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General Assembly Third Committee Background Guide 2025

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2025 National Model United Nations New York Conference (NMUN•NY)! We are pleased to introduce to you our committee, the General Assembly Third Committee (GA3). Your committee's work is facilitated by volunteer staffers. This year's committee staff are: Director Sebastian Hieke and Assistant Director Jost Giesing (Conference A), and Director Catherine Tomczyk and Assistant Director Catherine Marie Abbott (Conference B). Sebastian holds a master's degree in Near and Middle Eastern Studies from LMU Munich. He is currently working with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence based in Vienna. Jost is currently pursuing an LL.M. in Business Law at Westphalian University, Germany. In addition to his studies, he works full-time on enforcing due diligence laws related to human and environmental rights along the supply chain. Catherine Tomczyk holds a Bachelor's in International Affairs and a Master's of Public Administration from the University of New Haven. Catherine Marie Abbott is graduate student at the Washington University's Elliot School of International Affairs for Security Policy Studies and Nuclear Policy. She currently works at the House of Representatives focusing on legislative analysis. The preparation of these materials was supported by Under-Secretaries-General Eric Lowe (Conference A) and Paul Gussmann (Conference B).

The topics on the agenda for this committee are:

1. Protection of and Assistance for Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons
2. The Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth and use the bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the conference, each delegation should submit a Position Paper by 11:59 p.m. ET on 1 March 2025 in accordance with the guidelines in the [Position Paper Guide](#) and the [NMUN•NY Position Papers website](#).

Two resources, available to download from the NMUN website, serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions:

- The [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#), which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions.
- The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#), which includes the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for this committee, please contact the Deputy Secretaries-General at dsg.ny@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Sebastian Hieke, Director
Jost Giesing, Assistant Director
Conference A

Catherine Tomczyk, Director
Catherine Marie Abbott, Assistant Director
Conference B



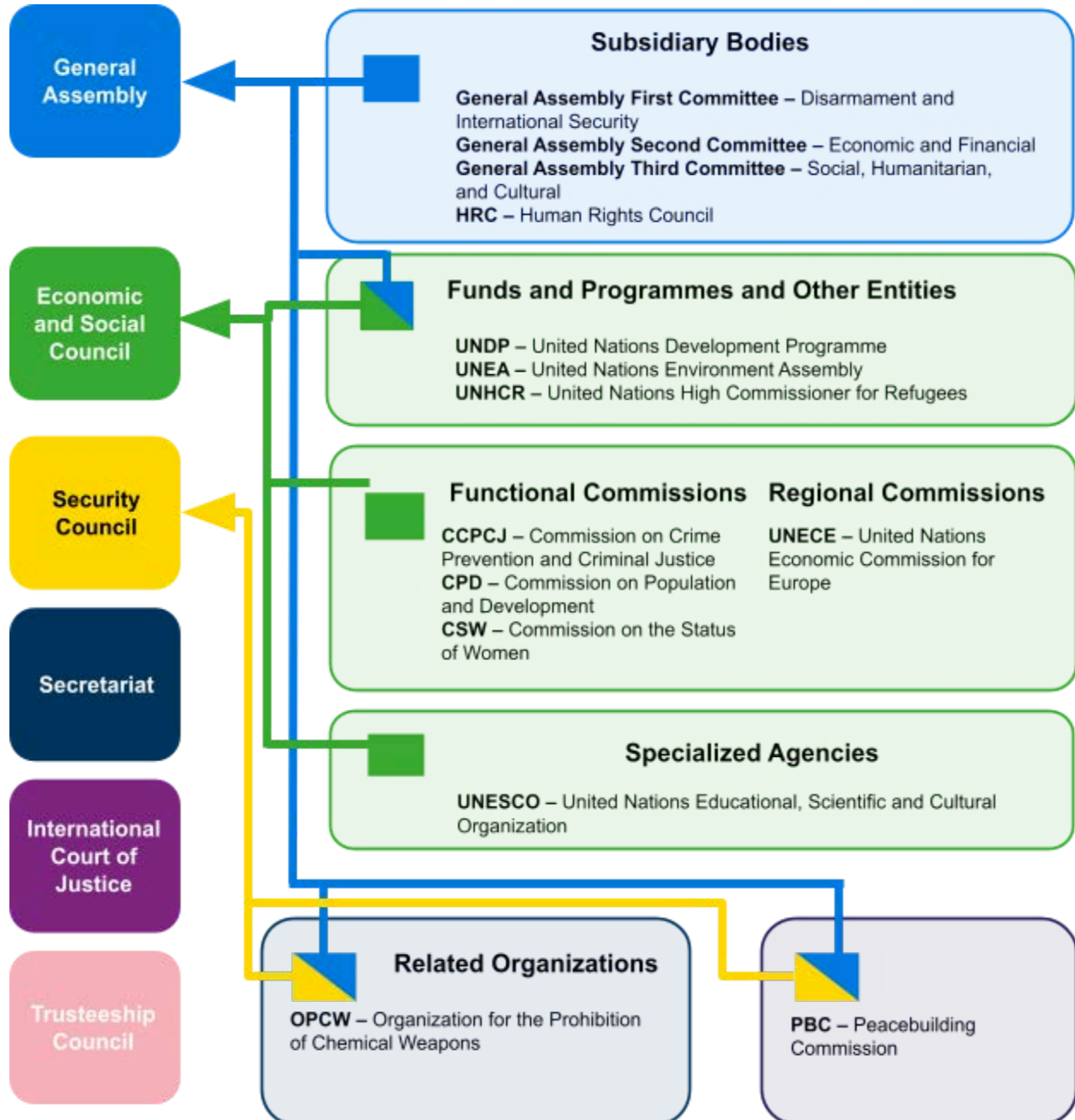
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United Nations System at NMUN·NY

This diagram illustrates the United Nations system simulated at NMUN·NY. It shows where each committee “sits” within the system to demonstrate the reportage and relationships between entities. Examine the diagram alongside the Committee Overview to gain a clear picture of the committee’s position, purpose, and powers within the United Nations system.





Committee Overview

Introduction

The General Assembly is the main deliberative and policy-making body in the United Nations system.¹ With its universal membership, the General Assembly makes policy recommendations to actors at all levels, including governments, regional organizations, and other United Nations bodies.² Its work is spread across six Main Committees, each of which discusses topics within a thematic area, adopting resolutions that are then considered by the broader General Assembly Plenary.³

The General Assembly Third Committee is mandated to discuss all matters related to social, humanitarian, and cultural affairs, including human rights issues.⁴ This involves a wide variety of agenda items, including: advancement of women; protection of children; treatment of refugees through the elimination of racism and discrimination; promotion of fundamental freedoms and the right to self-determination; indigenous issues; and a range of social matters such as issues related to youth, family, ageing, persons with disabilities, crime prevention, criminal justice, and international drug control.⁵

Mandate, Function, and Powers

The first article of the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945) established that one of the purposes of the United Nations is the achievement of international cooperation in the promotion of human rights.⁶ Its fourth chapter established the composition and capabilities of the General Assembly, and with it the mandate of the Third Committee.⁷ The Third Committee's work is also heavily influenced by the *International Bill of Human Rights* (1966), an overarching framework consisting of three fundamental human rights documents, namely the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the 1966 *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, and the 1966 *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.⁸

The General Assembly acts as a forum for dialogue and cooperation, providing general policy recommendations rather than carrying out operative tasks.⁹ Its policy recommendations are non-binding and their implementation is conducted by Member States, the United Nations Secretariat, and other United Nations bodies, each of which independently align their work with General Assembly resolutions.¹⁰ The General Assembly's resolutions are formal documents expressing the agreement and will of the

¹ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Main Bodies*. N.d.

² Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. pp. 1, 52.

³ United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld Library. *UN General Assembly Documentation*. 2024.

⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)*. N.d.

⁵ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. p. 73.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*; United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945.

⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Fact Sheet No. 2 (Rev.1), The International Bill of Human Rights*. 1966; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966.

⁹ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. p. 36.

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 52.



international community, and the Third Committee adopts the majority of its resolutions by consensus, meaning no vote is taken and no Member States have objections to the content.¹¹ In line with the *Charter of the United Nations*, the mandate of the General Assembly can be summarized as:

- The General Assembly **will generally**: make recommendations to Member States, the Security Council, other United Nations bodies and organs, United Nations specialized agencies, and other international actors; initiate studies and advance efforts to promote international cooperation; consider or request reports from other United Nations bodies and specialized agencies; establish United Nations observance days, create expert groups or commissions, formulate mechanisms for treaty negotiation, or refer an issue to the International Court of Justice.¹²
- The General Assembly **will not generally**: dictate the specific actions required for the implementation of policies it recommends, allowing Member States and other bodies to determine and implement operational details; create new bodies except in those rare instances where ubiquitous international demand requires the consolidation of existing bodies or where a concept and mandate have been fully developed, typically through years of negotiations; make recommendations on situations under consideration by the United Nations Security Council.¹³

The Third Committee tends to focus on high-level policy recommendations, calling for meetings or conferences on specific issues, and the initiation of studies, often relying on bodies with specific expertise.¹⁴ Additionally, the Third Committee examines the reports of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, which are independent human rights experts mandated to report and advise from a thematic or country-specific perspective.¹⁵

Governance, Funding, and Structure

The General Assembly is comprised of all 193 United Nations Member States, with observer status being granted to intergovernmental organizations and states without full membership.¹⁶ Each Member State receives a single, equal vote; observers may not vote on substantive items and most decisions require a simple majority.¹⁷

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 37, 52.

¹² *ibid.* p. 36.

¹³ United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld Library. *Are UN resolutions binding?* 2024; United Nations, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. *UN Women: The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.* N.d.; United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Welcome to the Human Rights Council.* 2024; United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations.* 1945.

¹⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly.* N.d.

¹⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council.* 2024.

¹⁶ International Service for Human Rights. *Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly: A Practical Guide for NGOs.* 2017. p. 7.

¹⁷ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly.* 2017. p. 13.



The Third Committee adopts approximately two-thirds of its resolutions by consensus and without a recorded vote.¹⁸ Its resolutions are passed on to the General Assembly Plenary for consideration in an annual report.¹⁹ The Third Committee's procedures are managed by a Secretariat and an elected Bureau.²⁰ The Bureau assists with opening and closing each meeting, managing the discussions, pronouncing decisions, assisting with drafts and documents, and ensuring compliance with the rules of procedure.²¹ The United Nations Secretariat also assists General Assembly committees by delivering substantive and logistical support.²² The Third Committee specifically considers reports from and engages in deliberations with the Human Rights Council and most human rights treaty bodies.²³ No subsidiary bodies report to the Third Committee.²⁴ All General Assembly meetings and events are funded through the United Nations regular budget.²⁵

¹⁸ *ibid.*; International Service for Human Rights. *Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly: A Practical Guide for NGOs*. 2017. p. 30.

¹⁹ *ibid.* pp. 37-38, 62, 68.

²⁰ *ibid.* p. 12.

²¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly (A/520/Rev.19)*. 2021. pp. 30-31.

²² Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017.

²³ *ibid.* pp. 73-74.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2024-25*. 2024. p. 412.



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United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966. Retrieved 20 October 2024 from: [http://undocs.org/en/A/RES/2200\(XXI\)](http://undocs.org/en/A/RES/2200(XXI))

United Nations, General Assembly. *Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly (A/520/Rev.19)*. 2021. Retrieved 20 October 2024 from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/520/Rev.18>

United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Welcome to the Human Rights Council*. 2024. Retrieved 20 October 2024 from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/about-council>

United Nations, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. *UN Women: The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women*. N.d. Retrieved 20 October 2024 from: <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2013/07/un-women-the-united-nations-entity-for-gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women/>



1. Protection of and Assistance for Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons

Introduction

Only 1% of displaced persons can return home, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).²⁶ In 2023, UNHCR reported that approximately 117.3 million persons were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, human rights violations, and climate change, including 43.4 million refugees and 68.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).²⁷ The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines displaced persons as those who had to forcefully leave their home to flee to a place within a state or to another state.²⁸ Under the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951) (Refugee Convention), refugees are individuals who have fled their country due to fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group, or political view and cannot return.²⁹ Those who return home are classified as returnees, losing their refugee status, working towards full reintegration into their host communities.³⁰ Similar to refugees, IDPs are individuals forced to flee but do not cross international borders.³¹ Several obstacles, such as limited access to legal protection, inadequate resources, and barriers to exercising rights, impede marginalized populations from fully participating in and benefiting from sustainable development.³² Although similarly situated, refugees, returnees, and IDPs do not receive the same international legal protections and assistance.³³ IDPs are not recognized as refugees, which results in their lack of specialized international legal status and protections.³⁴ Similarly, returnees fall under the jurisdiction of their home country and therefore lose vital safeguards, such as access to asylum and legal recourse against persecution.³⁵

Those forced to flee face heightened vulnerability.³⁶ According to UNHCR, forcibly displaced individuals, primarily women and children, are at increased risk of mortality, physical and gender-based violence, abductions, and lack of shelter, food, and healthcare.³⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges by straining resources, and limiting protections and assistance for already vulnerable displaced persons.³⁸ Disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have further impeded efforts to find

²⁶ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Global Issues Refugees*. N.d.; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Appeal 2024 Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration*. 2024.

²⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Figures at a glance*. 2024.

²⁸ International Organization for Migration. *Glossary on Migration*. 2019. p. 55.

²⁹ United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951.

³⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Who We Protect: Returnees*. 2024.

³¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons*. 2024.

³² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals - Updated guidance note 2019*. 2019. pp. 2-3.

³³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons*. 2024.

³⁴ *ibid.*; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Who We Protect: Returnees*. 2024.

³⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Who We Protect: Returnees*. 2024.

³⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons*. 2024.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *COVID-19, Displacement and Climate Change*. 2020. p. 1.



durable solutions, with fewer than 300,000 refugees returning to their country of origin or relocating to another state in 2020, compared to 425,000 in 2019.³⁹ Despite the need for safety and reintegration, very few displaced persons can voluntarily return as they rely on national governments and host countries to provide the necessary conditions for their return, including protection and assistance.⁴⁰ In 2024, the World Bank reported that three in four displaced people were hosted by developing countries, which strains their already limited resources and increases displaced persons vulnerability due to limited protection and assistance.⁴¹ A reason for the high rate of displaced people hosted by developing countries is that 69% of refugees and others needing protection seek protection in neighboring countries.⁴² Despite efforts to address the rights and needs of displacement, many governments struggle with limited resources, often prioritizing competing demands and neglecting their responsibilities towards displaced citizens and residents.⁴³

International cooperation and collective action contribute to addressing the various challenges of protecting and supporting displaced persons.⁴⁴ According to UNHCR, by the end of 2023, 40% of displaced people were children under the age of 18, with an average of 339,000 children born a refugee annually between 2018 and 2023.⁴⁵ Member States have a responsibility to ensure inclusivity, and prioritize those who are most disadvantaged by addressing complex causes of poverty, gender inequality, and discrimination to reduce global challenges.⁴⁶ Such efforts support voluntary repatriation, return, and sustainable reintegration while ensuring the rights of displaced persons.⁴⁷ Partnerships between stakeholders, including governmental and non-governmental actors at all levels, enhance the quality of assistance and promote a sustainable reintegration process.⁴⁸

International and Regional Framework

The protection and assistance of displaced persons is considered a human rights issue.⁴⁹ Article 1 of the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945) calls for international cooperation to address global challenges by promoting the respect for human rights without discrimination.⁵⁰ In 1948, the General Assembly adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, establishing a legal framework for protecting human rights,

³⁹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Global Humanitarian Overview 2022*. 2022.

⁴⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Who We Protect: Internally Displaced People*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Who We Protect: Returnees*. 2024.

⁴¹ World Bank. *Forced Displacement Refugees, Internally Displaced and Host Communities*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Refugee Data Finder*. 2024.

⁴² World Bank. *Forced Displacement Refugees, Internally Displaced and Host Communities*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Refugee Data Finder*. 2024.

⁴³ United Nations, Office of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement. *Follow-up to the Report of the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Internal Displacement*. 2022. p. 21.

⁴⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Report on Law and Policy on Internal Displacement: Implementing National Responsibility*. 2022. p. 10.

⁴⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Refugee Data Finder*. 2024.

⁴⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals - Updated guidance note 2019*. 2019. p. 2-3.

⁴⁷ International Organization for Migration. *IOM's Policy on the Full Spectrum of Return, Readmission and Reintegration*. 2021. pp. 3-9.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *What We Do: Protect Human Rights*. 2024.

⁵⁰ United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945.



with articles 13 and 14 emphasizing the rights to freedom of movement, residence, and asylum.⁵¹ This protection is reinforced by the Refugee Convention, which defines refugees (Article 1) and establishes the fundamental principle of non-refoulement (Article 33), which prohibits the return or deportation of refugees to Member States where they face threats to life and freedom.⁵² The Refugee Convention also provides legal protections and assistance, including access to housing, work, and education.⁵³ The *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1967) expands these protections by removing the geographical and temporal limits of the Refugee Convention, thus broadening the scope of refugee rights.⁵⁴ Additionally, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966) and the *International Covenant on Economic and Social and Cultural Rights* (1966) outline safeguards for all, including displaced persons, such as the right to life, and access to education and work.⁵⁵ Building on existing international protections and assistance for refugees, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989) further obligates Member States to protect and assist refugee children by explicitly addressing their needs and states' obligations (article 22).⁵⁶

As new challenges such as mass displacement, heightened political instability, and increasing resource constraints emerged, multilateral efforts were expanded to address the growing need for legal protection and assistance for refugees.⁵⁷ In 1967, the General Assembly adopted resolution 60/2312, "Declaration on Territorial Asylum", outlining principles intended to guide asylum practices, promote international consensus, and reinforce the humanitarian aspect of granting asylum to ensure refugee protection and assistance.⁵⁸ Building on this foundation, in 1969, the Organization of African Unity adopted the *Convention Governing the Specific Aspect of Refugee Problems in Africa*, supported by UNHCR, to address the growing refugee challenges faced by African countries.⁵⁹ Moreover, it expanded the legal definition of refugees and introduced the principle of voluntary repatriation, defined as the voluntary return to the country of origin, transit, or third country, either independently or assisted, based on free will.⁶⁰ Implementing these provisions remains challenging due to inconsistent enforcement and resource constraints across African Member States.⁶¹

⁵¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948.

⁵² United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Executive Committee. *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1967.

⁵⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966.

⁵⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. 1989.

⁵⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Briefing Paper Understanding the Root Causes of Displacement: Towards a Comprehensive Approach to Prevention and Solutions*. 2015. pp. 2-4; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Protection*. 2024.

⁵⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Declaration on Territorial Asylum (A/RES/2312 (XXII))*. 1967.

⁵⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Uncategorized Q&A: OAU Convention remains a key plank of refugee protection in Africa after 40 years*. 2009; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa*. 1969. pp. 2-3.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Uncategorized Q&A: OAU Convention remains a key plank of refugee protection in Africa after 40 years*. 2009.

⁶¹ Okoth-Obbo. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Thirty Years On: A Legal Review of the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa*. 2001. pp. 87-92, 109-132.



To address the vulnerability and increasing number of IDPs, global and regional efforts were adopted, providing assistance and protection.⁶² In 1998, UNHCR adopted the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (Guiding Principles) as the first international standard safeguarding IDPs.⁶³ The Guiding Principles were created to address gaps in international law regarding IDPs.⁶⁴ They provide a framework for preventing displacement, promote durable solutions, such as voluntary return, local integration, and resettlement, and establish standards that facilitate stability through international cooperation and support for national efforts.⁶⁵ Other regional agreements have been established in accordance with the Guiding Principles, including the *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa* (2009), emphasizing the responsibilities of states to prevent displacement, protect the displaced population and ensure their safe return or resettlement across the continent.⁶⁶

Achieving sustainable development necessitates addressing gaps in the protection and assistance of displaced persons.⁶⁷ In 2015, the General Assembly adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda).⁶⁸ The 2030 Agenda encompasses 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and emphasizes to not leave anybody behind, and advocates for ensuring human rights and protections for all vulnerable groups, including those affected by displacement.⁶⁹ Several SDGs support efforts to safeguard displaced individuals, including SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities).⁷⁰ Adopted in 2015 at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development to support the 2030 Agenda, the *Addis Ababa Action Agenda* aims to provide financial support to states hosting refugees with a special focus on assisting LDCs to protect and assist displaced persons, including women and children.⁷¹

Providing comprehensive and sustainable solutions for those living in protracted displacement requires adequate global support for host countries and durable strategies.⁷² In 2016, the General Assembly adopted the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*, which commits to protecting the rights of those in displacement, particularly women and children, while promoting their participation in durable

⁶² International Organization for Migration. *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. 2024; African Union. *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention)*. 2009. pp. 4-6.

⁶³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. 2004. pp. 3-5.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* pp. 5-12.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ African Union. *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention)*. 2009. pp. 4-6.

⁶⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *The UN Global Goals and Forced Displacement: UNHCR's work on the Sustainable Development Goals*. 2024.

⁶⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. p. 3; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About UNHCR: Sustainable Development Goals*. 2024.

⁶⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. p. 3; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About UNHCR: Sustainable Development Goals*. 2024.

⁷⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals - Updated guidance note 2019*. 2019. p. 8.

⁷¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda) (A/RES/69/313)*. 2015.

⁷² Secretariat of the United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement. *Shining a Light on Internal Displacement a Vision for the Future Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement*. 2021. pp. 6, 49.



solutions by prioritizing budget supports for host countries and sustainable reintegration for returnees, and strengthening multilateral partnerships.⁷³

Role of the International System

Allocated by the General Committee of the General Assembly, its Third Committee works towards the protection of and assistance for refugees, returnees, and displaced persons.⁷⁴ Recognizing the imbalance in global responsibility, the Global Compact on Refugees, drafted by various stakeholders in consultation with UNHCR and endorsed by the General Assembly, works to improve responsibility-sharing among Member States, ensuring that host countries receive adequate support in managing displaced populations.⁷⁵ Further strengthening these efforts, the General Assembly passed resolutions 78/474, “Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions”, and 78/185, “Assistance to refugees, returnees, and displaced persons in Africa”.⁷⁶ These resolutions emphasize the importance of continued global commitment to assisting refugees by strengthening international cooperation and channeling the necessary resources for assistance and protection.⁷⁷ Moreover, these resolutions outline specific measures to protect and integrate displaced persons, and strive for a more balanced distribution of responsibilities, ultimately reinforcing the General Assembly’s efforts to improve the conditions of those affected by displacement.⁷⁸

The United Nations system safeguards displaced persons’ rights by establishing and improving the international legal regime, ensuring their protection, and offering practical support.⁷⁹ The United Nations Network on Migration, established in 2019, intends to streamline efforts of different United Nations entities into a coordinated approach on challenges such as ensuring that displaced persons have access to essential services and economic opportunities.⁸⁰ This helps facilitate displaced persons’ social and economic integration.⁸¹ Through its 2022-2024 work plan, the network enhances anti-discrimination

⁷³ United Nations, General Assembly. *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (A/RES/71/1)*. 2016.

⁷⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Allocation of agenda items to the Third Committee (A/RES/C.3/78/1)*. 2023.

⁷⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Compact on Refugee – booklet*. 2018. pp. 1-5; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *The Global Compact on Refugees*. 2024.

⁷⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/RES/78/185)*. 2023; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (A/78/474)*. 2023.

⁷⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/RES/78/185)*. 2023; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (A/78/474)*. 2023.

⁷⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/RES/78/185)*. 2023; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (A/78/474)*. 2023.

⁷⁹ United Nations Network on Migration. *Position Paper Ensuring Safe and Dignified Return and Sustainable Reintegration*. 2021.

⁸⁰ United Nations Network on Migration. *About Us*. N.d.

⁸¹ *ibid.*



measures and promotes safe returns.⁸² The United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) also addresses migrants rights, particularly those in vulnerable situations.⁸³ In 2018, the Global Migration Group published its *Principles and guidelines on the human rights protection of migrants in vulnerable situations*, emphasizing the need for compliance with human rights and international law during returns, especially for children.⁸⁴ UNHCR works with governments and other organizations to help rebuild infrastructure in areas of prolonged conflict, supporting reintegration for returnees, and coordinating with governments to promote voluntary and safe returns.⁸⁵ UNHCR also focuses on promoting refugee protection through the success of its Reach Out Programme, which works with the American Red Cross to help train humanitarian staff on how to effectively assist refugees in a time of crisis.⁸⁶

The European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU) have established systems to address refugees, returnees, and displaced persons, focusing on responsibility sharing and due process.⁸⁷ The EU established the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) to create an EU-wide system to address migration and asylum for responsibility sharing between states, and adequate protection for displaced people.⁸⁸ CEAS was reformed in 2020 with a focus on efficient return procedures, and strengthened partnerships with states located in the Global South.⁸⁹ To ensure consistency and fairness, the EU established the European Union Asylum Agency in 2017, which monitors and supports Member States in making decisions on peoples' asylum status.⁹⁰ AU created the Division of Humanitarian Affairs to provide strategic guidance to achieve lasting solutions for humanitarian crises by addressing the immediate protection and assistance needs of displaced persons.⁹¹

Alongside the United Nations and other regional bodies, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work to provide aid and assistance to refugees and displaced persons globally.⁹² Amnesty International advocates for the rights of refugees by campaigning against forced returns and discriminatory policies while promoting safe passage and fair treatment.⁹³ The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) protects and empowers displaced women, children, and youth, emphasizing the need for specialized assistance in areas such as economic empowerment, gender inclusion, rights, and protection from gender-based violence.⁹⁴ WRC also partnered with the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights to improve legal protection and access to services for displaced women and children.⁹⁵ Additionally, Refugees International, in partnership with the Center for Global Development, works to ensure displaced people have access to work in their host communities to help expand the labor market access for refugees and displaced persons.⁹⁶

⁸² United Nations Network on Migration. *Workplan 2022-2024*. 2022. pp. 13-20.

⁸³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Principles and Guidelines, supported by practical guidance, on the human rights protection of migrants in vulnerable situations*. 2018.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Who We Protect: Returnees*. 2024.

⁸⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Reach Out training kit*. 2024.

⁸⁷ African Union. *Humanitarian Affairs Division*. N.d.; Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs. *Common European Asylum System*. N.d..

⁸⁸ Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs. *Common European Asylum System*. N.d.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs. *Common European Asylum System*. N.d.

⁹¹ African Union. *Humanitarian Affairs Division*. N.d.

⁹² Amnesty International. *Who We Are*. 2024.

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Women's Refugee Commission. *Asylum, Legal, and Human Rights*. 2024.

⁹⁵ Women's Refugee Commission. *Focus Areas*. 2024.

⁹⁶ Refugees International. *Right to Work*. 2024.



Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration

Refugees and IDPs can only return home safely when the causes of their displacement are resolved and lasting peace is established.⁹⁷ Ensuring safe environments for returnees requires addressing the adverse drivers that compel migration through investments in sustainable development and favorable conditions for a voluntary return for displaced people.⁹⁸ Reintegration may fail without cooperation between origin and destination states, for example, due to administrative hurdles, and adherence to international law.⁹⁹ Various United Nations bodies, including IOM, emphasize that returns should be voluntary to ensure individuals can prepare adequately and contribute positively to their reintegration.¹⁰⁰ The return process can occur with or without assistance, depending on the individual's choice.¹⁰¹

International efforts to support displaced persons emphasize integrated strategies, addressing both immediate repatriation needs and long-term integration through multilateral partnerships.¹⁰² UNHCR's 2003 *Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern* aims to address the needs of displaced people after their immediate requirements have been met.¹⁰³ This framework includes the 4Rs approach: "Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction", which provides an integrated strategy to support displaced individuals returning to their home countries.¹⁰⁴ It addresses both immediate and long-term development needs through community-driven support and partnerships with entities such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank.¹⁰⁵ IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration program supports this process by providing documentation, medical aid, and reintegration support, including capacity-building activities to help returnees integrate and strengthen local networks.¹⁰⁶ In 2024, UNHCR is supporting voluntary repatriation programs in 79 Member States through multilateral partnerships and regional platforms, including the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees and the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework in Latin America and Mexico to enhance responsibility-sharing mechanisms that distribute protections and reintegration responsibilities among Member States.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Appeal 2024 Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration*. 2024.

⁹⁸ International Organization for Migration. *IOM's Policy on the Full Spectrum of Return, Readmission and Reintegration*. 2021. p. 7; United Nations Network on Migration. *Position Paper Ensuring Safe and Dignified Return and Sustainable Reintegration*. 2021. p. 3.

⁹⁹ International Organization for Migration. *IOM's Policy on the Full Spectrum of Return, Readmission and Reintegration*. 2021. p. 7; United Nations Network on Migration. *Position Paper Ensuring Safe and Dignified Return and Sustainable Reintegration*. 2021. p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ International Organization for Migration. *Module 1 An Integrated Approach to Reintegration*. N.d. pp. 9-10.

¹⁰¹ International Organization for Migration. *Module 1 An Integrated Approach to Reintegration*. N.d. p. 9.

¹⁰² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Who We Protect: Returnees*. 2024.

¹⁰³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concerns*. 2003. pp. 4-6.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.* pp. 4-6.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.* pp. 5, 17-20.

¹⁰⁶ International Organization for Migration. *Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Supporting Dignified Return and Sustainable Reintegration*. N.d. p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Appeal 2024 Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration*. 2024.



Voluntary repatriation can be achieved when the conditions for sustainable reintegration are fulfilled.¹⁰⁸ Sustainable reintegration means that returnees attain economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychological well-being through access to conditions that uphold their rights, ensure a dignified livelihood, and promote safety, empowerment, and social cohesion.¹⁰⁹ In 2021, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs launched the Sustainable Reintegration Program in Dhankuta Municipality, Nepal, to address the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable migrant communities.¹¹⁰ The program supports vulnerable returnees who are victims of trafficking and survivors of gender-based violence by providing economic, psychological, and capacity-building assistance.¹¹¹ Similarly, IOM's FORAS Project, established in Morocco in 2017, assists returnees by offering pre-departure vocational training and counseling, encouraging economic empowerment, which is essential for sustainable repatriation.¹¹²

Rights and Protection of Displaced Women and Children

Recent crises highlight the critical need for specialized protection of and assistance for displaced women and children.¹¹³ By the end of 2022, conflict and violence caused 43.3 million children to be displaced globally, including 17.5 million child refugees and asylum seekers.¹¹⁴ In 2021, women and children accounted for approximately 80% of new IDPs, in part due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.¹¹⁵ By 2022, 86% of Ukrainian refugees were women and children.¹¹⁶ Children affected by any conflict may have to flee alone, which increases their exposure to abuse, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking.¹¹⁷ Female displaced persons are particularly vulnerable due to heightened risks of gender-based violence, exploitation, limited access to healthcare, and socio-economic marginalization.¹¹⁸

Protecting displaced women and children requires extended international efforts to ensure their protection from gender-based violence, and enable economic empowerment.¹¹⁹ UNHCR's *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women* (1991) emphasize that female refugees often require protection against

¹⁰⁸ International Organization for Migration. *Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Supporting Dignified Return and Sustainable Reintegration*. N.d. p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ United Nations Network on Migration. *Position Paper Ensuring Safe and Dignified Return and Sustainable Reintegration*. 2021. pp. 1-3; International Organization for Migration. *Coming Home Can Be Harder Than Leaving: The Psychological Challenges of Being A Returnee*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Compact on Refugees. MIRPS - Regional Response in Central America and Mexico*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)*. 2024.

¹¹⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Sustainable Reintegration Project*. N.d.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*; International Organization for Migration. *Mapping of Reintegration Services in Nepal*. 2022. pp. 2-13.

¹¹² United Nations Network on Migration. *FORAS*. N.d; International Organization for Migration. *Platform Hosts Webinar on the FORAS Approach: Enhancing Reintegration Opportunities*. 2022. N.d; International Organization for Migration. *2018 Return and Reintegration Key Highlights*. 2019. p. 69.

¹¹³ United Nations Children's Fund. *Child displacement*. 2024.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Joireman et al. World Bank Blogs. *Displaced Women and Girls in Cities*. 2024.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ United Nations Children's Fund. *War in Ukraine: Support for children and families*. 2024.

¹¹⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Women*. 2024.

¹¹⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Refugee and displaced women and children (E/RES/1991/23)*. 1991; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council: Recommendations to the Programme of Action for the Global Compact on Refugees*. 2024. pp. 2-3.



forced return, security from violence, and better access to everyday essentials like food, shelter, and medical care.¹²⁰ Furthermore, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) also discusses the importance of protecting displaced women and children by ensuring that they are given equal access to opportunities to make decisions on their own future.¹²¹ ECOSOC underscores the necessity of extending international protection to refugee women and children by implementing measures to ensure their safety from physical violence, sexual abuse, and abduction, as highlighted in ECOSOC resolution 2002/4, “Situation of women and girls in Afghanistan”.¹²² In 2018, UNHCR created the Global Youth Advisory Council to empower and protect youth globally, in alignment with the CRC.¹²³ The Global Youth Advisory Council highlights the importance of working with host countries to ensure that refugees, specifically women and children refugees, are given the right to work, formally recognized, and have equal access to education.¹²⁴

UNICEF works with national and local authorities of prospective host countries to help deliver emergency assistance, education, and support services to refugees.¹²⁵ It also creates safe spaces for displaced children to learn and play.¹²⁶ In response to the Ukrainian refugee emergency, UNICEF and UNHCR established “Blue Dot Hubs” to provide essential services to displaced women and children in these areas.¹²⁷ These “Blue Dot Hubs” are spaces to offer information, mental health support, legal aid, and medical needs to displaced people.¹²⁸ These centers are strategically located in various host countries, can support 3,000-5,000 people per day, and aim to reduce risks of gender-based violence, trafficking, abuse, and family separation for displaced individuals, particularly women and children.¹²⁹

Conclusion

Significant challenges remain to ensure that displaced persons are adequately protected and assisted.¹³⁰ The international community, through frameworks such as the Refugee Convention, has established foundational principles for the protection and assistance of displaced persons.¹³¹ However, the increase in displaced persons due to ongoing international conflicts demands enhanced global cooperation and innovative solutions to address the legal, social, and economic vulnerabilities of displaced persons, particularly women and children.¹³² Ensuring sustainable reintegration and promoting durable solutions,

¹²⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women*. 1991. pp. 1-2.

¹²¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Refugee and displaced women and children (E/RES/1991/23)*. 1991.

¹²² *ibid.*; United Nations Economic and Social Council. *Situation of women and girls in Afghanistan (ECOSOC/2002/4)*. 2002.

¹²³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council: Recommendations to the Programme of Action for the Global Compact on Refugees*. 2024.

¹²⁴ *ibid.* pp. 2-3.

¹²⁵ United Nations Children’s Fund. *War in Ukraine: Support for children and families*. 2024.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR, UNICEF establish dozens of support hubs in countries hosting Ukrainian refugees*. 2022.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁹ *ibid.*; United Nations Children’s Fund. *Blue Dot Shelters: Safe Spaces for Children Fleeing Conflict*. N.d.

¹³⁰ Joireman et al. World Bank Blogs. *Displaced Women and Girls in Cities*. 2024.

¹³¹ United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951.

¹³² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Trends*. 2024.



like voluntary repatriation, requires a concerted effort from national governments, international organizations, and civil society to provide the necessary support.¹³³

Further Research

As delegates conduct further research and consider how to address this topic, they should consider the following: What can states hosting displaced persons do to better prepare for and support the reintegration of returnees to minimize the potential economic and social impact on local economies? What are ways to strengthen frameworks and agreements adopted by the General Assembly to support displaced persons? How can the international community provide extended protections to returnees when they lose their refugee status? How does the General Assembly ensure equal access to protection for displaced women and children? What are the most effective strategies for providing long-term support for displaced children?

¹³³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Uncategorized Q&A: OAU Convention remains a key plank of refugee protection in Africa after 40 years*. 2009.



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2. The Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation

*The human rights to water and sanitation are clear illustrations of the indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependency of human rights and are vital for achieving an adequate standard of living.*¹³⁴

Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly affirms that safe drinking water and sanitation are basic human rights and builds on authoritative interpretations of the international human rights framework.¹³⁵ It is the main body of the United Nations concerned with highlighting current water-related challenges, providing policy recommendations, and streamlining United Nations-wide efforts with the help of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.¹³⁶ The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible, and affordable water for personal and domestic use.¹³⁷ Similarly, adequate sanitation services are expected to provide privacy and be physically accessible, affordable, safe, hygienic, secure, and available throughout all cultures and social groups to meet their needs.¹³⁸

2.3 billion people lack access to clean drinking water and nearly half the global population does not have access to safely managed sanitation, leading the international community to prioritize the issue within frameworks like the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) (2015).¹³⁹ Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 (clean water and sanitation) targets 6.1 on “safe drinking water” as well as 6.2 on “safe sanitation and hygiene” showcase the importance of access to water and sanitation for all.¹⁴⁰ Recent United Nations reporting, however, indicates that the world is not on track to reach these goals by 2030 unless Member States triple current efforts.¹⁴¹ The *Global Sustainable Development Report 2023* (2023) identified that progress on SDG 6 also boosts SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 13 (climate action), and more.¹⁴²

¹³⁴ Arrojo-Agudo. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Water is a common good not a commodity: UN experts*. 2023.

¹³⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation (A/RES/78/206)*. 2023. p. 2.

¹³⁶ *ibid.* p. 6.

¹³⁷ United Nations, Economic and Social Council. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. *General Comment No. 15 (2002). The right to water (arts. 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) (E/C.12/2002/11)*. 2003. p. 2.

¹³⁸ United Nations, Economic and Social Council. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. *Statement on the right to sanitation (E/C.12/2010/1)*. 2011. p. 2; United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Realising the human rights to water and sanitation. A Handbook by the UN Special Rapporteur Catarina de Albuquerque. Introduction*. 2014. p. 33.

¹³⁹ United Nations Children's Fund. *WASH in the new UNICEF: Strategic Plan 2022-2025*. 2021. p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ Our World in Data Team. *Ensure access to water and sanitation for all*. 2023.

¹⁴¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2028. Report of the Secretary-General (A/77/249)*. 2022. p. 2; UN-Water. *United Nations system-wide strategy for water and sanitation. July 2024*. 2024. p. 7.

¹⁴² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Global Sustainable Development Report 2023*. 2023. pp. 33-34.



Member States are ultimately responsible for systematically meeting these prospects, but they face difficulties due to a lack of financial resources, capacity development, and international cooperation.¹⁴³ Low- and middle-income countries in particular are seeking more opportunities for information exchange and technical assistance to help against natural hazards, social disparities, and to satisfy growing demands of basic water supply and sanitation by 2030.¹⁴⁴ Partnerships of international financial institutions therefore allocate their development contributions to facilitate water management strategies and focus on regions affected by ongoing conflict situations and the adverse effects of climate change.¹⁴⁵ Realizing the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation also forms part of the global challenge to end all forms of poverty, as poor households often cannot access water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) related services.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, policies on water and sanitation often direct efforts towards populations with individual water-related needs or those at risk of being left behind or discriminated against.¹⁴⁷

International and Regional Framework

The rights to safe drinking water and sanitation were initially included as part of the standard of living adequate for everyone's health and well-being, as stipulated in article 25 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948).¹⁴⁸ States parties to the *International Covenant for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966) reiterated these rights and stated the need for a progressive improvement of living conditions.¹⁴⁹ For example, Member States recognized the right of women, children, and disabled persons to attain a standard of living adequate to their individual needs in the *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* (1979), the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006), respectively.¹⁵⁰

In 2010, the General Assembly determined the rights to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation to be fundamental human rights for the first time in resolution 64/292 on "the human right to water and sanitation."¹⁵¹ This resolution is in line with an authoritative statement of the human right to safe drinking water by the Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2002, and depicts an overall legal

¹⁴³ United Nations, General Assembly. *The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation (A/RES/78/206)*. 2023. pp. 6-9.

¹⁴⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2023: Partnerships and cooperation for water*. 2023. pp. 10, 15; World Bank Group. *Global Water Security and Sanitation Partnership Annual Report 2023*. 2023. p. 28.

¹⁴⁵ World Bank Group. *Global Water Security and Sanitation Partnership Annual Report 2023*. 2023. pp. 97-98.

¹⁴⁶ Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative et al. *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023*. 2024. pp. 3-4.

¹⁴⁷ Van de Lande et al. UN-Water Policy and Analytical Briefs. *Eliminating discrimination and inequalities in access to water and sanitation*. 2015. p. 9.

¹⁴⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200A (XXI))*. 1966.

¹⁴⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200A (XXI))*. 1966. p. 50.

¹⁵⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*. 1979; United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. 1989; United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (A/RES/61/106)*. 2006.

¹⁵¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *The human right to water and sanitation (A/RES/64/292)*. 2010.



trend toward water being seen globally as a rights-based good rather than an economic commodity.¹⁵² Member States in 2015 adopted the 2030 Agenda and set up SDG targets pertaining to water-related human rights.¹⁵³ For example, the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, health, and equal access to water and sanitation for rural women are all taken into account in SDG 6.¹⁵⁴

Several frameworks, in part subsequent to the 2030 Agenda, promote the overcoming of water-related challenges that cross various aspects of sustainable development in the wake of a changing climate, population shifts, and interdependencies between states.¹⁵⁵ The *Paris Agreement* (2015) encompasses binding measures for climate change mitigation.¹⁵⁶ The treaty underscores that protecting ecosystems and water-related habitats like forests and wetlands is crucial for water regulation and replenishment.¹⁵⁷ The *New Urban Agenda* (2016) establishes principles to tackle increasing water scarcity in urban settlement and emphasizes effective water infrastructure for sustainable development in cities.¹⁵⁸ The *Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes* (Water Convention) (1992) provides a framework instrument to address cross-border water governance as well as international problems of water pollution.¹⁵⁹ Initially, it was established as a regional instrument by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, but it has been open for accession for all Member States since 2016.¹⁶⁰ The subsequent *Protocol on Water and Health* (1999) emphasized the aspects of social and economic development of water governance.¹⁶¹ The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation are further emphasized by the *Pact for the Future* (2024).¹⁶² The United Nations plans to strengthen these human rights by ensuring the sustainable management of water resources, promoting resilience to drought, and addressing water scarcity.¹⁶³

The International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028 (Water Action Decade) forms the current guiding theme for water-related policy efforts across the United Nations system.¹⁶⁴ It especially seeks to scale up sustainable development through integrated management of water resources (IWRM).¹⁶⁵ To review the progress made, Member States convened the 2023 United

¹⁵² United Nations, Economic and Social Council. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. *General Comment No. 15 (2002). The right to water (arts. 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)* (E/C.12/2002/11). 2003.

¹⁵³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Human Rights, the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. N.d.

¹⁵⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Human Rights, the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. N.d.

¹⁵⁵ UN-Water. *United Nations System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation. July 2024*. 2024. p. 7.

¹⁵⁶ Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Paris Agreement*. 2015.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *New Urban Agenda (A/RES/71/256)*. 2016.

¹⁵⁹ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. *Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes*. 1992.

¹⁶⁰ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. *The Water Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health*. N.d.

¹⁶¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. *Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes*. 1999.

¹⁶² United Nations, General Assembly. *The Pact for the Future (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024. pp. 7, 10, 21.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018–2028 (A/RES/71/222)*. 2017.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.* p. 3.



Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028.¹⁶⁶ Member States agreed on various voluntary commitments of state and non-state actors, such as water conservation and efficiency and water infrastructure development for climate resilience, among others.¹⁶⁷ Regionally, the Dushanbe Water Process in Central Asia biennially organizes follow-up exchanges for policy dialogue and in their final declaration reiterated the importance of scaling up coordinated action, including south-south cooperation.¹⁶⁸ In 2021 the German government initiated the “Water Dialogues for Results,” promoting cross-sectoral SDG 6 implementation and calling for new approaches for financing under the attendance of more than 60 Member States.¹⁶⁹ The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has been organizing frequent Regional Water Dialogues, facilitating public-private dialogue.¹⁷⁰ The latest exchanges in 2024 in various panel sessions investigated water as an accelerator for overall sustainable economic and environmental development and water security in the Latin American and Caribbean region.¹⁷¹

Role of the International System

The General Assembly plays a crucial role in promoting the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation through its resolutions, publication of reports, and facilitation of international cooperation.¹⁷² General Assembly resolution 78/206 (2023) on “the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation” indicated that sustainable and efficient solutions for the global implementation of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation require collective international cooperation.¹⁷³ The resolution highlights the need for Member States and international organizations to support and cooperate with states, especially developing countries.¹⁷⁴ Examples of this include technology transfer in wastewater recycling and water harvesting, as well as sharing financial resources to comply with these human rights.¹⁷⁵ When implementing these projects, particular attention should be paid to preventing discrimination and ensuring safe access for women, children, and people with disabilities.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028 (A/RES/73/226)*. 2019.

¹⁶⁷ International Institute for Sustainable Development. *Earth Negotiation Bulletin. UN 2023 Water Conference. Summary report, 22-24 March 2023*. 2023.

¹⁶⁸ Third High-Level International Conference on the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2028. *Final Declaration of the Third High-Level International Conference on the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2028*. 2024. pp. 5-6.

¹⁶⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2028. Report of the Secretary-General (A/77/249)*. 2022. p. 8.

¹⁷⁰ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Accelerating Sustainable Water Management in Latin America and the Caribbean: Highlights from the IV Regional Water Dialogues*. 2024.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

¹⁷² United Nations, General Assembly. *The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation (A/RES/74/141)*. 2020. pp. 1, 5; United Nations, General Assembly. *Promotion and protection of human rights. Report of the Third Committee (A/74/399)*. 2019. p. 19.

¹⁷³ United Nations, General Assembly. *The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation (A/RES/78/206)*. 2023. pp. 2, 6, 8.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.* pp. 8-9.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.* pp. 3-4.



Despite significant efforts, progress towards SDG 6 remains off-track, highlighting the urgent need for intensified action and innovation.¹⁷⁷ To identify the barriers hindering international progress on water-related goals such as SDG 6, the General Assembly invited the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report, offering a strategic pathway to overcome these challenges.¹⁷⁸ Published in 2023, the report highlights best practices, actions, and initiatives undertaken during the Water Action Decade.¹⁷⁹ In addition, UN-Water developed the United Nations System-Wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation (SWS) (2024).¹⁸⁰ SWS seeks to fully implement inter-agency collaboration, leverage the reforms of the United Nations Development System, and scale up the efforts of United Nations entities.¹⁸¹ By doing so, it aims to provide more strategic, effective, and coherent support to Member States in addressing current and future water-related challenges for the benefit of society and the environment.¹⁸² The United Nations 2028 Water Conference, to be hosted by the government of Tajikistan, will take a final review of the accomplishments of the Water Action Decade and give an outlook on improving the goal of providing all people with clean water and sanitation.¹⁸³

Several key United Nations bodies and agencies work to promote the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, including the Human Rights Council (HRC), UN-Water, and the World Health Organization (WHO).¹⁸⁴ HRC supports the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation primarily through the appointment of a Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.¹⁸⁵ Mandated to report on the global status of this topic, the Special Rapporteur undertakes country missions, promotes best practices, and collaborates with development practitioners for its implementation.¹⁸⁶ The Special Rapporteur's reports are welcomed by the General Assembly and are regularly used to evaluate the effectiveness of previous measures and improve them where necessary.¹⁸⁷ The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights supports this work by providing technical assistance and capacity-building to governments and civil society, ensuring that human rights principles are integrated into national policies on water and sanitation.¹⁸⁸ UN-Water ensures a coherent and coordinated approach to addressing water-related challenges by bringing together various United Nations agencies and international organizations to promote collaboration and advocate for increased

¹⁷⁷ UN-Water. *SDG6 update: the world is off-track*. 2021.

¹⁷⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018–2028 (A/RES/77/334)*. 2023. p. 3.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ UN-Water. *United Nations System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation*. July 2024. 2024. p. 9.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.* pp. 7, 11.

¹⁸² *ibid.* pp. 11, 24, 32.

¹⁸³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018–2028 (A/RES/77/334)*. 2023. p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2019: Leaving no one behind*. 2019. pp. 36, 200; United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Water, Sanitation, Hygiene 'a Human Right', Crucial for Health, Prosperity Worldwide, Speakers Stress at Conference's First Interactive Dialogue*. 2023.

¹⁸⁵ United Nations, Human Rights Council. *The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation (A/HRC/RES/51/19)*. 2022. pp. 3-6.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation (A/RES/78/206)*. 2023. p. 6.

¹⁸⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *OHCHR and the rights to water and sanitation*. 2024.



investment and policy attention to water and sanitation issues.¹⁸⁹ WHO provides global health leadership on water quality and sanitation.¹⁹⁰ It developed frameworks like the *Global Framework for Action 2024–2030 for water, sanitation, hygiene, waste and electricity services in all health care facilities to achieve essential, climate-resilient, quality health services (2024)* to improve political commitment and strengthen the implementation of safe drinking water and sanitation.¹⁹¹ Additionally, WHO collaborates with the United Nations Children’s Fund through the Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene to establish global monitoring and reporting systems.¹⁹²

Achieving safe drinking water and sanitation as part of SDG 6 will require not only increased engagement by the public and private sectors in providing expertise and innovation, but also a substantial financial investment of at least \$1.4 trillion by 2030.¹⁹³ The World Bank Group, through its Water Global Practice, established the Global Water Security and Sanitation Partnership (2017), which is a multi-donor trust fund.¹⁹⁴ This partnership serves as an open-source think tank, sharing knowledge and innovations while also providing country-level technical support.¹⁹⁵ This includes assistance for the implementation of IWRM and transboundary cooperation between Member States.¹⁹⁶ The Global Water Partnership network also offers support to build networks for exchange on policy guidance and smart management of water resources at the local level.¹⁹⁷ Government inter-agency projects like the United States Global Water Strategy (2022) focus on building self-sustaining systems, support of local leadership, as well as strengthening climate resilience plans.¹⁹⁸ Regional initiatives also play a crucial role in advancing the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.¹⁹⁹ In Africa, the African Ministers’ Council on Water (AMCOW) has driven efforts through the African Water Vision 2025 and the AfricaSan initiative, aiming to improve water access and sanitation on the continent.²⁰⁰ In Asia, the Asian Development Bank focuses on capacity-building and investment in safe drinking water infrastructure, particularly in rapidly growing urban areas.²⁰¹

Addressing Discrimination and Inequalities in Access to Safe Water and Sanitation

Member States risk uneven progress towards equal access to safe water and sanitation when certain groups and individuals of different race, gender, age or ethnicity are systematically left behind.²⁰² These vulnerable populations experience dimensions of water scarcity that vary across settlement areas and

¹⁸⁹ UN-Water. United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *About UN-Water*. N.d.

¹⁹⁰ World Health Organization et al. *Global Framework for Action 2024-2030*. 2024. p. 2.

¹⁹¹ *ibid.* p. 2.

¹⁹² World Health Organization et al. *World Health Organization/United Nations Children’s Fund Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene*. 2024.

¹⁹³ World Bank Group. *Global Water Security and Sanitation Partnership Annual Report 2023*. 2023. p. 28.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.* p. 10.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.* 16.

¹⁹⁷ Global Water Partnership. *Working towards a water secure world*. 2023.

¹⁹⁸ United States Government. *Global Water Strategy: 2022-2027*. 2022. pp. 4-5.

¹⁹⁹ United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque (A/HRC/18/33)*. 2011. p 5.

²⁰⁰ African Ministers’ Council on Water. *AMCOW Executive Secretariat Drives Water and Sanitation in Member States*. 2023.

²⁰¹ Asian Development Bank. *ADB’s Vision of a Water-Secure and Resilient Asia and Pacific*. 2024.

²⁰² Van de Lande et al. UN-Water Policy and Analytical Briefs. *Eliminating discrimination and inequalities in access to water and sanitation*. 2015. p. 8.



regions.²⁰³ For example, four in five persons can access safe drinking water services from local premises in urban areas of Least Developed Countries, whereas only three in five persons have this opportunity in rural areas.²⁰⁴ Unavailability of WASH services manifest in multidimensional forms of poverty and are especially prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.²⁰⁵ These cases not only point to a failure of the enjoyment of the human rights to water and sanitation on an equal basis, but also to a poor standard of living as defined by the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index.²⁰⁶ Member States understand the cross-sectoral benefits that proper access to water and sanitation brings about, such as increased availability of food, housing, and quality education, all of which are necessary for a decent living standard.²⁰⁷

Systematic discrimination against individuals persists because of direct or indirect disregard of their special needs, as evident in water-related regulations and policies with intentional or implicitly exclusionary effects.²⁰⁸ WASH services are essential for women and children to enjoy personal safety and well-being.²⁰⁹ Its absence hinders life-saving hygiene practices and contributes to the spread of diseases.²¹⁰ Children are a particularly vulnerable group to infectious illnesses like diarrhea, while women are disproportionately impaired in societies that do not normalize sanitary menstrual practices.²¹¹ Additionally, social perceptions of “uncleanliness” prevail if these individual requirements are not met, and in turn slow progress in ensuring the human rights to water and sanitation for everyone.²¹² At the same time, communities like homeless populations, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities find themselves stigmatized as contagious or dirty, leading to marginalization in society and often inaction towards the legal fulfillment of their human rights to clean themselves.²¹³

If Member States cannot mitigate external risks like degrading health, social cohesion, and ecosystems in a sustainable way, they perpetuate unequal access to water and sanitation for populations in exposed regions.²¹⁴ Renewable freshwater in certain areas becomes more limited because of natural and

²⁰³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2024: Water for prosperity and peace*. 2024. p. 28.

²⁰⁴ Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. *Report of the Fifth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries*. New York, 17 March 2022, Doha, 5-9 March 2023 (A/CONF.219/2023/3). 2023. p. 19.

²⁰⁵ Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative et al. *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023*. 2024. p. 13.

²⁰⁶ *ibid.* p. 3; Van de Lande et al. UN-Water Policy and Analytical Briefs. *Eliminating discrimination and inequalities in access to water and sanitation*. 2015. p. 19.

²⁰⁷ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Global Sustainable Development Report 2023*. 2023. pp. 33-34.

²⁰⁸ Van de Lande et al. UN-Water Policy and Analytical Briefs. *Eliminating discrimination and inequalities in access to water and sanitation*. 2015. p. 9.

²⁰⁹ UN-Water. *Water and Gender*. N.d.

²¹⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2024: Water for prosperity and peace*. 2024. p. 42.

²¹¹ United Nations Children’s Fund. *Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programmes*. 2024; United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque. Stigma and the realization of the human rights to water and sanitation (A/HRC/21/42)*. 2012. p. 7.

²¹² *ibid.* p. 6.

²¹³ *ibid.*

²¹⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2024: Water for prosperity and peace*. 2024. pp. 43, 74.



man-made disasters like increasing drought frequency or acidification.²¹⁵ Inequalities may be observed starkly in those areas that are least resilient to natural disasters and in turn unable to provide safe drinking water for local inhabitants.²¹⁶ Small-island developing states struggle with more erratic rainfall patterns as their main source of drinking water, rendering their freshwater conservation unsustainable.²¹⁷ Increasing amounts of freshwater withdrawal in general leads to unsustainable shortages in freshwater supply, described as water stress.²¹⁸

United Nations entities involved in tasks for sustainable social, environmental, and economic policy-making coordinate their action with regional and national actors and adhere to the international established framework on human rights.²¹⁹ The sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly in March 2024 emphasized the protection of water-based ecosystems and recommended implementing IWRM at all levels, disaggregating data collection, and increasing funding to achieve SDG 6.²²⁰ The United Nations Regional Commission for Africa with regional organizations like AMCOW pledged to improve open access to information on African water resources.²²¹ This is also in line with a focal point of the SWS to develop overarching and United Nations-wide strategies to provide global, up-to-date information on the status of water resources, which helps Member States in conserving respective ecosystems for sustainable water supply.²²² SWS reiterates the rights-based approach to promote development and address the special needs of women, youth, and others in social contexts.²²³ It calls for the robust participation of civil society organizations to include all levels of society in decision-making processes in order to preempt discrimination.²²⁴

Promoting Water Resource Management for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

IWRM strives to ensure a sustainable water supply by harmonizing water, land, and resource management through coordinated policies, strategies, and legislation, yet 107 Member States are falling behind and need to significantly increase their efforts to meet the targets of SDG 6.²²⁵ Regions particularly

²¹⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation (A/RES/78/206)*. 2023. p. 5.

²¹⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2024: Water for prosperity and peace*. 2024. p. 14.

²¹⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (S.A.M.O.A.) Pathway (A/RES/69/15)*. 2015.

²¹⁸ Roser et al. *Water Use and Stress*. 2024.

²¹⁹ UN-Water. *The Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework*. 2020. p. 5.

²²⁰ United Nations Environment Assembly. *Effective and inclusive solutions for strengthening water policies to achieve sustainable development in the context of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution (UNEP/EA.6/Res.13)*. 2024.

²²¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018-2028. Report of the Secretary-General (A/77/249)*. 2022. p. 12.

²²² UN-Water. *United Nations System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation. July 2024*. 2024. p. 16.

²²³ *ibid.* p. 18.

²²⁴ *ibid.*

²²⁵ United Nations World Water Assessment Programme. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in Action*. 2009. pp. 3-4; United Nations Environment Programme. *Progress on Integrated Water Resources Management: Global Indicator 6.5.1. Updates and Acceleration needs*. 2021. pp. 3, 9; UN-Water. United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Progress on Integrated Water Resources Management (SDG target 6.5)*. N.d.



affected by high water stress include Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Central Asia, and the Middle East.²²⁶ Summarized, this means that 50% of the world's population is already facing high water stress due to the growing population and industry, but also as a result of outdated water infrastructure and lacking investments.²²⁷ Next to high water consumption by industries such as agriculture, textiles, mining, energy, and chemicals, insufficient safe water treatment also leads to severe water pollution, making further use impossible and threatening ecosystems.²²⁸ Under these conditions, assuming that global industrial water usage will increase by almost two-thirds until 2050, a sustainable water-security strategy can accommodate changing requirements in the future.²²⁹ For example, agricultural production that would provide sufficient food security by 2050 will require a 15% rise in water withdrawals for agriculture compared to today.²³⁰ This is due to the growing need for irrigation and a sharp increase in food demand from population growth.²³¹ Environmental shortages in freshwater supply will worsen the current situation, increasing the number of people experiencing extreme water stress by at least one billion.²³² Therefore, ensuring water security through IWRM is a key challenge for many Member States in harmonizing food security and ecosystem conservation today.²³³

As part of SDG 6, target 6.5, the United Nations system promotes IWRM to balance social, economic, and environmental needs against increasing water demand.²³⁴ Data comparisons back to the 2000s show that the annual growth rate of people getting access to basic water supply and sanitation is 1%, while a growth rate of at least 3% is required to ensure basic services for everyone by 2030.²³⁵ To bring this development back on track, UN-Water implemented the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Program (2020) in response, as part of the Water Action Decade to deliver the SDGs by 2030.²³⁶ Regarding IWRM, the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Program suggests cooperative governance and finance projects like shared information for water management between Member States.²³⁷ Notable accelerators include transboundary cooperation, directly linked to SDG 17 (strengthening global partnerships for sustainable

²²⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2024: Water for prosperity and peace*. 2024. pp. 92, 101-105.

²²⁷ Kuzma et al. World Resources Institute. *25 Countries, Housing One-quarter of the Population, Face Extremely High Water Stress*. 2023.

²²⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2023: Partnerships and cooperation for water*. 2023. pp. 13-15; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2024: Water for prosperity and peace*. 2024. pp. 50-53.

²²⁹ Burek et al. International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis. *Water Futures and Solution*. 2016. pp. 74-75.

²³⁰ World Bank Group. *Water Resources Management*. 2022; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Water*. 2024.

²³¹ World Bank Group. *Water Resources Management*. 2022; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Water*. 2024.

²³² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2023: Partnerships and cooperation for water*. 2023. p. 107; Kuzma et al. World Resources Institute. *25 Countries, Housing One-quarter of the Population, Face Extremely High Water Stress*. 2023.

²³³ World Bank Group. *Water Resources Management*. 2022.

²³⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. p. 18; United Nations Environment Programme. *Progress on Integrated Water Resources Management: Global Indicator 6.5.1. Updates and Acceleration needs*. 2021. p. 10.

²³⁵ UN-Water. *The Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework*. 2020. p. 4.

²³⁶ UN-Water. *2030 Strategy*. 2020. pp. 26-27.

²³⁷ UN-Water. *The Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework*. 2020. p. 16.



development), and investment priorities towards cooperative projects.²³⁸ In adopting the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations acknowledged that the sustainable implementation of SDG 6 requires not only IWRM (indicator 6.5.1) but also transboundary cooperation (indicator 6.5.2).²³⁹

Transboundary water management fosters peace by promoting cooperation over shared water resources, addressing inequalities in access, and mitigating conflicts that can arise from water scarcity.²⁴⁰ Despite that, many regions such as North Africa and Central America still face challenges with transboundary water management, leading to conflicts and competition over shared resources due to insufficient international cooperation.²⁴¹ To quantify, 153 Member States are divided by transboundary rivers and lake basins, yet only 24 of them have established transboundary agreements in line with the Water Convention.²⁴² These transboundary rivers, lakes, and aquifers account for 60% of the world's freshwater flows.²⁴³ The *Practical Guide for the Development of Agreements or Other Arrangements for Transboundary Water Cooperation* (2021) suggests that Member States with transboundary water agreements benefit from enhanced cooperation and equitable, sustainable use of water resources.²⁴⁴ Furthermore, this leads to increased resilience to climate change and safe ecosystem conservation.²⁴⁵ For example, joint infrastructure projects, shared early warning systems, and collaborative adaptation strategies can strengthen resilience against climate-related shocks.²⁴⁶ Successful regulation of water usage across state borders has contributed to building trust and sustaining peace historically.²⁴⁷ In contrast, uncontrolled competition over shared water resources can lead to conflicts and competition between Member States.²⁴⁸

Conclusion

Achieving the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2030 requires significant international cooperation and investment.²⁴⁹ Key actors including the General Assembly, HRC, UN-Water, and WHO

²³⁸ UN-Water. *The Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework*. 2020. p. 16.

²³⁹ UN-Water. *Progress on Integrated Water Resources Management – Global baseline for SDG indicator 6.5.1*. 2018. pp. 3, 7.

²⁴⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2024: Water for prosperity and peace*. 2024. p. 174.

²⁴¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. *Summary Handbook on Water Allocation in a Transboundary Context*. 2023. pp. 6-11; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation*. 2021. p. 15.

²⁴² United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. *Practical Guide for the Development of Agreements or Other Arrangements for Transboundary Water Cooperation*. 2021. p. 4.

²⁴³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The role of transboundary cooperation*. 2024.

²⁴⁴ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. *Practical Guide for the Development of Agreements or Other Arrangements for Transboundary Water Cooperation*. 2021. pp. 35, 44, 58-59.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *ibid.* p. 24.

²⁴⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2024: Water for prosperity and peace*. 2024. pp. 88-89.

²⁴⁸ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *UN Water Conference: reducing cross-border tensions*. 2023.

²⁴⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018-2028. Report of the Secretary-General (A/77/249)*. 2022. p. 2.



play critical roles in coordinating efforts, setting standards, and monitoring progress.²⁵⁰ International organizations dedicated to humanitarian and development aid, such as the World Bank, WaterAid, and the International Water Association contribute by providing financial support, developing innovative solutions, and promoting best practices.²⁵¹ Despite the challenges, IWRM and robust international frameworks have the potential to reduce water-related inequalities and ensure sustainable access to water and sanitation for all.²⁵² Given the urgency and the interconnected nature of water issues, it is imperative for Member States to increase their efforts and commit to more coordinated and comprehensive strategies.²⁵³

Further Research

As delegates conduct further research and consider how to address this topic, they should consider: How can the General Assembly Third Committee ensure progress regarding the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation? How can the United Nations System help to reach the goals as set in SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation)? Where is the greatest and most urgent need for action? How can non-governmental organizations support and expand their previous ventures? How can discrimination and inequalities regarding the access to safe drinking water and sanitation be removed? What is necessary to achieve sustainable IWRM and transboundary cooperation?

²⁵⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2019: Leaving no one behind*. 2019. pp. 36, 200; United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Water, Sanitation, Hygiene 'a Human Right', Crucial for Health, Prosperity Worldwide, Speakers Stress at Conference's First Interactive Dialogue*. 2023.

²⁵¹ World Bank Group. *Global Water Security and Sanitation Partnership Annual Report 2023*. 2023. p. 10.

²⁵² UN-Water. *2030 Strategy*. 2020. pp. 5-7.

²⁵³ UN-Water. *United Nations system-wide strategy for water and sanitation. July 2024*. 2024. p. 7.



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<https://washdata.org/data/healthcare#!/>