

BACKGROUND GUIDE— Seniors Intermediate Double Delegate



GIISMUN

TOKYO 2025

CHAPTER 5

Committee:

UNGA

United Nations General Assembly

Agenda:

Addressing the global refugee crisis, focusing on improving international cooperation for resettlement programs, enhancing border policies, and ensuring equitable access to resources for displaced populations.

Hosted by Global Indian International School Tokyo
18th July ~ 23rd July 2025

Committee Overview

The Senior Committee of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) empowers high school delegates (Grades 9–12) to tackle the global refugee crisis, which now impacts over 114 million displaced individuals. In a collaborative double-delegate format, participants will focus on improving international cooperation for refugee resettlement, enhancing border policies, and ensuring equitable access to essential resources like housing, healthcare, and education. Against the backdrop of ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan, and Gaza, delegates will craft forward-thinking policy solutions that balance national interests with global responsibilities.

History of the committee

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and the only one where all 193 UN Member States have equal representation. It was established in 1945, following the end of World War II, under the Charter of the United Nations. As a platform for multilateral discussion, the UNGA plays a central role in promoting international peace, development, and cooperation, including in humanitarian affairs such as refugee protection.

1. Laying the Foundations (1945–1960s):

The UNGA began its mission during a time of global reconstruction after WWII. One of its first humanitarian actions was supporting displaced persons across Europe. In 1950, the General Assembly created the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to help Europeans displaced by war. The 1951 Refugee Convention, adopted under the UN's guidance, became the cornerstone of international refugee law.

2. Cold War and Decolonization (1960s–1980s):

As decolonization movements surged, many new countries joined the UN. The UNGA began addressing new waves of refugees from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It passed resolutions condemning apartheid and colonial oppression, which were major drivers of displacement. The Assembly increasingly focused on refugee protection, humanitarian aid, and the rights of newly independent nations.

3. Responding to Complex Emergencies (1990s–2000s):

After the Cold War, the world witnessed new types of refugee crises stemming from civil wars, ethnic conflicts, and state collapse (e.g., in Rwanda, the Balkans, and Somalia). The UNGA passed resolutions calling for protection of civilians, promoted regional peacekeeping, and supported UNHCR operations. The Millennium Declaration (2000) also stressed international cooperation in conflict resolution and humanitarian response.

4. Advancing Global Responsibility (2010–2016):

During this time, the UNGA responded to growing concerns over large-scale displacement caused by war, poverty, and climate change. The Syrian civil war alone displaced over 13 million people, drawing international attention. In 2016, the UNGA unanimously adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, reaffirming the rights of displaced persons and calling for fairer burden-sharing between nations.

5. A Platform for Global Solutions (2018–Present):

In 2018, the UNGA endorsed the Global Compact on Refugees, which aims to improve international cooperation, enhance refugee self-reliance, and support host communities. The Assembly continues to debate and pass resolutions that address the root causes of displacement, fund refugee aid programs, and call for the protection of migrants and asylum seekers. Today, the UNGA remains a vital forum for shaping global refugee policy, responding to crises in countries like Ukraine, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Venezuela.

Background Information

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) serves as the main deliberative body of the United Nations, representing all 193 Member States equally. It plays a leading role in shaping international policy on global peace, development, and humanitarian issues, including the protection and support of refugees and displaced populations.

The General Assembly responds to refugee crises through formal resolutions, high-level declarations, and multilateral frameworks. It supports the work of specialized UN agencies like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and UNICEF by adopting policy guidelines, encouraging funding commitments, and establishing long-term cooperation mechanisms.

While not directly implementing humanitarian operations, the UNGA enables countries to align their national laws and border practices with international refugee protection principles. It also convenes summits and special sessions to mobilize international attention and facilitate coordinated action on displacement-related issues. Throughout its history, the UNGA has spearheaded landmark efforts in refugee protection.

Notable achievements include the creation of UNHCR in 1950 and the adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which remains the legal foundation for refugee rights.

In 2016, the Assembly unanimously adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, setting the stage for the Global Compact on Refugees endorsed in 2018. These actions strengthened the international community's commitment to resettlement programs, humanitarian corridors, and fair support for refugee-hosting nations.

The General Assembly continues to serve as a key driver of multilateral cooperation, supporting solutions that uphold dignity, safety, and opportunity for displaced populations around the world.

Key definitions

- **Refugee:** A person who, because of a well-founded fear of persecution... is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable or unwilling to return (UNHCR,2025). In general, refugees are those who flee their country due to war, conflict or persecution.
- **Internally Displaced Person (IDP):** An individual forced to flee their home for similar reasons but *remaining within* their country's borders. IDPs have not crossed an international border and thus do not have a separate country's protection.
- **Asylum Seeker:** Someone who has left their country and formally requested protection as a refugee in another country, but whose claim has *not yet been decided*. Not all asylum seekers are ultimately recognized as refugees, but every refugee was once an asylum seeker.
- **Resettlement:** The transfer of refugees from the country where they sought asylum to a third country that has agreed to admit them and grant them permanent residence. This is one of the “durable solutions” when refugees cannot safely return home or integrate locally.
- **Non-Refoulement:** A core legal principle forbidding the return of refugees to any country where their life or freedom would be threatened. This means asylum seekers and refugees cannot be sent back to danger.

- **Stateless Person:** Someone who is *not considered as a national by any country under its laws*. Stateless people lack citizenship and the legal rights of nationality, which can compound hardship when displaced.
- **Humanitarian Corridors (Safe Passages):** Agreements, often between warring parties, to establish safe routes and times for civilians to leave conflict zones or receive aid. These are limited humanitarian measures (e.g. evacuation corridors) to protect civilians and deliver assistance.
- **Durable Solutions:** Long-term solutions to end a refugee's displacement. They include voluntary return to the home country when safe, local integration (becoming a permanent resident or citizen of the host country), or resettlement to a third country. The goal is to allow refugees to rebuild normal lives in safety and dignity.

Agenda Overview

The agenda and the committee's aim/targets

Agenda: Addressing the global refugee crisis, focusing on improving international cooperation for resettlement programs, enhancing border policies, and ensuring equitable access to resources for displaced populations.

The global refugee crisis represents one of the most urgent humanitarian challenges facing the international community today. As of mid-2023, more than 117.3 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide due to conflict, persecution, and disasters, including 36.4 million refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2023a).

Many of these individuals face unsafe journeys, limited access to services, and legal uncertainty. Host countries carry a disproportionate burden, often lacking the infrastructure or support to provide long-term care. This agenda aims to enhance international cooperation on resettlement programs, improve border and asylum policies, and ensure equitable access to health care, education, and employment for displaced populations.

Despite the international framework provided by the Global Compact on Refugees, global resettlement remains far below need. In 2023, only 158,700 refugees were resettled, though over 2 million were identified as in urgent need (UNHCR, 2024a). Climate-related displacement is also on the rise, with projections suggesting up to 216 million internal climate migrants by 2050 (World Bank & IOM, 2021).

Discussion Points

- **Burden-Sharing Mechanisms:** How can high-income states help countries hosting large refugee populations? Consider resettlement pledges, funding support, and private sponsorship schemes.
- **Legal Protections and Asylum Procedures:** What changes to national or international law could improve access to asylum and protection (e.g. speeding up processing, ensuring legal aid, combatting refoulement)?
- **Funding and Resources:** How should the international community fund refugee resettlement and humanitarian aid? Consider expanding contributions to UNHCR, humanitarian pledges, or development aid tied to refugee hosting.
- **Border Security vs. Human Rights:** How can countries secure their borders while still upholding obligations to asylum seekers? Debate measures like safe disembarkation, reception centers versus strict deterrence.
- **Inclusion in Services:** How can refugees be included in national education, health care and labor markets? For example, granting work permits or school enrollment, and what international support is needed?
- **Climate Change and Displacement:** Should climate-induced displacement be addressed as part of this agenda? Discuss links between climate disasters and migration, and whether new international mechanisms or recognition (e.g. as migrants) are needed.
- **Regional Cooperation:** What roles should regional bodies (the EU, African Union, ASEAN, etc.) play? Consider regional resettlement programs, common asylum policies (like the EU's Dublin rules), or cross-border aid.
- **Public Attitudes and Xenophobia:** How can misinformation or political resistance to refugees be countered? Consider education campaigns, positive refugee stories, and media oversight.
- **Statelessness and Long-Term Displacement:** How to handle people who have no nationality or whose refugee status persists for generations (e.g. Rohingya, Palestinians)?
- **Private Sector and Civil Society:** What innovative solutions can NGOs and businesses offer (e.g. employment programs, tech for registration, social sponsorship)?

Issues Faced by the Committee

Divergent National Interests

- UNGA can recommend solutions, but enforcement depends entirely on Member States.
- Some countries are unwilling to accept refugees or resist external influence over their immigration policies.
- In 2018, delegations like Hungary emphasized that refugee-related commitments must remain voluntary to preserve national sovereignty.
- Global frameworks such as the Global Compact on Refugees are non-binding, relying on political goodwill rather than legal obligation.
- The 1951 Refugee Convention is not uniformly applied, leading to inconsistent national contributions and weak global coordination.

Resource Constraints

- The economic burden of hosting refugees falls largely on developing countries.
- According to UNHCR, 75% of refugees live in developing nations with limited capacity to provide services like education, healthcare, and employment.
- UN appeals are frequently underfunded, with many donors prioritizing other crises or lacking awareness.
- UNHCR often receives only a fraction of its requested budget, leading to critical shortages in food, shelter, and medical care.
- Even wealthier countries may face integration challenges, especially when public opinion toward refugees is negative.

Complex & Overlapping Crises

- Refugee displacement is now caused by multiple overlapping emergencies: armed conflict, climate change, pandemics, and economic instability.
- The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted asylum systems and halted resettlement programs as borders closed and resources were redirected.
- Climate change is projected to drive future displacement through droughts, flooding, and extreme weather.
- Coordination between agencies like UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF, and WHO is complex, and their missions often compete for limited funding.
- The committee must navigate shifting priorities, limited resources, and the need for cohesive global response strategies.

UN Response (Actions taken)

The United Nations has played a leading role in addressing the global refugee crisis by setting standards, creating support systems, and encouraging international cooperation. Below are five of the most important actions the UN has taken to respond:

- **Creation of UNHCR (1950):** The United Nations General Assembly created the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to help people displaced by World War II. Although it was originally intended as a temporary agency, its mandate has been renewed many times due to continuing crises. Today, UNHCR works in over 130 countries, helping refugees and internally displaced people with protection, shelter, food, and legal aid.
- **1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol:** Under the leadership of the UN, countries adopted the 1951 Refugee Convention, which defines who a refugee is and outlines the rights of refugees and responsibilities of host countries. The 1967 Protocol expanded these protections to apply globally, not just in post-WWII Europe. These remain the most important legal frameworks for refugee protection today.
- **New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016):** In response to record-high global displacement, all UN Member States came together to adopt this declaration. It reaffirmed the right to seek asylum and committed countries to stronger cooperation in helping refugees and migrants. It also led to the development of more detailed global agreements, including the Global Compact on Refugees.
- **Global Compact on Refugees (2018):** Endorsed by the General Assembly, this compact provides a framework for shared responsibility. It encourages countries to open more resettlement opportunities, support refugee-hosting nations, and help refugees become self-reliant. Although not legally binding, the compact has guided many national and international refugee policies.
- **UNHCR Field Operations and Resettlement Work:** UNHCR supports displaced people around the world through direct humanitarian aid and coordination with governments. In 2023, UNHCR helped resettle over 158,000 refugees to safe third countries and supported voluntary returns for many more. Its staff also helps provide refugee children with access to school, clean water, and basic healthcare.

Scope of Debate

Possible Caucus Questions:

- How can the UNGA facilitate more equitable responsibility-sharing among host countries for refugee resettlement and integration?
- Should there be a binding international framework for refugee quotas per country, and if so, what mechanisms would ensure compliance?
- How can border security policies be strengthened without violating international human rights standards for asylum seekers?
- What role should emerging economies and non-traditional host nations play in future refugee resettlement programs?
- How can international cooperation be enhanced to ensure consistent access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities for displaced populations?
- In light of climate-induced displacement, how should the definition of ‘refugee’ evolve, and what policy frameworks are needed to address this emerging category?

Sources / Useful websites

- “Figures at a Glance.” UNHCR, UNHCR, 2024, www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html.
- “Global Compact on Refugees.” UNHCR, UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html. Acc
- “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023.” UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/global-trends. Accessed 10 May 2025.
- “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.” United Nations, www.un.org/en/ga/71/meetings/migration.
- Amnesty International. Refugees and Migrants Rights: Annual Report 2023/24. Amnesty, 2024. www.amnesty.org.
- World Bank. Forced Displacement and Development: Data and Statistics 2023. World Bank Group, 2023. www.worldbank.org.
- “Climate Change and Disaster Displacement.” IOM, International Organization for Migration, www.iom.int/climate-change-and-disaster-displacement.