

United Nations of  
High Commissioner for Refugees  
(UNHCR)

Refugees and the Impact on COVID-19



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

Dear Distinguished Delegates,

It is our pleasure to greet you to the seventh annual King's MUN conference! Since the beginning of our journey in 2013, King's MUN has created the opportunity to debate and learn more about the world. With a range of committees branching from tutorial to advanced, delegates with all levels of experiences have an opportunity to grow their MUN abilities.

Model United Nations is an internationally recognized forum for debate that simulates the United Nations. Delegates from around the world are encouraged to debate and attempt to resolve pressing issues that affect the global community. Through MUN simulations, students are able to develop and refine their skills in research, public speaking, critical thinking, and writing, amongst other practical skills that can be extremely useful in future endeavours.

This year the world has completely changed, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected many ways of life. The new world of social distancing has led to significant changes in the world, including King'sMUN having its first ever online conference. At King's Christian Collegiate, we have come to recognize the significant impact that Model UN has had on our students and have dedicated ourselves to growing our own club as well as spreading our knowledge and passion to schools and communities. In light of the pandemic, our network has greatly expanded, increasingly becoming involved with conferences and summits around the world. Through developing our awareness regarding international and geo-political relations, we have been able to deepen our insight into some of the world's most compelling issues and encourage conducive and beneficial discussions around these topics.

Since the beginning of our Model UN journey, we as Secretary Generals have been able to strengthen our academics, improve our interpersonal skills, and develop a more complete worldview and appreciation for international cultures and populations. We are so proud of how inclusive, supportive and dedicated our group has become and cannot wait to see King'sMUN continue to grow exponentially in the upcoming years. Even with the extremely different circumstances we are currently in, we strongly believe this conference will be an amazing experience, and hope that you can walk away with a greater knowledge of the world and stronger skill sets.

We are once again extremely excited to welcome each and everyone one of you at the seventh annual King'sMUN conference. We look forward to seeing you on Friday February 26th and Saturday, February 27th, 2021.

Sincerely,

Ivana Gotovac and Zeeshan Pervaiz

Secretary General, 2020/2021

King'sMUN

### **Purpose of United Nations (UN):**

The United Nations was created in 1945 after world war two ("WW2"), their purpose is to maintain peace and security in the world. This is carried out by preventing conflicts, helping both parties in conflict and creating conditions for peace to flourish and be maintained. The United Nations work to protect human rights around the world. They have done this by creating a declaration of human rights that must be followed and enforced. This has created a fundamental and necessary minimum standard of life that has benefited many people. The UN also has a council that focuses on humanitarian aid. With the declaration of human rights that was created the UN also backs up by giving aid in crisis to the most vulnerable. This ensures the basic human rights are met. The UN is passionate about Sustainable development goals ("SDG") which are sustainable development goals. These goals are crucial for the success of earth as they will benefit everyone. These goals are targeted and are extremely important to the UN as they invest a lot of resources into them. The UN currently has 17 goals and are working towards achieving these goals. An example of a goal would be to end all forms of poverty. The last focus of the UN is to uphold international law. This can be carried out by the international court of justice, multilateral treaties and by the UN Security Council. The UN Security Council can approve peacekeeping missions to send troops where the human rights are not being met or to stabilize a conflict to prevent it from escalating further.



### **Purpose of United Nations of High Commissioner for Refugees ("UNHCR"):**

The purpose of the UNHCR is to work with and assist refugees internationally. Their goal is to assure that everyone gets the right to seek asylum or refuge in a state, with an option to go back home or settle in a new country. This is carried out by helping people in the forms of providing the basic needs for people. They provide sanction, clean water, shelter, blankets, household items and occasionally food. Additionally the UNHCR provides travel and assistance packages for those who are returning home. For the people that resettle they are given access to income generated projects. These projects help people get a livelihood and transform their lives.

### **Background of UNHCR:**

The UNHCR was created in 1950 for the purpose of helping millions of Europeans whose homes were destroyed and were displaced after WW2. They helped these people immigrate safely and provided the basic needs for them. The UNHCR was given 3 years to help these people and then disbanded. With this work the UNHCR was given a Nobel Peace Prize for its work in Europe. Soon after this the UNHCR faced a larger issue with the Hungarian revolution which led 200 000 people to flee to Austria. The UNHCR helped resettle these people which led to the creations of many organizations that would help deal with the refugee crisis. During the 1960s the UNHCR worked in Africa as it was unstable which led to a refugee crisis. In addition the UNHCR worked to help people in Latin America and Asia over two decades. This work proved to be significant as the UNHCR was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 1981 for its work in Latin America. With the start of the 21 century the UNHCR led the charge in helping the refugee crisis in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The UNHCR has also helped people who were internally displaced and stateless find better lives. The UNHCR has also created the 1951 Refugee Convention which is an international law that helps protect refugees from being returned to their original country if they are under threat. The UNHCR has significantly grown since

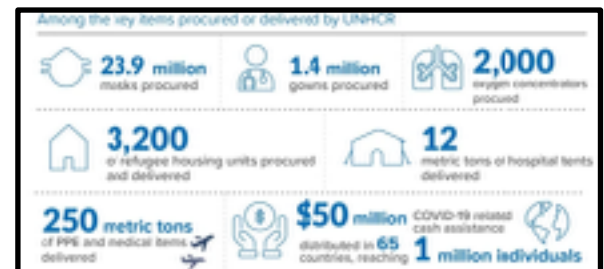


1950 and has 17,324 workers in 135 countries. The initial funding for the UNHCR was US \$300 000 and has now grown to US \$8.6 billion in 2019. It is apparent that whenever a crisis occurs the UNHCR can be counted on to uphold refugees rights.

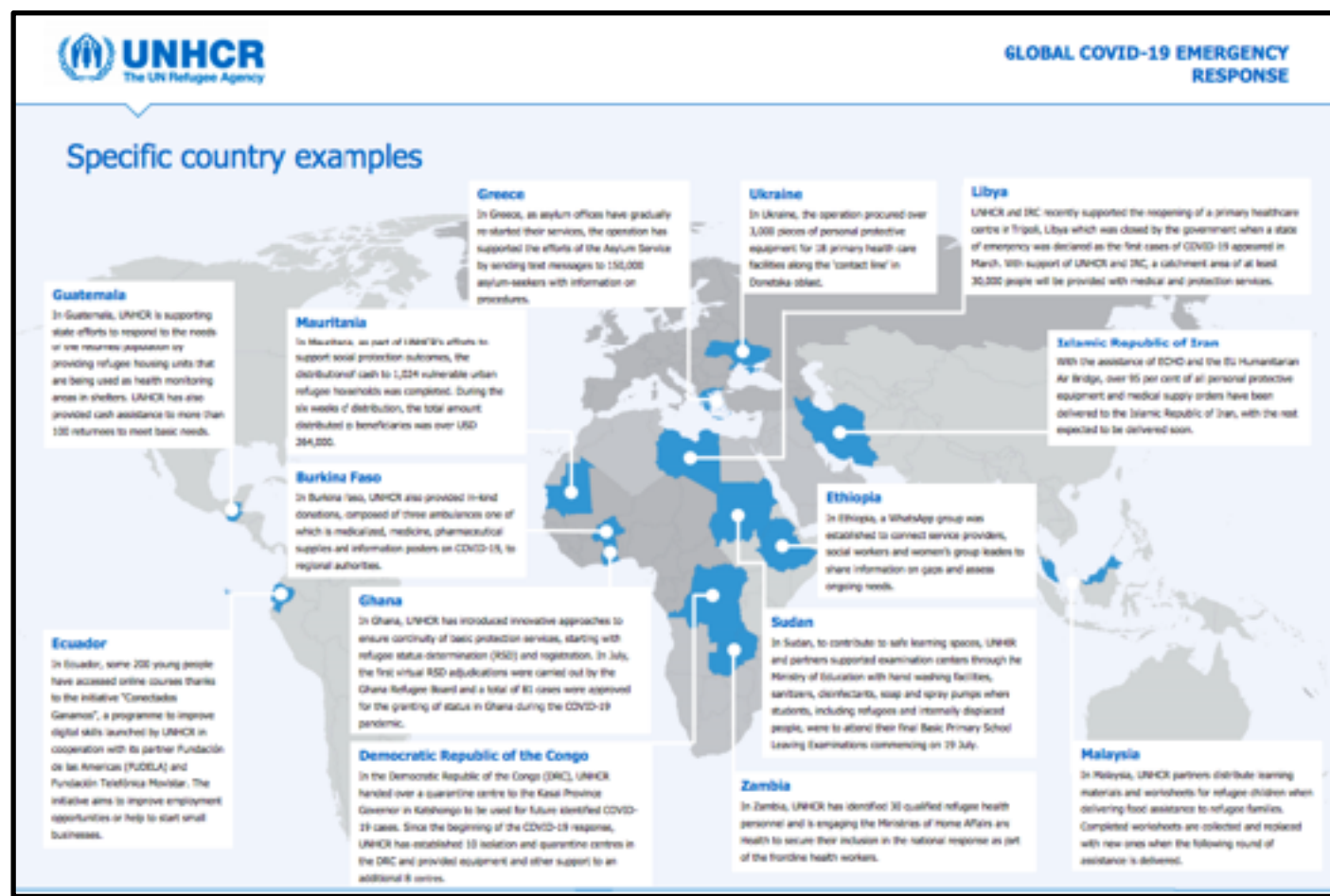
### **Refugees and the impact of COVID-19:**

Refugees are having a tough time as the camps that they are in only meet their basic requirements. This leaves these people extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 as the camps have a high population density and share many amenities. COVID-19 has affected everyone but it has affected some groups disproportionately to others. The refugee camps do not permit safe COVID-19 protocols that can be followed. The camps lack soap, face masks and ways to practice social distancing. These basic measures can be proven to be life saving but simply cannot be applied in the camps due to poor infrastructure and high population density. Along with the larger risk of COVID-19 refugees face the lack of access to health facilities. For example in Lebanon refugees without documentation cannot access health facilities which leaves them completely on their own. Even if there are facilities open refugees often will lack the capital to pay for good quality healthcare. Just like anyone during the lockdown mental health is a priority to all. Refugees are already dealing with their mental health as refugees often move due to conflict which can come with traumatic experiences. This is heightened with COVID-19 as refugees are concerned with keeping their jobs during this pandemic along with not contracting the virus. COVID-19 has also stopped schooling for nearly all refugee children. Millions of refugee children are not in school which is significant as all children should have access to education. Refugee children already have it tough as they are often discriminated against at schools. An even larger issue is refugee girls going to school or going back to school. The Malala fund estimates that around half of the refugee girls in secondary school will not go back when schools reopen. Along with the closing of schools, borders also closed. This means that refugees are unable to seek asylum which is a humanitarian issue. When COVID-19 was most rampant 168 countries' borders were closed. This is a dangerous issue as it meant that people could not leave possible dangerous situations. All countries made no exceptions for refugees as they wanted to reduce the possible spread of COVID-19 from refugees traveling. Since the lockdown many jobs and industries have closed down which resulted in many refugees losing their jobs. This has significant development issues as it puts refugees back at square one with no job and no means to provide for their families. This means refugees will have to be on some sort of a well-fare program if available, which is not what they want. This combined with the COVID-19 can lead to complications as if a family member were to get infected who will pay for their treatment. Refugee families will have to substitute their food or rent money for health care bills. This will lead to significant development issues as this could lead to stunting which sets countries' development back. Overall it is apparent that COVID-19 has made refugees' lives significantly worse and the effects are large.

The UNHCR is addressing these issues through its relief system that is hoping to offset these issues. This is through meeting the needs of refugees via health care and economic needs. This is being done through giving soap, shelter and core relief items. The UNHCR is giving money to avoid the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 as well as ensuring the rights of refugees are being protected. Along with protecting refugee rights the UNHCR is providing governments with medical equipment and are making sure that refugees can get access to these facilities. The map below represents where the UNHCR is working to help refugees across the globe. Specifically in Sudan the UNHCR has done work to improve sanitation in schools. This was done by disinfecting areas, providing soap and COVID-19 testing centres. The main goal was to make sure refugees and internally displaced children could complete their basic primary school entrance exams. This is huge for a place like Sudan where education rates are low which allows people to get ahead if they can get some basic education. Along with the work in Sudan the UNHCR is currently working in Ecuador with the goal of providing education to teenagers during this pandemic. This was done by providing online learning for 200 teenagers. This initiative was to enhance people's digital skills to help small businesses get their product to market and to boost employment opportunities. The UNHCR has gone above and beyond time and time again through the initiatives it has created. These initiatives



help the people in these camps find jobs and allow them to be successful. If the UNHCR was never created the world would not look the same as it does today.



(Refer to [COVID- Background Guide](#) for more information)

## Conclusion:

COVID-19 is a huge issue that has created numerous logistical issues for the world. For refugees these issues are heightened because oftentimes they are ignored by the governments and treated as second class citizens. The areas that refugees are staying in do not permit safe COVID-19 protocols. They are crowded and share the same facilities with hundreds of people. This is the most crucial issue to be solved as COVID-19 will spread in these refugee camps which leaves refugees helpless. Along with creating COVID-19 safe living conditions, efficient and good medical facilities must be provided for refugees. Some refugees do not have documentation which means they cannot access healthcare facilities. The movement of people has stopped due to COVID-19 restrictions. This has led many people to not have the right to seek asylum. This causes many issues as peoples lives are at stake. This issue is very hard to address as governments have to protect their citizens against COVID-19 and are doing so but at the cost of refugees. The last issue that must be brought up is education for refugees. Since schooling has closed it has led to millions of children not having access to education. Education is a foundation for progressing society as it leads to opportunities and growth. Children need education to grow and giving refugees access to education during COVID-19 should be a high priority.

## Connections to sustainable development goals (SDGs) and specific targets:

The impact of COVID-19 on refugees fits into many SDGs as their quality of life in almost every aspect has declined. The first SDG that this issue relates to is SDG number one on poverty. Refugees who are in camps or who have moved out of camps are feeling the effects of COVID-19 in the economy. A lot of refugees have lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 restrictions as businesses are cutting costs or closing down. This means that





refugees who are providing for their family have suddenly lost their only income. Even worse some places where have no well-fare programs or employment insurance for refugees. This creates an impossible situation for refugees to provide which will result in greater poverty. This will delay the targets goals of SDG 1 as target 1.1 is to reduce the people living in extreme poverty . It will also slow the development of target 1.4 which is all men and women who are vulnerable or poor to have access to financial services and basic services.

Poverty ties closely to SDG 2 zero hunger. If families have no income coming in it makes the quality and quantity of food decrease as they

have to make ends meet. This can result in many issues such as stunting, wasting and infections. These issues should be major concerns as it can lead to generational stunting which stops the growth of countries. This relates to target 2.1 which is to end hunger and to ensure that vulnerable people have access to safe and nutritious food. This applies to refugees as not all will have access or the money for quality food.

Another concern for refugees is the access to health care which relates to SDG 3 good health and well being. Some refugees do not have documentation which poses an issue as some places healthcare can only be accessed with documentation. This means that these refugees cannot access healthcare which is a significant concern as their issues could be life threatening. Or refugees simply cannot afford health care which leaves them vulnerable if they are in need. This relates to target 3.8 which is to provide universal health care that is quality and affordable. This target is not being met as not all refugees have access to healthcare.

The next issue that ties into SDGs is the issue of access to education and the gender equality issue. This is a two part issue in that refugee children currently have no access to education which is a huge concern as everyone should have the opportunity to learn. Most schools have closed down for refugees and online learning cannot be accessed by most refugees. This means that these children are missing out on key skills that would have been developed in school. When COVID-19 ends there is a scary statistic that the Malala fund has stated which is that around 50% of refugee girls in school will not return to school. This will create a significant dent in the work of gender inequality as 50% of these girls will not be formally educated. This relates to target 4.1 which is access to free and quality education and target 5.1 which is to end all forms of discrimination towards women and girls.

COVID-19 closely relates to SDG 6 which is ensuring safe water and sanitation to all. In refugee camps people are in tight and crowded situations. People use the same facilities which means that it is a breeding ground for COVID-19 as it spreads in droplets and aerosols. This means that refugees are highly susceptible to COVID-19 as their sanitation is poor and there is high population density. This relates to target 6.2 which is to provide good sanitation. This target will not be met due to the overstretched local governments and UN, as this issue may be overlooked.

### **Further questions:**

- Which issue do you believe should be addressed first? Why?
- Do you think the government is doing enough to help refugees during COVID-19?
- Should countries take in refugees during COVID-19?
- Were you aware of some of the issues refugees have faced as a result of COVID 19?
- Do you think countries should focus their work internally during COVID-19 or allocate some funds towards refugees?

## **Bibliography**

“THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development.” *United Nations*, United Nations, [sdgs.un.org/goals](https://sdgs.un.org/goals).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “About Us.” *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/about-us.html](https://www.unhcr.org/about-us.html).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “Coronavirus Outbreak.” *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/coronavirus-covid-19.html](https://www.unhcr.org/coronavirus-covid-19.html).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “History of UNHCR.” *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/history-of-unhcr.html](https://www.unhcr.org/history-of-unhcr.html).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “Refugees and the Impact of COVID-19.” *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/events/campaigns/5fc1262e4/refugees-and-the-impact-of-covid-19.html](https://www.unhcr.org/events/campaigns/5fc1262e4/refugees-and-the-impact-of-covid-19.html).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “Who We Help.” *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/who-we-help.html](https://www.unhcr.org/who-we-help.html).

“What We Do.” *United Nations*, United Nations, [www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/](https://www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/).

[https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/28072020\\_UNHCR%20Global%20COVID-19%20Emergency%20Response.pdf](https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/28072020_UNHCR%20Global%20COVID-19%20Emergency%20Response.pdf)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sustainable\\_Development\\_Goals.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sustainable_Development_Goals.jpg)