- Enhancing refugee self-reliance.
- Expanding access to third-country solutions.
- Supporting conditions for safe and dignified return.



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The CRRF recognizes that refugee situations cannot be addressed through humanitarian assistance alone and require long-term development, education, employment, and integration strategies.

4. Global Compact on Refugees (2018)

Affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) seeks to strengthen international cooperation and responsibility-sharing in responding to refugee situations. The Compact was developed in response to growing concerns that a small number of countries were carrying a disproportionate share of the global refugee burden. It encourages greater support for host states while promoting refugee inclusion, self-reliance, and access to durable solutions. Although not legally binding, the Global Compact on Refugees serves as an important framework for international cooperation and remains one of the most significant recent developments in refugee governance.

5. Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018)

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) is the first comprehensive intergovernmental agreement addressing international migration in all its dimensions. The Compact aims to strengthen migration governance through international cooperation while ensuring respect for the rights and dignity of migrants. It promotes safer migration pathways, improved documentation systems, protection against exploitation and trafficking, and measures to combat xenophobia and discrimination. While the Compact is non-binding, it provides important guidance for states seeking to develop more effective and rights-based migration policies.



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6. *Human Rights Council Resolutions on Migration*

The Human Rights Council has adopted numerous resolutions addressing migration-related human rights concerns. These resolutions have focused on issues such as the protection of migrants, combating xenophobia, ensuring access to asylum procedures, preventing arbitrary detention, and strengthening international cooperation. Through Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts, and Fact-Finding Missions, the Council has also examined migration-related human rights violations and provided recommendations aimed at improving protections for vulnerable populations. These efforts demonstrate the Council's growing recognition that migration is not solely a border management issue but also a fundamental human rights concern requiring international attention and cooperation.

Collectively, these initiatives reflect the international community's efforts to strengthen refugee protection, improve migration governance, and promote human rights-based approaches to displacement. While significant progress has been made, the continuing rise in global displacement demonstrates the need for stronger implementation, increased cooperation, and more effective responsibility-sharing among states.



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Questions a Resolution Must Address

As delegates formulate solutions, they should consider the following guiding questions:

1. How can states strengthen refugee protection mechanisms while maintaining national sovereignty and border security?
2. What measures can be implemented to ensure compliance with the principle of non-refoulement and prevent unlawful deportations?
3. How can asylum procedures be made more accessible, efficient, and consistent with international human rights standards?
4. What role should the international community play in supporting countries that host large refugee populations?
5. How can responsibility-sharing be improved to ensure that the burden of refugee protection is distributed more equitably among states?
6. What policies can effectively combat xenophobia, discrimination, hate speech, and social exclusion directed toward migrants and refugees?
7. How can governments improve access to education, healthcare, employment, and legal protection for displaced populations?
8. What alternatives to immigration detention can be implemented, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women and children?
9. How can international organizations, civil society groups, and governments strengthen cooperation in responding to migration crises?
10. How should the international community address emerging forms of displacement, including migration linked to climate change and environmental degradation?



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Delegates should ensure that proposed solutions remain realistic, internationally cooperative, financially viable, and consistent with existing international legal frameworks and the mandate of the Human Rights Council.

Further Research

Delegates are encouraged to supplement this study guide by researching the following areas:

International Legal Frameworks

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
- 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees
- Convention Against Torture (1984)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- Global Compact on Refugees (2018)
- Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018)

United Nations Resources

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

<https://www.unhcr.org>

- United Nations Refugees and Migrants Platform

<https://refugeesmigrants.un.org>

- Global Compact on Refugees

<https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/global-compact-refugees>



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- *United Nations Academic Impact – Refugees and Migrants Crisis*
<https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/refugees-and-migrants-crisis-solidarity>

Case Study Resources

- World Bank Case Study: Türkiye and the Syrian Refugee Crisis
<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents/reports/documentdetail>

Country-Specific Research

Delegates should research:

- Their country's immigration and asylum policies.
- Whether their country is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and/or 1967 Protocol.
- Refugee populations hosted by their country.
- National legislation concerning migration and refugee protection.
- Previous statements, voting records, and positions regarding migration-related resolutions.

- Domestic challenges and priorities relating to migration governance.

A strong understanding of national policy will be essential for developing realistic and effective solutions during committee proceedings.



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Suggest Moderated Caucus Topics

1. Assessing the legality of Safe Third Country agreements and forced deportations under international refugee and human rights law.
2. Combating xenophobia, hate crimes, discriminatory media narratives, and political scapegoating targeting migrants and refugees.
3. Evaluating international protection for people displaced by climate change, economic collapse, and generalized violence.
4. Addressing illegal pushbacks, border militarization, and protecting human rights at land and sea borders.
5. Preventing human trafficking, gender-based violence, and the exploitation of vulnerable migrants, with special emphasis on women and unaccompanied minors.
6. Ensuring access to legal representation, interpretation services, and fair asylum procedures before deportation.
7. Strengthening international responsibility-sharing, refugee resettlement, and financial support for host countries and humanitarian agencies.



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Conclusion

The global migration crisis represents one of the most significant human rights challenges of the twenty-first century. Record levels of displacement, combined with ongoing conflicts, political instability, discrimination, environmental pressures, and economic inequality, have created unprecedented challenges for governments, humanitarian organizations, and international institutions.

Forced deportations, xenophobia, and weaknesses within refugee protection systems continue to expose millions of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to serious risks and human rights violations. At the same time, host countries face increasing pressures on public services, infrastructure, and resources, highlighting the need for greater international cooperation and responsibility-sharing.

While significant progress has been made through international legal frameworks and multilateral initiatives, persistent gaps in implementation remain. Ensuring the protection of displaced populations requires not only humanitarian assistance but also sustained efforts to address the root causes of migration, strengthen protection mechanisms, combat discrimination, and uphold international human rights standards.



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As members of the United Nations Human Rights Council, delegates are encouraged to approach this agenda through a human rights-based lens while recognizing the legitimate concerns of states regarding migration governance and national sovereignty. Effective solutions will require balancing humanitarian obligations with practical realities, fostering international cooperation, and promoting policies that protect the dignity, safety, and fundamental rights of all individuals affected by displacement.

Ultimately, the success of the international community's response to the migration crisis will depend upon its collective commitment to solidarity, accountability, and the universal protection of human rights.
