



# UN HIGH COMMISSIONER ON REFUGEES

Topic: Urban Refugees





## From the Secretary General

Dear Delegates,

On behalf of the Secretariat, it is my honor to welcome you all to the 8th edition of PeruMUN, the largest and oldest high school MUN conference in our country.

In PeruMUN we believe in creating the citizens our country needs. Citizens who don't only ask for change, but lead the way to change through innovation, creativity and diplomacy. We are committed to make this PeruMUN truly memorable. Expect high quality academic content, a competitive climate and distinguished experts from international organisations, who will provide insights on the topics addressed in each committee. At PeruMUN, delegates will have the opportunity to share ideas, contribute solutions and promote change, all of this in a supportive learning environment provided by our wonderful team of Directors, Assistant Directors and Moderators.

Our mission as Secretariat is to provide an international level experience and give you the tools to achieve academic and personal growth. We strive to do our best to close the ever expanding education gap through an equal opportunity environment, where delegates from different backgrounds can share their own experiences and enrich each other with their own cultural heritage.

As Secretary General, I hope PeruMUN will raise awareness on the different subjects that plague our country today, such as: corruption, gender inequality, domestic abuse and xenophobia. Furthermore, I hope that this newfound awareness can translate into change through concrete actions. As Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg have taught us, it is never too early to advocate for better policies and demand a response from our political representatives.

If I can assist you with further questions or comments, do not hesitate to contact me.

We are excited to meet you and see you soon!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alessp'.

Alessandra Pinto  
Secretary-General

Peru Model United Nations 2019

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# UN HIGH COMMISSIONER ON REFUGEES

Topic Area: Urban Refugees

Dear Delegates,

My name is Andrea Ho and it is my privilege to be your director on the United Nations High Commission on Refugees. Currently, I am a third year law student at the Universidad de Lima (UL) and I work in Garrigues Law Firm as an intern in the Labor and Employment Department. To tell you a little bit about myself, in my free time I enjoy dancing, hanging out with my friends and trying out Lima's variety of restaurants. My MUN career began in my junior year of high school. Since then, my passion for MUN only got stronger as not only I grew as a delegate and a person, but I met incredible people who I have the fortune to call my friends today. That is the reason why, last year, I joined Peruvian Universities MUN Team and had the incredible opportunity to travel to Madrid, Spain to debate at Harvard World Model United Nations 2019.

For this committee, considering it is a deeply relevant topic and one that requires deeper discussion due to its complexity, I am expecting substantive debate, realistic proposals, enthusiasm and teamwork from you. In case you have any doubt, feel free to contact me through: [andreaochen@gmail.com](mailto:andreaochen@gmail.com).

Best Regards,

*Andrea Ho*

Andrea Ho Chen  
Director, UNHCR

Peru Model United Nations 2019

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# UN HIGH COMMISSIONER ON REFUGEES

Topic Area: Urban Refugees

Dear Delegates,

It is my biggest pleasure to welcome you all to PeruMUN's 2019 United Nations High Committee. My name is Juan Pablo Muñoz and I will be your Assistant Director during this challenging, and, hopefully, entertaining weekend.

I started doing MUN when I was 15 years old going to my first conference without having the slightest clue about how anything worked. Since then, I would say that I've followed a rather standard route of growth for a MUNer. I went to multiple conferences during the previous years and, currently, I am part of the Peruvian Universities' team for WorldMUN 2020 in Tokyo. I have tried numerous techniques and strategies in committees trying to understand what best suited me and, in the process, I gained not just marvelous experiences but friendships that have lasted to this very same day. I could very well list every aspect that MUN has changed in me, but I would be short in words, since I dare to say that MUN has molded a great part of who I am and I how I interact with the world we live in. I would consider myself what many would call a "gimmick delegate", having used numerous props in conferences that have led me to earn numerous nicknames such as "Gold Coin delegate", the "Lollipop guy" (both of which I'm still called by some) and more. I also highly value content, so I will be expecting to hear new, yet relevant, information in the committee that is not taken out of the study guide.

If you have any doubts, do not hesitate on contacting me, and I'll do everything in my power to clear them. I truly hope this will be a great experience for all of you and let's make PeruMUN 2019 UNHCR's Committee an unforgettable experience for all of us.

Best Regards,

*Juan Pablo Muñoz*

Juan Pablo Muñoz

Assistant Director, UNHCR

Peru Model United Nations 2019

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## INTRODUCTION

Imagine one day being obliged to leave your country: abandoning all of your relatives without seeing them again and going to another place where your destiny is uncertain. Sadly this is something that 68 million refugees are currently living, and that's why discussing this topic, specifically in urban zones, will be very important. It seems logical that the refugees who live in the cities have better conditions than the ones who are in rural zones, but, in reality, 60% of the global refugee population resides in cities, in precarious conditions and beyond the reach of most humanitarian aid. Observing extreme cases like that of some African countries shows that the situation needs cooperation from various states and in this committee we will seek to achieve that in order to stop the situation's continuous growth.

## HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (also known as UN Refugee Agency) is one of the programmes of the United Nations and it is in charge of the assistance and protection of refugees at the request of a country or the UN itself. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created in 1950, during the aftermath of the Second World War, to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes. The start of the 21st century has seen UNHCR help with major refugee crises in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. To achieve its goal, the UNHCR engaged in activities both in the countries of interest and in countries with donors. UNHCR's mandate is defined by the 1950 UNHCR Statute. Discussion among members is done in a series of roundtables regarding the problems refugees have and how to fix them. During its period of activity, the Commission has helped well over 50 million refugees to restart their lives.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, 66 million people worldwide have been forcibly displaced from their homes. Of these, 23 million are refugees: people who have fled their home country. Across the world, giant camps have been installed in order to accommodate this massive growing influx of refugees. Nevertheless, it should be noted that most refugees do not live in camps. What is the reason behind this preference and where do they live instead?

Camps are considered a viable option for temporary accommodation as these can effectively concentrate and control large masses of people in one place. Moreover, these are easy to install, adapt to the

growing needs or emergencies and expand to cope with a sudden urge of new arrivals. Host governments and aid agencies can quickly build tents to house refugees, distribute food rations and set up clinics and schools. For governments, camps are preferred to keep refugees in because they can easily be counted, registered, screened to make sure they do not present a threat to the hosting country, and cordoned off from the local population.

However, life inside refugee camps can turn to be miserable. Usually camps are located in remote areas, generating difficulties for refugees who seek for employment. Residents usually struggle to find work, and thus become dependent on handouts. Therefore, most refugees avoid camps. The UN estimates that 69% instead opt to live in towns and cities. This can translate into refugees preferring to have more job opportunities even though it reduces chances to seek for aid given in camps in terms of health, education or even security. Regarding this issue, The UN Refugee Agency issued a new policy guidance in 2014, emphasizing that camps should only be temporary and urging that refugees should be integrated into their host communities whenever possible.

In general terms, urban refugees are distinguished from refugees living in camps as live in cities autonomously, generate their own incomes and attempt to build a better future for themselves. However, this condition exposes urban refugees to several imminent dangers such as exploitation, discrimination or detention; they can even be forced to compete with the poorest local workers for the worst jobs. Employers often exploit refugee workers' dire situation and pay unfair wages, demand long working hours, or expose refugees to dangerous working conditions. This goes unreported because refugees fear identification and possible detention or deportation. Due to the lack of regulations in the informal economy and lower wages, refugees struggle to support themselves and their families. To avoid exploitation, a number of refugee groups have procured fake documents and/or pursued entrepreneurship.

For urban refugees, employment in the informal sector is particularly common. In countries that have not ratified the 1951 Convention or that have not afforded refugees the right to employment, many refugees seek work informally to keep their refugee status hidden. Still the term "Urban refugee" is not legally recognized by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees nor its Protocol. However, the UNHCR has adopted a '

Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas' in 2009.

In urban centres, assistance to refugees can be inefficient and insufficient to meet basic needs. Therefore, urban refugees maintain a higher degree of self-sufficiency than those in camps. Refugees settle in urban centres to avoid dependence on rations, boredom, hopelessness, hardships and restrictions that prevail in camps. They use their skills and pursue opportunities that could provide greater economic resources, such as education for their children. This is an important indicator to gather information regarding the motivation for urban settlement of refugees. Refugees who previously lived in urban centres and have no knowledge of farming do relatively poorly in camps or rural areas, yet do quite well in urban areas where they can use their education, skills and expertise.

In the past, it was commonly thought that many refugees living in cities were young men with the skills to survive on their own and it received confirmation in the widespread assumption within UNHCR that urban refugee populations are composed predominantly of young, single males. The 1997 policy statement says that it explicitly endorses this perception "unlike other refugee populations, the majority of refugees in urban areas are generally male: the proportion of family groups is often lower than usual". Nevertheless, today, according to UNHCR, the urban refugee population worldwide is very diverse, including a large number of women, children, and older people who have a variety of different needs due to their vulnerable condition. Issues regarding living conditions often include: lack of access to services, health, education and exposure to xenophobic attitudes in the host country.

Regarding the 1997 Policy statement, many criticized the approach it took for improving urban refugees living conditions. The Policy advocated for reducing the assistance and promoting "self-reliance", as it was concerned that providing this aid could unintentionally attract refugees to cities. This concern was based on arguments such as the provision of allowances and refugee-specific services to urban locations being expensive, hard to administer and could be creating a long-term dependence on the Commission. On this basis, it concludes that "as a rule, UNHCR's assistance should be reduced to a minimum". There is, of course, no justification for providing assistance to refugees if they are not in need of it. However, the 1997 policy failure to recognize that urban refugees may find

themselves in a critical situation which requires continuous UNHCR aid and support is evident.

Thus, while recognizing the need to address the issue of urban refugees in a more comprehensive manner, UNHCR replaced the 1997 policy statement with the UNHCR Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas in 2009 and the UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps in 2014. The first document focused on ensuring the recognition of cities as legitimate places for refugees to reside and exercise their rights and maximizing the protection space available to urban refugees and the humanitarian organisations that support them. Meanwhile, the second's purpose was mainly to refocus attention on refugees living in camps and extends the principal objectives of the urban refugee policy to all operational contexts.

As the world's premier organization dedicated to the assistance of refugees and asylum seekers, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees has pushed towards including urban refugees in their measures, as it was previously mentioned. However, UNHCR faces technical and logistical limitations in its efforts to offer protection to urban refugees. Firstly, some regions have a mere handful of refugee status determination officers responsible for deciding cases, or a UNHCR protection office of two or three people tasked with protecting hundreds of thousands of refugees. Consequently, the accompanying delays in processing times expose refugees to protracted periods of vulnerability. Secondly, UNHCR must cope with urban refugee populations of diverse nationalities and ethnicities which are undirected and widely dispersed. Thirdly, UNHCR efforts to protect and find solutions for urban refugees have also been hampered by their policy choices. Ultimately, UNHCR is bound to operate within the parameters of the host government policies.

## POSITION PAPERS

In present day, the increase of urban refugees in numerous areas of the globe, as you will see in the case studies, has created a new spotlight for these refugees in the eyes of the international community. Although the demographic for urban refugees has dramatically changed from men (usually fathers) being the ones migrating in order to support their families to individuals from both sexes and all ages being the ones moving as entire families look to escape the situation they are facing, many of the issues that urban refugees face remain the same. Urban refugees often suffer from labor related abuse as they have little to no bargaining power when discussing working conditions.



A lack of language skills may force urban refugees to face payments under the minimum wage, lack of any kind of benefits and forceful overlabor; in their desperate situation they cannot look for better opportunities easily. The employment situation for urban refugees leads to the second obstacle they face: discrimination. Urban refugees are usually accused by the local population of “stealing” jobs from the natives, the logic under this argument is that due to a lack of language as well as specialized skills, refugees tend to apply to low-skill jobs which will almost always hire the refugee thanks to the fact that they can be easily exploited. Although there are numerous pieces of evidence suggesting otherwise, and that refugees actually contribute to the economy of the host country, they are still the target of hate and discrimination. Figures in power, mostly politicians, often use urban refugees as a scapegoat to justify the main issues their countries are facing so they do not have to bring into attention other causes, namely corruption. This characterization of urban refugees, although not in all countries, can actually put the lives of urban refugees at stake. Hate crimes and police profiling are some of the most common ways in which urban refugees get caught in conflicts without engaging in any negative activity. Nonetheless, it is necessary to keep in mind the burden which host countries have to face due to these urban refugees. In most cases, urban refugees have access to public services such as health and education regardless of their current labor situation: if a large amount of them stay in a country which does not have the resources to support them, the host country can spiral into its own crisis.

## Venezuelan Refugee Crisis

Since 2016, Venezuelan refugees have flooded the entire South American landscape as well as the United States, escaping from a country in which their quality of life has been seriously compromised. The reasons behind the mass migration are rather complex, but overall, they can be summarized as a situation of massive inflation and political instability in which citizens were becoming unable to access basic goods, as well as being unable to oppose the government without fearing for their safety. Venezuelans' treatment varies dramatically from host country to host country, as their migration policies go from being rather lenient to being completely strict. Arguably, the current number one destination for Venezuelans is Peru, with over 800 thousand migrants currently living there. This high migration rate was caused mostly due to ex-president Kuczynski's proposed legislation in 2017, which offered all Venezuelans a Temporary Permit of Permanence (this legislation has since been reverted, making it

harder for Venezuelans to seek a life in Peru), an action that was received with international praise. Despite such a large amount of Venezuelans living in Peru, with over 80% living in the capital Lima, their presence has not been free of controversy. At the start, cases of xenophobia against Venezuelans were almost non-existent, as a sense of solidarity towards their South American neighbors was dominant in the Peruvian mindset. However, as the Venezuelan population increased exponentially, more clashes between locals and Venezuelans have appeared. Due to Peru's high informality rate, local informal workers confront migrants as they are seen as a threat to their current source of income. Furthermore, an increase in usage of public services by Venezuelans has increased the perception of them taking away resources that could be designated to Peruvians. Other countries such as Colombia and Brazil have a different approach towards Venezuelan migration. As both countries geographically limit with Venezuela, they were considered as obvious choices for most refugees. This led to a massive influx in the Venezuelan population in both countries, particularly Colombia, which holds the largest amount of Venezuelans of any country in the area. Both countries have, at some point, closed their frontiers with Venezuela in order to stop immigration, as they were unable to handle the sheer amount of new members in their cities. However, those who currently stay in these countries do receive access to public services and overall are treated in a fair manner. Countries that are further away from Venezuela, such as Chile and Argentina, have been far more strict with migration providing little to no assistance in order to enter their territories. They basically treated Venezuelans like any other migrant; in these situations, it can be argued that the only reason the label of “urban refugee” is still applicable is because of the reason for migration instead of how they are treated in the host country.

## POSITION PAPERS

### Countries from which refugees migrate

Countries from which urban refugees come from tend to be in rather unstable situations. Whether it is to political instability and/or persecution, armed conflict or an economic downturn, there will most likely be a strong reason for such a large amount of the population to seek escape. These countries may be looking for international assistance in order to solve the issues they're facing or take the opposite approach and deny international help in order to avoid any interference with their governments which may be committing actions that could be frowned upon.

**Countries with strong refugee migration policies**

This group contains the countries that currently host urban refugees. These countries may be looking for a higher regulation in refugee migration in order to not destabilize their own economies and societies. Countries that accept large amount of refugees often belong to the same region from which said refugees migrate; they are accepted due to a sense of solidarity towards their regional neighbours. These countries have strong policies that facilitate both the entry and quality of life for urban refugees, providing them with the same benefits as any other citizen and sometimes even more.

**Countries with few or no refugee migration policies**

It could be easily assumed that this group encompasses all the countries that do not care about refugees, however, that is not the case. First world countries tend to highly contribute towards refugee crises around the globe through donations that can be either monetary or resource-based. These countries believe that they should not accept large amounts of refugees as it would be detrimental and, therefore, they will mostly contribute with anything, except accommodation.

## QUESTIONS ALL RESOLUTIONS MUST ANSWER

1. Should the placement of refugees in urban areas instead of camps become the international standard on refugee management? If so, how can refugees currently in camps be transferred into urban areas?
2. How can the social issues that urban refugees face be mitigated? Is discrimination intrinsic to a large migration of refugees or can harmonious coexistence be reached between urban refugees and locals?
3. How can the labor issues that urban refugees face be mitigated? Is the private sector in their right to apply theory of labor demand and supply when hiring refugees or do they have a moral/legal responsibility towards these individuals?
4. To what extent should countries be expected to welcome urban refugees? Should countries prioritize their own stability, even if it means denying/controlling access to refugees?
5. Are the current legislations created by the UNHCR regarding urban refugees enough to efficiently manage the existent crisis? If not, how can these be improved in order to secure the safety and quality of life of urban refugees?

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