QueenMUN 2026

Refugee Crisis and Forced Migration

Background Guide

QueenMUN 2026

Director's Welcome

Dear delegates,

My name is Victoria Bellhouse, and I am thrilled to serve as the Director of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) at Queen MUN 2026. On behalf of my Chair, Supriya Parhar, my Assistant Director, Zachary Eeles, and myself, I welcome you all to UNHCR.

Ever since I first joined my school's MUN club in Grade 6, I have been captivated by the unity and learning experiences that it has brought to me. Model UN has been invaluable to my academic and personal development, and I have loved every second of committee- even when being burned at stake during a Salem Witch Trials simulation! I hope to help cultivate that same eagerness and interest in each of you throughout this conference.

In committee this year, we will be delving into a deeply relevant topic: the Refugee Crisis and Forced Migration. This topic encourages us to think about the humanitarian impacts of our decisions and the responsibility we have to consider those who are less fortunate or privileged than we are. I encourage all delegates to think critically and research thoroughly about this issue and the obstacles surrounding it, as well as the solutions we might implement.

I am eager to meet all delegates and hear the contributions each of you will make as representatives of various countries with complex and diverse beliefs, policies and history. Whether Queen MUN is your first conference or your tenth, I am confident that all delegates will bring insightful and passionate ideas to this committee. I wish you the best of luck in preparation, and if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at vbellhouse@qms.bc.ca.

Sincerely,

Victoria Bellhouse
Director of UNHCR
Queen MUN 2026

Position Paper Policy

What is a Position Paper?

A position paper is a brief overview of a country's stance on the topics being discussed by a particular committee. Though there is no specific format the position paper must follow, it should include your country's background and history on the topic, any political and foreign policy on the topic, any governmental actions related to the topic, and potential solutions your government might suggest. Each position paper should not exceed one page, excluding works cited, and should all be combined into a single document per delegate (for double delegations this means only one delegate needs to submit the paper for both). For UNHCR, position papers, although strongly recommended, are not required. However, delegates who wish to be considered for an award must submit position papers. If delegates choose to write their position paper with the help of AI, they will also not be eligible to receive awards.

Formatting

Position papers should:
— Include the name of the delegate, their country, and the committee
— Be in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) with a 12-point font size and 1-inch document margins
— Not include illustrations, diagrams, decorations, national symbols, watermarks, or page borders
— Include citations and a bibliography, in any format, giving due credit to the sources used in research (not included in the 1-page limit). Citation style is not standardised
— Not be written by Large Language models (AI)

Due Dates And Submission Procedure

Position papers for this committee must be submitted by **11:59 PM PST on March 3rd, 2026**. Once your position paper is complete, please save the file as your **last name, your first name** (ex. Doe, Jane) and send it as an attachment in an email to your committee's email address, with the subject heading as "**Last Name_First Name_Committee_Position-Position Paper**"
ex. Doe_Jane_UNHCR_Saudi Arabia-Position Paper. Please do not add any other attachments to the email.
Your position paper should be submitted in **PDF format**; position papers submitted in another format such as a google or Word document will not be accepted. Each position paper will be manually reviewed and considered for the Best Researched award.

Please send all Position Papers to vbellhouse@qms.bc.ca. An example Position Paper is below.
Example Position Paper.docx

Timeline of the UNHCR

1921 – The first High Commissioner for Refugees – Fridtjof Nansen - is appointed by the **League of Nations.**

1922 – The Nansen Passport was introduced as the first international travel document for "stateless persons".

1947 – The International Refugee Organization was created to temporarily manage post WW2 Europe displacement.

1950 – The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established to help displaced Europeans on a three-year renewal basis.

1951 – The UN Refugee Convention is adopted, defining the term refugee, and establishing a policy of non-refoulment.

1956 – The UNHCR extends to provide aid during the Hungarian Revolution

1965 – The Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees is signed, officially extending the UNHCR's scope to cover the entire world.

1992 – The UNHCR conducts assistance in the Balkan region, marking a shift towards assistance in active combat zones.

2003 – The UN General Assembly removes the three-year renewal period, making the UNHCR permanent.

2018 – The Global Compact on Refugees is affirmed.

2022 – Global displacement exceeds 100 million people, largely due to the Russian – Ukrainian war.

2024 – The total number of forcibly displaced persons reaches 123 million people.

Background

The United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees was established in 1950 to help support Europeans displaced during WW2. In the decades after, the UNHCR was expanded to aid all refugees in the world and was made a permanent branch of the United Nations in 2003. However, the world has begun to hit some rather unfortunate milestones, including 100 million displaced people worldwide in 2022. This massive number of people who have nowhere to go is an issue that is being addressed differently worldwide.

The first approach is a far more restrictive policy, where refugees are selectively admitted, often in small numbers. This approach is a strong choice domestically. Large numbers of refugees can quickly overwhelm public services, including healthcare, education, and housing programs. Furthermore, the act of processing refugees, housing them, and providing them with basic services can be incredibly draining to a country's finances.

Other countries take on a far more inclusive approach, legalizing refugees as permanent residents, and focusing on integration into the workforce. This approach has several major benefits. The first is major workforce expansion. Large numbers of refugees can address labor shortages, especially in low-income jobs such as manufacturing. Additionally, there are long-term benefits. A US study found that refugees contributed a total of 123 billion more in state and local revenue than the initial costs to settle them. Moreover, Canadian refugees reported a 14% entrepreneurship rate, compared to the Canadian-born 12%, thereby creating more jobs (OECD Global Action, n.d.).

Outside of quantitative data, however, there are several perceived risks to taking on refugees. This can include refugees not assimilating into local cultures, instead forming their own enclaves with others of their culture, especially in the first years. Expansion within or an increase in the number of these enclaves can lead to tensions between country-born and immigrants, alongside paranoia as to the integrity of established communities and xenophobia. For these reasons, many countries attempt to regulate the number of immigrants taken on at once and sometimes try to disperse the refugees and other immigrants throughout the country.

However, an increase in refugees can lead to an enriched culture, with various cuisine options, celebrations, and a notable increase in volunteering and civic engagement. Furthermore, refugees

have one of the highest citizenship uptake rates than other immigrants and report a greater sense of belonging than native residents, showcasing a willingness to assimilate and a commitment to the country. For example, in Canada the citizenship uptake rate for refugees is 89%, which is nearly 40% higher than the average immigrant, and a 9% higher sense of belonging than Canadian-born (UNHCR Canada, n.d.). These statistics imply that refugees are actually beneficial to a country's society, rather than hindrance.

 Each country takes a slightly different approach, but the reasons stated above are often cited as rationale. Furthermore, public opinion typically influences government policies, with more monogamous or "melting pot" cultures less likely to accept refugees or cultural enclaves, while multicultural countries are more likely to. However, this can sometimes be taken to extremes, with enforcement agencies aggressively searching for refugees, checking ID, and sometimes detention and deportation, although the non-refoulment policy would remain in effect.

Enforcement

Regardless of whether a country takes a restrictive or open approach, enforcement is a critical issue. Refugees that enter a country through illegal means often end up impoverished, unable to find legal work, and are at a substantial risk of exploitation (UNHCR Canada, n.d.). This can have a massive impact on communities including increases in homelessness rates and drug usage.

There are international regulations that prohibit inhumane measures, such as the non-refoulment policy enacted under the UN Refugee Convention, where displaced persons cannot be deported to a country where they will face persecution. Additionally, Article 31(1) of the 1951 Refugee Convention prevents asylum seekers from being penalized for entering a country through irregular means so long as they make themselves known to authorities upon arrival and can provide sufficient justification(Costello et al., 2017). However, a country can still choose to deport refugees, often to a Safe Third Country, which is any country that a refugee passed through that they will not face persecution in, or a willing country where promises of safety are guaranteed. Furthermore, under Article 31(2) of the 1951 Refugee Convention, refugees can have their movement restricted in a country they are seeking to live in, such as detention, lengthy legal processes, or limits on where they can live. In this committee, delegates should consider

However, these acts which guarantee humane and reasonable treatment only extend so long as the refugee follows legal routes. However, if a refugee is turned away, but decides to stay, or arrives but fails to inform authorities, many of these protections are no longer required by international law. There are often severe consequences for illegal immigration, even as a refugee.

To clarify, it is NOT illegal to enter a country through irregular means, but failure to present to authorities IS illegal. For example, refugees in Canada can be fined up to $100,000, or be charged with 5 years of incarceration for misrepresentation or false documents, should they not inform authorities after admittance. A $25,000 fine is in effect for entering the country outside of legal pathways should they fail to make themselves known to authorities. However, many refugees are unaware of specific laws, and are additionally unable to access the internet, read or speak the country's languages, and face many other communication barriers preventing them from understanding relevant laws. This challenge can create major problems for refugees when law enforcement or immigration officers perform routine checks, and they are unknowingly in violation of several laws.

Current Situation

In the last five years, the refugee crisis has reached new milestones. As of June 2025, 117.3 million people had been forced to flee their homes globally due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order (UNHCR, 2025). Conflicts such as the ones in Russia-Ukraine, Sudan, and Venezuela have kept millions of people away from their homes for months or even years longer than intended, with over 20% of children separated from a parent or caregiver (UNICEF, 2023). This can prove especially problematic; many of the children are still very young and most do not have access to proper identification documents, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and more likely to be overlooked by formal protection systems. This greatly decreases chances of family reunification post-conflict. Additionally, individuals from countries with ongoing violence and political unrest face major obstacles in education, with less than half able to comprehend basic questions asked even in their mother tongue (Translators Without Borders, 2017). This exponentially contributes to the volume of low-income jobs held by refugees, especially in countries like Canada and the United States.

Climate disasters have also been a large contributor to the refugee crisis, having displaced 250 million people in the last 10 years (The Guardian, 2025). Incidents like floods, droughts, wildfires, and sea-level rise are turning thriving municipalities unlivable, and as global temperature and sea levels rise, these are slated to increase and even decimate major cities close to sea level such as Miami, Venice, and Jakarta by 2100 (World Economic Forum, 2019). Despite other causes contributing more to the crisis currently, environmental complications are expected to become one of the leading causes of the refugee crisis within decades.

There are at least 500 significant refugee camps worldwide, which house almost 25% of known refugees (UNHCR, 2021). However, the prevalence of these camps has not equated to high levels of quality or efficiency. For example, access to food and water is severely limited; much of what is available is often contaminated and causes highly threatening illnesses (ScienceDirect,

2021). Furthermore, subpar sanitation conditions can also quickly spread serious illnesses to many people, which is intensified by the limited number of medical personnel available to provide proper and timely treatment, leaving populations even more vulnerable, (UBC, 2019). Conditions in refugee camps are especially harmful to young children, whose health and opportunities are put at risk daily not only due to lack of access to basic needs, but low-quality education as well. Shortages of teachers and resources, as well as an overflow of school-aged refugees, has led to millions of illiterate children in refugee camps. Only 23% of refugee adolescents are enrolled in secondary school, and 39% do not even go to primary school (UNHCR, 2025) Organizations such as the UN World Food Program or WFP as well as UNHCR have attempted to stage interventions through sending resources and personnel to refugee camps for various purposes such as education, medical care, and food security. While these missions have been fairly successful in the short term, the long-term effects have often been minimal and still leave many refugees without basic needs or care.

Past UN Involvement

 Ever since its creation, the United Nations has played an extremely vital role in responding to refugee crises and forced migration worldwide. In 1950, the United Nations General Assembly created the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to provide international protection and help for the refugees, originally focusing on more than one million Europeans displaced after the war (UNHCR, n.d.`/ Britannica, 2026). One year later, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted, establishing the legal definition of a refugee and outlining the responsibilities of states toward those who leave places of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, or political opinion (UNHCR, n.d.). Contrary to the notion of enforced migration, the UN's role is humanitarian- it supports displaced populations but does not compel individuals to move.

The UNHCR's mandate has changed over time to meet the needs of more modern refugee emergencies across Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America (UNHCR, n.d./ UN.org, 2026). The agency works to ensure that refugees receive protection under international law, including the right to seek asylum, freedom from forced return to danger, and access to basic services (Belfer Center, 2026/ UN-NGLS, 2026). In addition to protection efforts, UNHCR mobilizes humanitarian aid, such as shelter, food, water, and healthcare, and coordinates with other UN representatives, national governments, and non-governmental organizations to deliver life saving help during emergencies like the conflicts in Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine (UN.org, 2026). They also promote durable solutions for displaced people, encouraging voluntary return to home countries, local integration in host states, or resettlement in third countries (Belfer Center, 2026/ UN-NGLS, 2026).

Despite these efforts, the scale of forced displacement has grown exponentially. By the mid-2020s, global forced displacement reached historical levels, with tens of millions fleeing war, persecution, and disaster (UN.org, 2026). The UN continues to advocate for stronger international cooperation and increased humanitarian funding to uphold refugee rights and address the complex challenges of these crises. While refugees returning home or integration into new communities is still a long-term goal, the UN's involvement is in protection and humanitarian response, not enforcing migration pathways for displaced populations.

Possible Solutions

Solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons have increased in recent years, with 1.6 million people returning to their home countries (UNHCR). However, almost all of these returns have been to just four countries, namely Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan, and Ukraine. While this is a considerable step towards alleviating the refugee crisis, many people have returned to their home countries because they face challenges in accessing basic rights and services in their host countries, (UNHCR, 2025), and in extreme cases, are being offered funds and transport to 'self deport' or go back to their country of origin (Homeland Security, 2024). Another notable roadblock is that so many already vulnerable people are returning to places that are still either physically unsafe or offer limited access to basic needs and human rights, essentially putting them back at 'square one' or undoing any progress they had previously made in reaching safety or a better quality of life.

However, these issues can be solved by establishing systems such as **voluntary repatriation,** a concept which is defined as the safe return of refugees or migrants to their home countries, ("Policy Framework and Implementation Strategy. UNHCR's Role in Support of the Return and Reintegration of Displaced Populations.," n.d.) To implement this, both source and host countries must understand and prepare for the fact that repatriation is not a simple reversal of displacement, but a complex process that requires individuals and communities to establish frameworks for rebuilding regions socioeconomically while also being cautious of remaining unrest and peril. Nations whose stances align with this approach should prioritize connecting with other countries to ensure safe and effective housing, education, and working environments for refugees who choose the path of voluntary repatriation.

Contrary to this, other main approaches include **resettlement** and **integration.** While resettlement has been largely successful in some nations, including Canada, Australia, United States, and Norway, which all have strong resettlement programs in effect, this concept has not seen as much success in countries closer to conflict zones. It is important to note that currently, less than 1% of refugees are resettled every year, but nearly 6% are in need of a Safe Third Country or STC annually (Beirens & Fratzke, n.d.). Emphasis must be placed on bettering the

services and strengthening the laws and regulations offered to refugees, as well as expanding the abilities and tools possessed by STC's in order to meet this goal.

Furthermore, integration is one of the most highly controversial topics when applied to the context of refugees. Primarily, the effectiveness of the approach is highly reduced by governments and groups who oppose the influx of refugees into their home countries. This influence leads to less access to healthcare, education, and other vital support systems for refugees, reinforcing the need for Safe Third Countries. Despite this, many steps can be taken to increase integration including reinforcing education programs, not only for refugees, but for native residents as well. Additionally, equitable access to education, housing, and healthcare are extremely relevant factors to consider when balancing the integration of refugees with maintaining the quality of life of citizens. Minimizing animosity is vital in a world where global conflict and unrest is interconnected, as tensions in one region can quickly escalate and have far-reaching political, economic, and humanitarian consequences across the globe.

Bloc Positions

Primary Host Nations:

Nations such as Colombia, Germany, Türkiye, Uganda, Iran, and Poland, which neighbor current and recent conflict zones including Ukraine, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Sudan, and DRC, are top destinations for refugees. These nations would support implementing increased legal pathways for refugees, more integration programs, and further attention to the root causes of displacement in order to balance safety of displaced persons with quality of life of their own citizens.

Western Nations:

Nations such as Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia have frequently expressed concerns about the significant housing, infrastructural, and economic drawbacks that come with accepting refugees in large numbers. As such, these nations would lean toward a more cautious approach and limited admission when it comes to permitting refugees to enter their borders, prioritizing the well-being of their countries' citizens and economies.

Source Nations:

In today's age, there are many nations which are major sources of refugees, including Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Sudan, Venezuela, Myanmar, Somalia, and the DRC. All of these nations, as well as numerous others from which many refugees originate, are considered 'developing countries' and experience significant political unrest. Due to this, these nations would favor emphasizing the protection, care, and long-term solutions for displaced peoples in a world of unrest.

Discussion Questions

What are some of the contributing factors leading to forced migration worldwide? What steps can be taken to reduce these elements?

How can the risks faced by forced migrants, such as limited access to basic needs and vulnerability to violence and/or trafficking, be diminished?

How do your nation's policies affect refugees and migrants within and outside of your country's borders?

How can nations balance economic stability and border security concerns with their obligations to international refugee and human rights laws?

What are the long-term consequences of restrictive asylum policies for both host nations and refugees?

In what ways can the international community better support countries that host the largest refugee populations despite limited resources?

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