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Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees 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 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Your committee's work is facilitated by volunteer staffers. This year's committee staff are: Director Matthias Burtscheidt and Assistant Director Diamond James (Conference A), and Director Mariana G. Marañón Laguna and Assistant Director Omar H. Zaky (Conference B). Matthias Burtscheidt holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and Sociology and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy at Trier University. Diamond graduated from Cal Poly Humboldt with a Bachelor's degree in International Studies, with minors in Cultural Anthropology and Business Marketing. She currently works in the Clinical Education department at a local medical university, where she assists with the coordination of students' clinical rotation schedules. Mariana earned her Master's degree in Integrative Neuroscience at Georgetown University. She currently works advancing large language models while pursuing medical training part-time. Omar received his B.A. in Political Science from The American University in Cairo and has completed his M.A. in International Human Rights Law, with a specific focus on artificial intelligence. Currently, Omar is a practicing attorney at a prominent law firm in Egypt. The preparation of these materials was supported by Under-Secretaries-General Anthony Bassey (Conference A) and Johanna Günkel (Conference B) with contributions by Under-Secretary-General for Conference Management Paola Chávez (Conference A).

The topics on the agenda for this committee are:

1. Enhancing Efforts to End Statelessness
2. Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence against Refugees

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!

Matthias Burtscheidt, Director
Diamond James, Assistant Director
Conference A

Mariana G. Marañón Laguna, Director
Omar H. Zaky, Assistant Director
Conference B



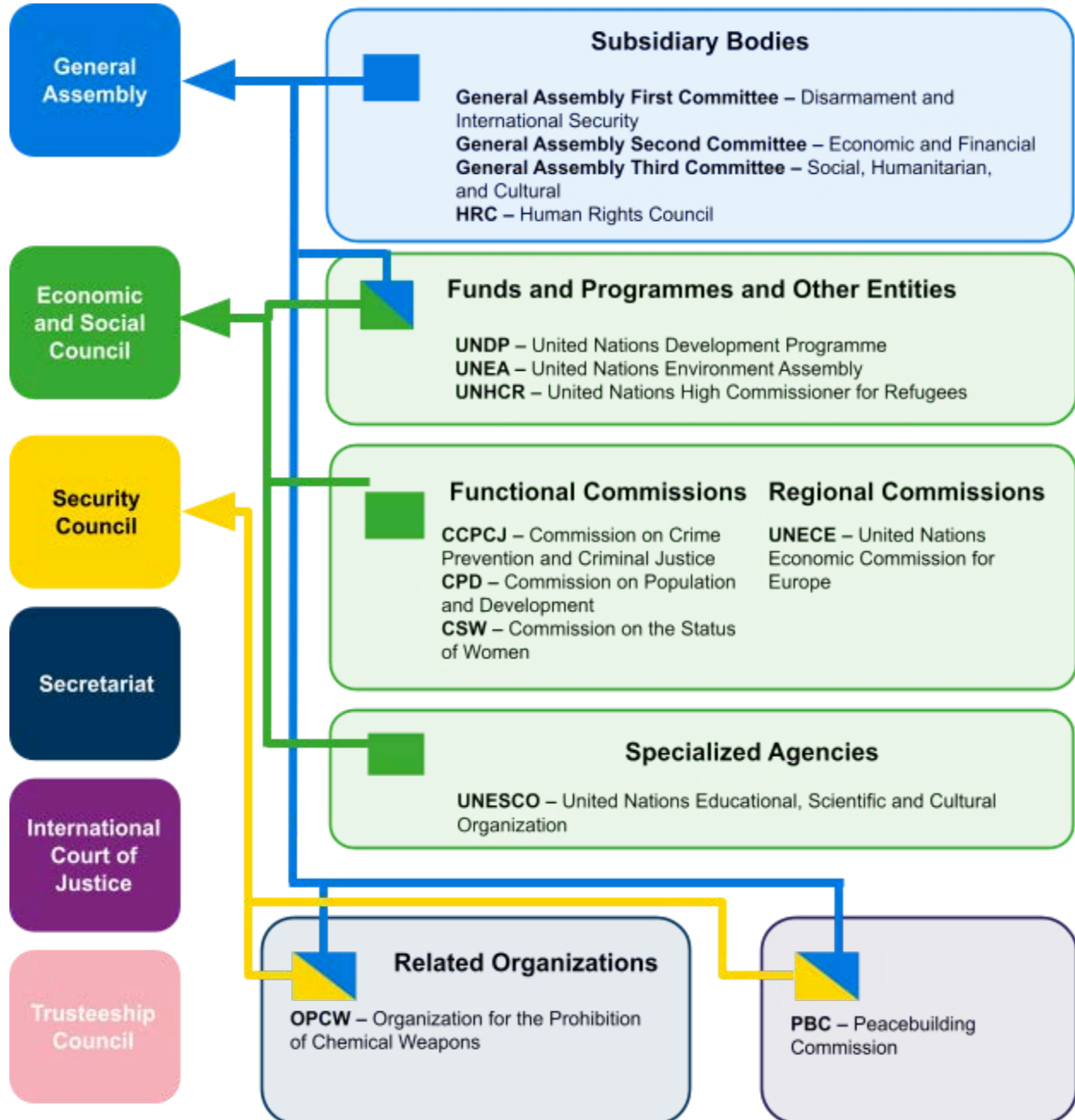
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United Nations System at NMUN·NY

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 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the leading United Nations entity for the protection of the welfare and rights of refugees.¹ The United Nations General Assembly established the body in 1950 to address the high number of displaced Europeans after World War II and initially gave the body a three-year mandate.² After extending the mandate every five years until 2003, the General Assembly decided to prolong UNHCR's mandate indefinitely.³

Most of UNHCR's resources are dedicated to field operations that address the needs of forcibly displaced persons, including 43.4 million refugees, 68.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 6.9 million asylum seekers.⁴ UNHCR is also mandated to identify and work to protect stateless people, of which there are estimated to be 4.4 million globally.⁵ UNHCR provides a variety of humanitarian aid, including food and nutritional supplements, basic and long-term shelter and housing, cash assistance, and legal services.⁶ While immediate assistance in crises constitutes a large portion of the body's work, UNHCR's larger goal is to help refugees find durable solutions to rebuild their lives.⁷

Mandate, Function, and Powers

UNHCR's mandate is to provide international protection and humanitarian assistance and seek permanent solutions for refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people.⁸ UNHCR reports annually to both the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).⁹ In 2016, the General Assembly adopted the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants* (New York Declaration), committing global support in dealing with the large numbers of forcibly displaced persons.¹⁰ The New York Declaration established the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which is a global plan to guarantee refugees' rights that serves as the predominant framing tool for UNHCR's *Global Compact for Refugees* (Global Compact).¹¹ The Global Compact, which was drafted in 2018 and affirmed

¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About UNHCR*. 2024.

² United Nations, General Assembly. *Refugees and Stateless Persons (A/RES/319 (IV))*. 1949; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *History of UNHCR*. 2024.

³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Implementing actions proposed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to strengthen the capacity of his Office to carry out its mandate (A/RES/58/153)*. 2004.

⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Figures at a glance*. 2024.

⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Statelessness around the world*. 2024.

⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Protection*. 2024.

⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Solutions*. 2024.

⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*. 2010. p. 2; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About UNHCR*. 2024.

⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Governance and Oversight*. 2024.

¹⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (A/RES/71/1)*. 2016. pp. 1-2.

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 16-24; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *The global compact on refugees: UNHCR Quick Guide*. 2018. p. 2; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *The Global Compact on Refugees*. 2024.



by the United Nations General Assembly in 2019, is the United Nations's current agreement guiding the international approach to assisting refugees.¹²

While the following list is not exhaustive, the mandate of UNHCR can be summarized as:

- **UNHCR will generally:** provide international protection and humanitarian assistance in partnership with governments, other United Nations bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society organizations; supervise the implementation of refugee instruments; assist or make recommendations to Member States in enacting or revising national refugee legislation, including administrative procedures and operational guidelines; advocate for the creation of new measures against displacements and statelessness.¹³
- **UNHCR will not generally:** unilaterally direct Member States, NGOs, and other United Nations bodies to implement actions; enforce the implementation of refugee instruments in Member States.¹⁴

To achieve its work, UNHCR collaborates with national governments, NGOs, community-based organizations, universities, and the private sector.¹⁵ UNHCR also partners with other United Nations organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).¹⁶

The UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026 (2022) guides the current work of UNHCR.¹⁷ In the document, UNHCR reaffirmed its commitment to achieving its five strategic directions (protect, respond, include, empower, and solve) and further identified eight areas for additional, accelerated, and targeted action in its pursuit to develop the comprehensive approaches outlined by the CRRF and the Global Compact.¹⁸

Governance, Funding and Structure

UNHCR is governed by the Member States of the Executive Committee (ExCom).¹⁹ ExCom approves the agency's annual program priorities and budget.²⁰ ExCom meets every October to review financial matters for the coming year, advise the High Commissioner, authorize appeals for funds, and approve upcoming

¹² United Nations, General Assembly. *Part II: Global Compact on Refugees (A/73/12(Part II))*. 2018; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Refugee Forum*. 2024.

¹³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR's mandate for refugees, stateless persons and IDPs*. 2024.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Additional partnerships*. 2024.

¹⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UN and International Institutions*. 2024.

¹⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026*. 2024.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Governance and Oversight*. 2024.

²⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. 2010. p. 2.



targets for UNHCR.²¹ ExCom members are elected by ECOSOC according to equitable geographical allocations and is now comprised of 106 Member States.²² The committee reports directly to the General Assembly Third Committee and follows directives issued by either the General Assembly or ECOSOC.²³

UNHCR's funding comes almost entirely from the voluntary contributions of Member States, intergovernmental institutions, corporations, foundations, and individuals worldwide.²⁴ To acquire these donations, UNHCR releases an annual Global Appeal that provides detailed information regarding significant areas of concern for UNHCR, as well as Supplementary Appeals that address specific situations.²⁵ The budget also includes contributions from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund for situations requiring immediate response, such as a natural disaster or violent conflict.²⁶

²¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. 2010. p. 2.; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Executive Committee*. 2024.

²² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. 2010. p. 3.

²³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *ExCom membership by date of admission of members*. 2024.

²⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Budget and Expenditure*. 2024.; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Donor ranking*. 2024.; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Additional partnerships*. 2024.

²⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Appeal 2024*. 2024.

²⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UN and International Institutions*. 2024.



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1. Enhancing Efforts to End Statelessness

Introduction

Statelessness arises from various factors, including discrimination, gender-biased nationality laws, state dissolution, legal gaps, and the inability to prove national ties due to lack of documentation like birth certificates.²⁷ Article 1 of the *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* (1954) defines a stateless person as “a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law.”²⁸ This means that no state recognizes this person as a citizen.²⁹ Some people are born stateless, while others become stateless later in life.³⁰ Currently, the most significant cause of statelessness is discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, or gender.³¹ In 24 Member States, gender-discriminatory nationality laws prevent mothers from passing on their nationality to their children, potentially leaving the child stateless if the father is absent or unwilling to cooperate.³² Statelessness also arises from the emergence or dissolution of states.³³ When a state ceases to exist, its nationality is extinguished, and the new state must determine eligibility for its nationality, often excluding some groups.³⁴ This occurred when the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, leaving millions stateless.³⁵ Gaps and conflicts in nationality laws contribute to statelessness by creating legal loopholes that prevent certain individuals, such as children born to stateless parents or in cross-border situations, from acquiring or retaining citizenship.³⁶ Furthermore, the inability to prove links to a state, often due to a lack of birth registration, puts people at risk of statelessness, as a birth certificate is crucial for establishing nationality.³⁷

Most stateless people belong to marginalized minority groups, increasing their exclusion and limiting access to basic rights.³⁸ At the end of 2023, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported 4.4 million stateless persons and individuals with undetermined nationality in its annual statistics.³⁹ However, this figure is widely acknowledged as significantly lower than the actual

²⁷ Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness. Melbourne Law School. *Factsheet: How does someone become stateless?*. 2023. p. 1; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About Statelessness*. 2024.

²⁸ United Nations, Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Stateless Persons. *Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*. 1954.

²⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About Statelessness*. 2024.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness. Melbourne Law School. *Factsheet: How does someone become stateless?*. 2023. p. 1.

³² Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights. *The Problem*. N.d.; Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness. Melbourne Law School. *Factsheet: How does someone become stateless?*. 2023. p. 1.

³³ Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness. Melbourne Law School. *Factsheet: How does someone become stateless?*. 2023. pp. 1-2.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 2.

³⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About Statelessness*. 2024.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Division of International Protection. *This is Our Home: Stateless minorities and their search for citizenship*. 2017. p. 1; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Focus UNHCR Operations Worldwide. Global Appeal 2024 Statelessness*. 2024.

³⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Focus UNHCR Operations Worldwide. Global Appeal 2024 Statelessness*. 2024.



number due to the complexities of data collection and the tendency for stateless persons to be overlooked in national data surveys.⁴⁰ Demographic information, available for 79% of the 4.4 million stateless people, shows that women constitute 53% of the adult stateless population.⁴¹ Approximately one third of the global stateless population is also displaced.⁴² The Rohingya refugees, mainly in Bangladesh, total 971,900 and constitute the largest displaced stateless population in the territories neighboring Myanmar.⁴³ The largest non-displaced stateless populations are in Côte d'Ivoire and Thailand, with 931,000 and 586,500 stateless persons, respectively.⁴⁴ Furthermore, over 75% of the world's known stateless populations belong to ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority groups.⁴⁵ Statelessness exacerbates the exclusion of minorities, further limiting their access to education, healthcare, legal employment, freedom of movement, and basic rights due to the lack of legal recognition and documentation.⁴⁶ Many Member States require proof of nationality for school enrollment, limiting educational opportunities for stateless children.⁴⁷ Without proper documentation, stateless individuals are often excluded from formal employment, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and deepening the gap of opportunities between them and non-stateless people.⁴⁸

UNHCR's populations of concern include refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and stateless people.⁴⁹ Although being a refugee and being stateless are distinct conditions, these statuses overlap for approximately 1.5 million individuals worldwide.⁵⁰ The *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951) explicitly recognizes that a refugee can also be stateless.⁵¹ IDPs are people who have been forced to leave their homes due to armed conflict, violence, human rights violations, or natural disasters, but who have not crossed an international border.⁵² This distinction is recognized in the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and the *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* (1954).⁵³ Statelessness differs from being undocumented in that stateless individuals lack any recognized nationality, whereas undocumented people may have citizenship in another Member State.⁵⁴

⁴⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Focus UNHCR Operations Worldwide. Global Appeal 2024 Statelessness*. 2024.

⁴¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Statistics, Data Science, and Survey Section. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023*. 2024. pp. 43-44.

⁴² Ibid. pp. 43-44.

⁴³ Ibid. 43-44.

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 43-44.

⁴⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Division of International Protection. *This is Our Home: Stateless minorities and their search for citizenship*. 2017. p. 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 1.

⁴⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Statistics, Data Science, and Survey Section. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023*. 2024. pp. 6, 15, 25, 43.

⁵⁰ Forced Migration Review. Refugee Studies Center at Oxford University. *Recognising stateless refugees*. 2024.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Statistics, Data Science, and Survey Section. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023*. 2024. p. 25.

⁵³ Forced Migration Review. Refugee Studies Center at Oxford University. *Recognising stateless refugees*. 2024.

⁵⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *5 Things to Know About Statelessness*. 2020. p. 1.



International and Regional Framework

The inalienability of human rights provided the fundamental basis for the protection of stateless persons.⁵⁵ The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948) served as the first major international framework to protect individual human rights.⁵⁶ The 1954 *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* (1954 Convention) established the components for addressing, protecting, and resolving issues pertaining to stateless persons.⁵⁷ As not all stateless persons were considered refugees in accordance with the convention, they were not entirely covered under the 1951 *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951 Convention).⁵⁸ The 1954 Convention addressed this gap, as its preamble acknowledged that many stateless persons fall outside the scope of the 1951 Convention.⁵⁹ The 1954 Convention also provided the fundamental framework for the treatment of stateless persons, including freedom from discrimination, access to employment, access to courts of law, housing, and education.⁶⁰ This includes granting stateless persons with identity papers and travel documents.⁶¹ A key provision of the 1954 Convention mandates that States parties facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of stateless persons, including expediting the process and reducing associated costs.⁶²

The *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness* (1961) created the basis for the legal prevention of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons.⁶³ The *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness* (1961 Convention) was adopted to build on the 1954 Convention and article 15 of the UDHR, which affirms everyone's right to a nationality.⁶⁴ The 1961 Convention aimed to prevent statelessness at birth by requiring states to grant nationality to those born on their territory who would otherwise be stateless (article 1) and also introduced safeguards to prevent loss, renunciation, or deprivation of nationality that would result in statelessness.⁶⁵ The adoption of the 1961 Convention resulted in General Assembly resolution 50/152 on the "Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees" in 1996, which expanded UNHCR's mandate to encompass support for stateless persons.⁶⁶

International frameworks play a crucial role in addressing statelessness resulting from gender discrimination.⁶⁷ The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*

⁵⁵ United Nations, Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Stateless Persons. *Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*. 1954. Preamble.

⁵⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948; United Nations, Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Stateless Persons. *Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*. 1954. Preamble.

⁵⁷ United Nations, Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Stateless Persons. *Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*. 1954.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Article (I).

⁵⁹ United Nations, Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Stateless Persons. *Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*. 1954. p. 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ United Nations, Conference of Plenipotentiaries. *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*. 1961.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/RES/50/152)*. 1996.

⁶⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966; United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of*



(CEDAW) mandates States parties to uphold women's rights and equality, addressing barriers such as discriminatory nationality laws that prevent women from conferring citizenship.⁶⁸ Article 9 of CEDAW ensures women have equal nationality rights as men.⁶⁹ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, established in 1982, monitors compliance and advocates for law reforms.⁷⁰ Article 24 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966) and Articles 7 and 8 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) further support these principles.⁷¹

The adoption of General Assembly resolution 70/1 on “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (2030 Agenda) (2015) has been relevant in addressing statelessness.⁷² As outlined in the 2030 Agenda as well as in the 2017 UNHCR report titled “Sustainable Development Goals and Addressing Statelessness,” the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 associated targets are pertinent to resolving statelessness.⁷³ Specifically, SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals) provide protections towards basic rights, reduction of inequality, gender equality, and access to justice, all of which are essential for eradicating statelessness through addressing gender disparities and strengthening legal frameworks.⁷⁴

Role of the International System

Since 1950, UNHCR has played a key role in the identification and protection of stateless people as well as the prevention and reduction of statelessness.⁷⁵ UNHCR releases annual statistical reports containing data on stateless populations.⁷⁶ These reports contribute to the agency's efforts to maintain comprehensive and current information on the global number and conditions of stateless people.⁷⁷ In 2014, UNHCR launched the #IBelong Campaign, which has since then enabled nearly 565,900 stateless people to gain citizenship and prompted 26 Member States to improve their legal frameworks.⁷⁸ For instance, Kenya granted citizenship to the Pemba in 2023, and Thailand, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan

Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180). 1979; United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. 1989.

⁶⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*. 1979; United Nations, Human Rights Council. *The Right to a Nationality: Women and Children (A/HRC/RES/20/4)*. 2012; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2.0*. 2024. p. 18.

⁶⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*. 1979. Article 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* Article 17.

⁷¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966; United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. 1989.

⁷² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *The Sustainable Development Goals and Addressing Statelessness*. 2017.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

⁷⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About Statelessness*. 2024.

⁷⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Statistical Reporting on Statelessness*. 2019.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Statistics, Data Science, and Survey Section. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023*. 2024. p. 45.



continue to reduce statelessness.⁷⁹ Along with the launch of this campaign, UNHCR published the *Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014-2024*, which aimed to end statelessness by 2024, focusing on reforms like removing gender discrimination from nationality laws and enhancing data on stateless populations.⁸⁰ Building on this action plan, UNHCR published its *Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2.0* in October 2024, which reflects the progress made over the past ten years as well as the remaining challenges and changing needs.⁸¹ This progress is reported in *Redoubling Our Efforts on Ending Statelessness: UNHCR's Strategic Plan 2023-2026* (2023), which also emphasizes enhancing protection, providing durable solutions, and supporting the resilience of refugees, stateless persons, and other forcibly displaced populations by 2026.⁸² UNHCR launched the Global Alliance to End Statelessness in October 2024 at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in Geneva, creating a collaborative platform focused on eliminating statelessness and ensuring universal access to nationality rights.⁸³ The Global Alliance Taskforce is made up of stateless people, civil society organizations (CSOs), academic institutions, faith-based groups, United Nations agencies, and other international actors.⁸⁴

Collaboration among United Nations agencies is essential for addressing the issue of statelessness.⁸⁵ For instance, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), through its various field offices, offers Member States technical guidance on nationality laws and policies to align them with international human rights standards.⁸⁶ It particularly advocates for reforms that address gender discrimination in nationality laws, which affect women's rights as well as the rights of their children and spouses.⁸⁷ In October 2021, OHCHR and UNHCR co-hosted a Virtual Roundtable on Equality and Non-Discrimination in Nationality Matters to End Statelessness that led to the creation of the outcome document *Equality and Non-Discrimination in Nationality Matters to End Statelessness* (2021), emphasizing the need to address discrimination in nationality laws and policies.⁸⁸ The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) consistently works to enhance birth registration and civil registries.⁸⁹ In collaboration with UNHCR, UNICEF also supports the production of materials to strengthen the capacity of national governments and civil society stakeholders to address childhood statelessness at national,

⁷⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Redoubling our efforts on ending statelessness: UNHCR's strategic plan 2023-2026*. 2023. p. 2; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Statistics, Data Science, and Survey Section. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023*. 2024. p. 45.

⁸⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014-2024*. 2014.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Redoubling our efforts on ending statelessness: UNHCR's strategic plan 2023-2026*. 2023.

⁸³ Global Alliance to End Statelessness. *Introduction*. 2024.

⁸⁴ Global Alliance to End Statelessness. *Taskforce*. 2024.

⁸⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About Statelessness*. 2024.

⁸⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *OHCHR and the right to a nationality*. 2024.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Equality and Non-Discrimination in Nationality Matters to End Statelessness*. 2021; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *OHCHR and the right to a nationality*. 2024.

⁸⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About Statelessness*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Results of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness*. 2024.



regional, and global levels.⁹⁰ The United Nations Population Fund along with UNHCR assists governments in designing and implementing national censuses, while OHCHR supports the monitoring of human rights for stateless persons.⁹¹ The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) focuses on the gendered dimensions of statelessness, addressing how it disproportionately affects women and advocating for their rights and legal recognition in both national and international contexts.⁹² In collaboration with the Association for the Prevention of Torture and the International Detention Coalition, UNHCR also issued the *2014 Practical Manual: Monitoring Immigration Detention*, which provided a guide for monitoring the conditions and practices within immigration detention facilities, emphasizing human rights, due process, and the importance of transparency and accountability.⁹³ Additionally, the International Development Law Organization, which gives legal assistance and capacity-building support, collaborates with UNHCR to enhance the ability of legal systems and strengthen legal frameworks.⁹⁴

CSOs play a crucial role in advancing nationality rights by promoting universal birth registration and advocating for gender-equal citizenship laws.⁹⁵ In February 2024, the African Union Assembly of States adopted the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights Relating to the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness*.⁹⁶ This protocol aims to protect nationality rights by addressing legal barriers to the right to nationality, help stateless people access human rights, such as education, health, and employment, and prevent generational statelessness.⁹⁷ The Latin American and Caribbean Council of Civil Registry, Identity, and Vital Statistics promotes the right to identity and supports regional efforts to achieve universal birth registration by 2030.⁹⁸ Family Frontiers, a CSO that works in Malaysia, advocates for gender-equal citizenship laws and policies, offering support to women in binational marriages, who often face heightened risks of statelessness due to discriminatory laws.⁹⁹ These risks can arise from restrictions on passing nationality to children, loss of citizenship upon marrying a foreign spouse, changes in a spouse's nationality, or other gender-based legal inequalities.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About Statelessness*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Results of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness*. 2024.

⁹¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR and UNFPA support the collection of data on statelessness within 2023 national census in Uzbekistan*. 2021; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Results of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness*. 2024.

⁹² Asia-Pacific Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group et al. *Good Practices Brochure: Stateless Women and Girls*. 2021.

⁹³ Association for the Prevention of Torture et al. *Monitoring Immigration Detention: Practical Manual*. 2014.

⁹⁴ International Development Law Organization. *IDLO and UN Refugee Agency Strengthen Partnership*. 2020.

⁹⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Non-governmental organizations*. 2024.

⁹⁶ African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. *Press release on the adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights relating to specific aspects of the right to a nationality and the eradication of statelessness in Africa*. 2024.

⁹⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR lauds African Union move to address statelessness across the continent*. 2024.

⁹⁸ Organization of American States. *Latin American and Caribbean Council of Civil Registry, Identity, and Vital Statistics (CLARCIEV) promotes the right to identity and supports regional efforts to achieve universal birth registration by 2030*. N.d.

⁹⁹ European Institute for Gender Equality. *Stateless Women*. N.d.; Global Alliance to End Statelessness. *Taskforce*. 2024.

¹⁰⁰ European Institute for Gender Equality. *Stateless Women*. 2024.



Since 2018, UNHCR has formed strategic partnerships with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Terre des Hommes (TdH) to assist displaced and stateless persons in developing their sporting careers and building their futures.¹⁰¹

Addressing Legal Barriers to Citizenship and Legal-based Discrimination of Stateless Persons

Statelessness is largely driven by discriminatory legal frameworks present in over 80 Member States, disproportionately impacting ethnic, religious, and gender minorities.¹⁰² A key driver of statelessness is legal discrimination embedded in national laws, which creates significant barriers to obtaining citizenship.¹⁰³ Such discriminatory laws are present in at least 80 Member States and particularly affect people from ethnic, religious, or minority groups, who make up an estimated 75% of stateless persons.¹⁰⁴ However, this discrimination can also be based on gender, further exacerbating the challenges stateless populations face.¹⁰⁵ Per UNHCR's report, *Addressing Statelessness through the Rule of Law* (2022), 24 Member States have laws that prevent women from passing on their citizenship to their children, a situation worsened when the father is either stateless or unable or unwilling to confer his citizenship.¹⁰⁶ Action 3 of UNHCR's *Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2.0* (2024) emphasizes the need to eliminate gender discrimination in nationality laws, aligning with Article 9 of CEDAW.¹⁰⁷ The plan calls on Member States to withdraw reservations to Article 9 and enact retroactive reforms to enable women to pass on their nationality to their children.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, Human Rights Council resolution 20/4 on "The Right to a Nationality: Women and Children" (2012) calls on Member States to eliminate gender-discriminatory provisions in nationality laws.¹⁰⁹ UNHCR also continuously collaborates with UNICEF, UN Women, and OHCHR to aid in identifying and addressing gender-based discrimination in nationality laws.¹¹⁰ Regional commitments have significantly advanced gender equality in nationality rights, notably in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) through the 2015 *Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of ECOWAS Member States on the Eradication of Statelessness* and the *Banjul Plan of Action of ECOWAS on the Eradication of Statelessness 2017-2024*.¹¹¹ These initiatives reflect the

¹⁰¹ International Olympic Committee et al. *Sport for Protection Toolkit: Programming with young people in forced displacement settings*. 2018.

¹⁰² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014-2024*. 2014; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Addressing Statelessness through the Rule of Law*. 2022. pp. 6-7.

¹⁰³ Ibid. pp. 6-7.

¹⁰⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Addressing Statelessness through the Rule of Law*. 2022. p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2.0*. 2024. pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 19.

¹⁰⁹ United Nations, Human Rights Council. *The Right to a Nationality: Women and Children (A/HRC/RES/20/4)*. 2012.

¹¹⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014-2024*. 2014. p. 13.

¹¹¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Background Note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness 2022*. 2022.



intention of ECOWAS members to ensure that both men and women have equal rights to confer nationality to their children.¹¹²

Accession to the *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* and the *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness* are key steps towards promoting, facilitating, and supporting the naturalization and protection of stateless persons.¹¹³ As of 2024, 98 Member States have acceded to the *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*, and 80 Member States have acceded to the *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*, respectively.¹¹⁴ These conventions provide minimum standards for the protection of stateless persons and their right to a nationality.¹¹⁵

UNHCR has called on Member States to identify and release detained stateless individuals, promote legal aid, and monitor nationality laws, while providing legal pathways for stateless persons.¹¹⁶ The movement of stateless people, combined with the absence of systems to determine their status, often makes it hard to identify them or for them to gain legal status needed for naturalization.¹¹⁷ In 2014, UNHCR urged Member States to actively identify stateless individuals detained for immigration reasons and secure their release while their legal status is being determined, following the 2014 *Monitoring Immigration Detention: Practice Manual*.¹¹⁸ UNHCR also promoted offering legal aid to affected groups and called for stricter oversight of nationality laws and reforms to support the rule of law.¹¹⁹ Specifically, UNHCR supported the International Development Law Organization in developing pathways to justice and providing legal aid to stateless persons in Uganda and South Sudanese refugees in the Kyegegwa district.¹²⁰

Sports Diplomacy: A Tool for Mitigating Statelessness

Sports create a supportive environment that enhances people's quality of life and helps address the challenges associated with statelessness.¹²¹ It is vital for stateless people to participate in sports as it significantly contributes to their health and well-being (SDG 3) by providing physical activity and mental

¹¹² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Background Note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness 2022*. 2022. p. 3.

¹¹³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014-2024*. 2014. p. 29.

¹¹⁴ United Nations Treaty Collection. *Depositary. Status of Treaties. Chapter V: Refugees and Stateless Persons. 3. Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*. 2024; United Nations Treaty Collection. *Depositary. Status of Treaties. Chapter V: Refugees and Stateless Persons. 4. Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*. 2024..

¹¹⁵ United Nations, Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Stateless Persons. *Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*. 1954; United Nations, Conference of Plenipotentiaries. *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*. 1961.

¹¹⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014-2024*. 2014. pp. 14, 16; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Addressing Statelessness through the Rule of Law*. 2022. p. 9.

¹¹⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014-2024*. 2014. p. 16.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 17.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 14.

¹²⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Addressing Statelessness through the Rule of Law*. 2022. p. 9.

¹²¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *More than a Game – the UNHCR Sport Strategy 2022-2026*. 2022. p. 23.



stimulation.¹²² Sports offer opportunities for personal development and learning, helping people acquire skills that are valuable for education (SDG 4) and future employment (SDG 8).¹²³ Moreover, it promotes reduced inequalities (SDG 10) by offering equal opportunities and fostering social inclusion.¹²⁴ Through sports, stateless people can experience community cohesion and dialogue, advancing peace and social stability (SDG 16).¹²⁵ Involvement in sports can foster partnerships and collaborative initiatives that enhance the integration and development of stateless individuals (SDG 17).¹²⁶ In this regard, sports diplomacy serves as a powerful mechanism that leverages athletes and sporting institutions, such as IOC, the International Paralympic Committee, and Special Olympics, to promote international cooperation, peace, and development, while empowering vulnerable groups, such as stateless youth, through skill-building and education.¹²⁷

UNHCR has increasingly recognized the transformative potential of sport for refugees, internally displaced persons, and stateless communities.¹²⁸ Sport has long been present in displacement settings where UNHCR works with refugees, IDPs, and stateless communities.¹²⁹ Historically, inter-camp tournaments and “sport days” were organized, particularly in Europe after World War II, to improve health and well-being through distraction.¹³⁰ Recently, UNHCR has taken a more strategic approach, recognizing that organized sports can enhance protection and development outcomes, especially for children and youth.¹³¹ In 2018, UNHCR, in collaboration with IOC and TdH, launched the *Sport for Protection Toolkit: Programming with Young People in Forced Displacement Settings* to help humanitarian staff and sports organizations implement sport projects that promote positive protection outcomes.¹³² In 2022, UNHCR launched its first global sport strategy, *More than a Game*, to provide opportunities for displaced and stateless youth to participate in protective and developmental sport- and play-based activities.¹³³ In June 2024, UNHCR Montenegro partnered with the Football Association of Montenegro and the Montenegrin Olympic Committee to host two events promoting the inclusion and protection of refugee and stateless children through the unifying power of sport.¹³⁴ The *More than a Game* strategy highlights UNHCR’s commitment to harnessing the transformative potential of sport for displaced and stateless populations, while aiming to develop a consistent, global approach to maximize its impact.¹³⁵

¹²² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *More than a Game – the UNHCR Sport Strategy 2022-2026*. 2022. pp. 20, 23.

¹²³ Ibid. pp. 20, 23, 34.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 20.

¹²⁵ Ibid. p. 20.

¹²⁶ Ibid. p. 20.

¹²⁷ The International Platform on Sport and Development. *What is sports diplomacy?*. 2024; Rofe. *Sport Diplomacy: So what is it?*. N.d.

¹²⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *More than a Game – the UNHCR Sport Strategy 2022-2026*. 2022. p. 9.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 9.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 9.

¹³¹ Ibid. p. 9.

¹³² Ibid. p. 9.

¹³³ Ibid. p. 5.

¹³⁴ United Nations in Montenegro. *In Action: Teaming Up to Empower Refugee and Stateless Children in Montenegro through Sport*. 2024.

¹³⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *More than a Game – the UNHCR Sport Strategy 2022-2026*. 2022. p. 5.



Various organizations leverage sports to promote social change and improve the lives of displaced and stateless individuals.¹³⁶ For example, Fare Network, funded by the European Network, is an umbrella organization that unites individuals and groups committed to combating inequality in football and using the sport as a means for social change.¹³⁷ The International Judo Federation has been diligently implementing various initiatives to leverage the unique benefits of judo for improving outcomes for displaced and stateless people and their communities, particularly youth.¹³⁸ Similarly, the Confederation of Independent Football Associations (CONIFA) hosts international football tournaments for unrecognized states, minorities, stateless people, and regions unaffiliated with the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA).¹³⁹ CONIFA represents 334 million people worldwide and includes football teams from Tibet, Rohingya, Darfur, and Northern Cyprus.¹⁴⁰

While UNHCR has made significant strides in utilizing sport to benefit displaced and stateless communities through initiatives like the Sport for Protection Toolkit and the More than a Game strategy, further efforts are necessary to enhance access and participation for stateless persons.¹⁴¹ This includes increasing awareness of their specific challenges within the sporting community, developing targeted programs that address their unique needs, and fostering partnerships with local and international sports organizations.¹⁴² Additionally, sustained investment in infrastructure and resources are crucial to ensure that stateless people can engage in meaningful sport and play activities, ultimately promoting their social inclusion and well-being.¹⁴³

Conclusion

Statelessness is a complex and persistent global issue that affects 4.4 million people, depriving them of basic human rights and opportunities.¹⁴⁴ UNHCR has progressed in eradicating statelessness through initiatives like the #IBelong Campaign, which has helped hundreds of thousands acquire citizenship.¹⁴⁵ However, statelessness remains a critical problem due to legal barriers and legal-based discrimination, gender-biased nationality laws, and the dissolution and creation of states.¹⁴⁶ Collaboration among United

¹³⁶ Fare Network. *What does Fare Do?*. N.d.; Cable News Network World. *CONIFA: The alternative World Cup for stateless people and unrecognized nations*. 2018; International Judo Federation. *Judo for Refugees: An Initiative of the International Judo Federation*. 2021. p. 2.

¹³⁷ Fare Network. *What does Fare Do?*. 2024.

¹³⁸ International Judo Federation. *Judo for Refugees: An Initiative of the International Judo Federation*. 2021. p. 2.

¹³⁹ Cable News Network World. *CONIFA: The alternative World Cup for stateless people and unrecognized nations*. 2018.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *More than a Game – the UNHCR Sport Strategy 2022-2026*. 2022. pp. 5, 9.

¹⁴² United Nations in Montenegro. *In Action: Teaming Up to Empower Refugee and Stateless Children in Montenegro through Sport*. 2024.

¹⁴³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *More than a Game – the UNHCR Sport Strategy 2022-2026*. 2022. pp. 20, 23, 34.

¹⁴⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Focus UNHCR Operations Worldwide. Global Appeal 2024 Statelessness*. 2024.

¹⁴⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Statistics, Data Science, and Survey Section. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023*. 2024. p. 45.

¹⁴⁶ Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness. Melbourne Law School. *Factsheet: How does someone become stateless?*. 2023. p. 1.



Nations agencies, governments, and CSOs is crucial in addressing statelessness.¹⁴⁷ For instance, UNHCR works closely with diverse partners to improve birth registration, develop programs for sports development, and advocate for legal reforms, actions that help reduce statelessness.¹⁴⁸ Addressing statelessness requires commitment and innovative solutions to guarantee that everyone can enjoy the right to a nationality and the full benefits of citizenship.¹⁴⁹ This can involve promoting further accession to the *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* and the *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*, improving means of the identification of stateless persons, and building upon existing processes for the monitoring and identification of discriminatory laws or processes that hinder the naturalization of stateless persons.¹⁵⁰

Further Research

As delegates conduct further research and consider how to address this topic, they should consider: What specific measures have been most effective in reducing statelessness in Member States such as Kenya, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, and how can these be implemented globally to accelerate progress? How do gender-discriminatory nationality laws in different Member States contribute to statelessness, and what legislative changes are needed to address this? How can Member States more easily identify stateless persons? Which specific methods should Member States and UNHCR adopt or improve upon to monitor Member States' progress on the identification and resolution of legal barriers? How can Member States promote accession to the conventions regarding stateless persons? What role can international sports organizations play in supporting the integration and empowerment of stateless and displaced youth, and what successful models or programs can be scaled up?

¹⁴⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About Statelessness*. 2024.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. ; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Results of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness*. 2024.

¹⁴⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Background Note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness 2022*. 2022.

¹⁵⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014-2024*. 2014.



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<https://statelessnessalliance.org/taskforce/>

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<https://www.idlo.int/news/highlights/idlo-and-un-refugee-agency-strengthen-partnership>

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https://78884ca60822a34fb0e6-082b8fd5551e97bc65e327988b444396.ssl.cf3.rackcdn.com/up/2021/12/Judo_for_Refugees-V2021-163966-1639660242.pdf

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2. Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence against Refugees

*It is unacceptable that gender-based violence continues to drive women, girls and LGBTIQ+ people from their homes and remains one of the major risks they face during their displacement. National authorities must ensure they are able to access asylum and seek protection, and scale up prevention and response measures.*¹⁵¹

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a critical risk for refugees worldwide and their risk is further exacerbated by their displacement.¹⁵² The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) defines GBV as an umbrella term encompassing any harmful act imposed against a person's will, rooted in socially assigned gender differences.¹⁵³ It includes acts that cause physical, sexual, or mental harm, threats of such acts, coercion, and other forms of deprivation of freedom.¹⁵⁴ GBV can take place in both public and private settings.¹⁵⁵ The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) notes that one of the root causes of GBV is systematic gender inequality.¹⁵⁶ The *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951) (Refugee Convention) defines a refugee as anyone who has crossed an international border due to a fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a specific social group, or political beliefs.¹⁵⁷ Whilst fleeing persecution does not inherently cause GBV, refugees are particularly vulnerable to GBV due to gender inequalities and unsafe migration routes.¹⁵⁸

Of the 37.3 million refugees worldwide, approximately 50% are women, and girls and one in five displaced women has faced some form of GBV.¹⁵⁹ GBV also affects other social groups, like children, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) persons, defined by their real or perceived non-conforming sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and/or sex characteristics.¹⁶⁰ The intersection of gender and flight exacerbates the risks faced by refugees, and societal breakdown, lack of protection, economic insecurity, and exposure to exploitation compounds

¹⁵¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR urges more effective action against gender-based violence in the north of Central America*. 2021.

¹⁵² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Gender Equality and Gender-Based Violence*. N.d.

¹⁵³ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action. Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience and Aiding Recovery*. 2015. p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 5.

¹⁵⁵ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action. Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience and Aiding Recovery*. 2015. p. 5.

¹⁵⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Gender Equality and Gender-Based Violence*. N.d.

¹⁵⁷ United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951.

¹⁵⁸ International Organization for Migration, Regional Office for the Americas. *What Makes Migrants Vulnerable To Gender-Based Violence?*. 2024; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *From Evidence To Action: Tackling Gender-Based Violence Against Migrant Women And Girls, Policy Brief*. N.d.

¹⁵⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Refugee Data Finder*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Women*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Gender Equality and Gender-Based Violence*. N.d. p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Applying the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy to LGBTIQ+ Persons*. 2021. p. 2.



these risks.¹⁶¹ Child, female, and LGBTQIA+ refugees are therefore at greater risk of sexual, physical, and psychological violence, including rape, sexual abuse, forced prostitution, or trafficking, and the perpetrators might range from authorities, smugglers, human traffickers, or other refugees.¹⁶²

UNHCR considers GBV to be a serious human rights violation.¹⁶³ To ensure the protection of victims and intervene in case of an attack, UNHCR addresses GBV through prevention and response mechanisms.¹⁶⁴ Preventive measures are aimed at targeting the root causes of violence to stop it from occurring, for example through education programs to change social norms and behavior.¹⁶⁵ Response refers to immediate survivor-centered intervention following an act of violence to ensure the survivor's physical safety and, thereafter, provide access to justice or psychological support.¹⁶⁶

International and Regional Framework

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) is the first international document to outline fundamental human rights for refugees, with Article 14 ensuring the right to seek asylum from persecution.¹⁶⁷ The Refugee Convention established the definition of refugees (Article 1) and highlighted their rights and protections, including access to legal remedies and protection from discrimination.¹⁶⁸ The *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1967) expanded these regulations to include individuals displaced by conflicts, political unrest, and other crises.¹⁶⁹ The *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) (1966) prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment towards any individual (Article 7).¹⁷⁰ The *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) (1966) ensures equal rights to all persons without discrimination, and promotes economic independence, and access to education and health services.¹⁷¹ In 1979, the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) established a comprehensive framework combating GBV, outlining state obligations and monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective prevention and response measures while reinforcing gender equality.¹⁷² CEDAW defines discrimination against women as any

¹⁶¹ International Organization for Migration, Regional Office for the Americas. *What Makes Migrants Vulnerable To Gender-Based Violence?*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Gender-Based Violence*. 2024; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *From Evidence To Action: Tackling Gender-Based Violence Against Migrant Women And Girls, Policy Brief*. N.d.

¹⁶² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Gender-Based Violence*. 2024; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *From Evidence To Action: Tackling Gender-Based Violence Against Migrant Women And Girls, Policy Brief*. N.d.

¹⁶³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Gender-Based Violence*. 2024.

¹⁶⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR policy on the prevention of, risk mitigation and response to gender-based violence, 2020*. 2020. pp. 8-9.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 8-9.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 8-9.

¹⁶⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948.

¹⁶⁸ United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966.

¹⁷¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966.

¹⁷² United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*. 1979.



sex-based distinction or restriction that impairs women's equal access to human rights (Article 1).¹⁷³ The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989) ensures that children seeking asylum or refugee status receive necessary protection and aid, including efforts to trace and reunite them with family (Article 10).¹⁷⁴ This commitment is significant in addressing issues like child and forced marriage (CFM), as refugee children are at increased risk of such occurrences due to displacement and instability.¹⁷⁵ The *Yogyakarta Principles*, developed in 2007 by a group of international human rights experts, while not part of the United Nations system, they have become a widely recognized international norm that set forth key individual rights of LGBTQIA+ persons, particularly protecting them from persecution, torture, exploitation, and discrimination.¹⁷⁶

In 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants* (New York Declaration), a landmark document underscoring 193 Member States' commitment to safeguarding the human rights of refugees.¹⁷⁷ Member States pledged to prevent and address GBV, striving to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and to ensure access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services.¹⁷⁸ In 2018, the *Global Compact on Refugees* was created as a result of the New York Declaration.¹⁷⁹ It establishes a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which includes guiding principles, objectives, and a programme of action for burden sharing and support, along with follow-up and review arrangements.¹⁸⁰ The CRRF's key objectives are to ease host country pressures, boost refugee self-reliance, expand third country solutions, and support safe return to countries of origin.¹⁸¹

The United Nations system works to eliminate GBV by promoting human rights, advocating for policy changes, and supporting initiatives that empower women and ensure their safety globally.¹⁸² The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000) on "Women, Peace and Security," establishing a framework for incorporating a gender perspective into international peace and security.¹⁸³ This resolution marked a significant shift toward recognizing the role of women in peacebuilding and their right to safety during and after conflict.¹⁸⁴ This was further strengthened with Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) on "Acts of Sexual Violence against Civilians in Armed Conflict," addressing sexual violence in armed

¹⁷³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*. 1979.

¹⁷⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. 1989.

¹⁷⁵ Girls Not Brides. *About Child Marriage: Why It Happens*. 2024; Walk Free. *Understanding forced and child marriage*. 2024.

¹⁷⁶ International Panel of Experts in International Human Rights Law and on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. *Yogyakarta Principles: Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. 2006.

¹⁷⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (A/RES/71/1)*. 2016.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *The Global Compact on Refugees (A/73/12 (Part II))*. 2018.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² United Nations, Security Council. *Women, Peace and Security (S/RES/1325 (2000))*. 2000; United Nations, Security Council. *Acts of Sexual Violence against Civilians in Armed Conflict (S/RES/1820(2008))*. 2008; United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

¹⁸³ United Nations, Security Council. *Women, Peace and Security (S/RES/1325 (2000))*. 2000.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.



conflicts and calling for safety measures in refugee camps.¹⁸⁵ In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda), which established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to address global issues and advance sustainable development.¹⁸⁶ SDG 5 (gender equality) addresses GBV by promoting gender equality and empowering all women and girls.¹⁸⁷ While other SDGs advocate for the protection of human rights and the eradication of discriminatory practices, SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) are especially pertinent in the context of addressing GBV against refugees.¹⁸⁸

At the regional level, several frameworks aim to respond to GBV against refugees.¹⁸⁹ The *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* (2011) establishes legal standards across Europe for addressing GBV by supporting victims, prosecuting offenders, and incorporating GBV considerations into asylum processes.¹⁹⁰ The *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* (2003) establishes protections for women's rights, including those of refugees.¹⁹¹ It focuses on preventing and responding to GBV within the African human rights system through education, awareness programs, legislation, and community engagement, utilizing the standards set by CEDAW and CRC.¹⁹² The *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children in ASEAN* (2013) commits to preventing and eliminating GBV against refugees by developing policies, strengthening support services for survivors, and improving data collection on GBV.¹⁹³

Role of the International System

UNHCR is the main organ within the United Nations system for the protection of refugees.¹⁹⁴ UNHCR prioritizes gender equality and GBV as one of eight priority areas for action in its Strategic Directions 2022-2026.¹⁹⁵ In its 2023 plenary session, UNHCR's Executive Committee adopted the programme budget for 2024, which included GBV interventions as a key initiative.¹⁹⁶ In this annual budget, the Executive Committee also increased the budget for the impact area achieving SDG 5 by 1% (\$14.8

¹⁸⁵ United Nations, Security Council. *Acts of Sexual Violence against Civilians in Armed Conflict (S/RES/1820(2008))*. 2008.

¹⁸⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones. *Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence at the Local Level*. 2024.

¹⁹⁰ Council of Europe. *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*. 2011. p. 17.

¹⁹¹ African Union. *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*. 2003.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Elimination of Violence Against Children in ASEAN*. 2013.

¹⁹⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *About UNHCR*. 2024.

¹⁹⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026*. 2022. p. 22.

¹⁹⁶ Executive Committee of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Programme Budget for 2024 of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/AC.96/74/5)*. 2023. p. 14.



million) compared to 2023.¹⁹⁷ In 2024, UNHCR is working on GBV prevention and response programs in 110 countries.¹⁹⁸

In 2020, UNHCR published its Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation and Response to Gender-based Violence as a primary operational document and guideline for addressing GBV against refugees.¹⁹⁹ Actions to prevent GBV are especially targeted at the root causes, which are gender inequality and resulting unequal power relations.²⁰⁰ UNHCR's response mechanism supports GBV survivors by providing safe access to health, mental and psychosocial support, livelihood, and justice to support their long-term recovery and reintegration.²⁰¹ Also, safe and confidential ways of reporting for survivors are provided to prevent the danger of retaliation.²⁰² UNHCR's mandate includes special response mechanisms like refugee status determination, resettlement, and voluntary repatriation.²⁰³ Assistance and services for survivors are designed to meet their specific needs.²⁰⁴ In 2022, 131 UNHCR operations provided medical and psychosocial services for GBV survivors while ensuring quality case management and referral pathways in all response operations.²⁰⁵ Risk mitigation refers to agency-wide mainstreaming processes to anticipate and identify GBV risks throughout all operations, strategies, and work plans within UNHCR to better facilitate advocacy and intervention by Member States.²⁰⁶

In practice, humanitarian efforts of GBV protection in UNHCR operations differ greatly depending on the respective context of each country.²⁰⁷ In conflict and humanitarian crises, GBV risks are significantly higher, with 70% of women experiencing GBV compared to 35% globally.²⁰⁸ In these contexts, immediate intervention, safe spaces, and shelters are crucial.²⁰⁹ Overcrowding in refugee camps is also a special challenge in those regions and exacerbates the risk of GBV.²¹⁰ For example, in Lebanon, UNHCR collaborates with local community groups to provide community-based protection for Syrian refugees through 79 civil society-run community centers offering safe spaces for GBV information, services,

¹⁹⁷ Executive Committee of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Programme Budget for 2024 of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/AC.96/74/5)*. 2023. p. 16.

¹⁹⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Appeal 2024, Gender-based violence*. 2024.

¹⁹⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR policy on the prevention of, risk mitigation and response to gender-based violence, 2020*. 2020.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 14.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.* p. 9.

²⁰² *Ibid.* p. 9.

²⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 9.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p. 9.

²⁰⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/78/12 (Part I))*. 2023. p. 6; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR policy on the prevention of, risk mitigation and response to gender-based violence, 2020*. 2020. p. 14.

²⁰⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR policy on the prevention of, risk mitigation and response to gender-based violence, 2020*. 2020. pp. 9, 14.

²⁰⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Report 2023, Gender-based violence*. 2023.

²⁰⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Gender and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Action*. N.d.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*



vocational training, and psychosocial support.²¹¹ Expertise and leadership are reinforced by partnerships with organizations led by refugee women to ensure that all humanitarian GBV assistance remains grounded in real experiences.²¹² As many of those women are survivors of GBV, this also serves to empower victims.²¹³

UNHCR works in partnership with various actors within and outside of the United Nations system to tackle GBV.²¹⁴ IASC, comprising United Nations agencies and other partners, coordinates humanitarian action by developing common strategies and policies and mobilizing resources for a coherent, unified response to humanitarian crises.²¹⁵ In 2015, IASC published *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action*, which serve as a fundamental framework for humanitarian actors, including UNHCR.²¹⁶ These guidelines aim to mainstream GBV mitigation and strategies across humanitarian efforts and enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities, providing guidance in 13 areas, such as camp management, livelihoods, shelter, and recovery.²¹⁷ The United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict (UN Action) coordinates efforts across 25 United Nations entities to address GBV in conflict zones.²¹⁸ As many refugees are fleeing from those conflict zones where the risk for GBV is drastically increased, this is a highly relevant issue.²¹⁹ The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) works in coordination with governments, civil society and UNHCR to prevent and respond to GBV.²²⁰ They provide survivors with health services, psychosocial support and safe spaces required to access care and protection.²²¹

Besides the United Nations system, various non-governmental actors like the International Committee of the Red Cross and many humanitarian and civil society organizations are engaged in the issue of fighting GBV and providing support to survivors.²²² Coordinating and mainstreaming through IASC, UN Action, and other actors supports UNHCR's risk mitigation strategies.²²³

²¹¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Fact Sheet, Lebanon January 2020*. 2020. p. 3.

²¹² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Appeal 2024, Gender-based violence*. 2024.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action. Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience and Aiding Recovery*. 2015.

²¹⁵ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *The Inter-Agency Standing Committee*. N.d.

²¹⁶ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action. Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience and Aiding Recovery*. 2015.

²¹⁷ Ibid. .

²¹⁸ United Nations, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. *UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict*. N.d.

²¹⁹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Gender and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Action*. N.d.; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Policy on the prevention of, risk mitigation and response to gender-based violence, 2020*. 2020. p. 6.

²²⁰ United Nations Children's Fund. *Gender Based Violence*. N.d.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² International Committee of the Red Cross. *"That never happens here": Sexual and gender-based violence against men, boys, LGBTIQ+ people*. 2022; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Recommendation From Civil Society Organizations on GBV Programming of The UN in Response to Covid-19*. 2020.

²²³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation and Response to Gender-based Violence*. 2020. pp. 8-9.



Protecting LGBTQIA+ Refugees From Gender-Based Violence

LGBTQIA+ individuals face GBV daily through persecution, abuse, violence, and discrimination due to their gender identity or sexual orientation.²²⁴ Furthermore, as refugees, they encounter even greater challenges, discrimination, and heightened vulnerability to physical harm.²²⁵ While international frameworks, such as CEDAW and UNHCR's GBV policy have been established by the international community over the years to combat GBV, they have largely overlooked the specific needs of LGBTQIA+ persons.²²⁶ There is no clear political framework or policies addressing LGBTQIA+ refugees.²²⁷ Due to this, there is insufficient data on specific aspects of GBV against LGBTQIA+ refugees.²²⁸ Notwithstanding this, UNHCR expects the number of LGBTQIA+ refugees will rise soon due to socioeconomic fragility and climate impacts.²²⁹ The lack of adequate action on this issue creates an urgent need for a higher priority by the international community, reflected in the increased activity by UNHCR.²³⁰

Under the Refugee Convention, LGBTQIA+ refugees are considered under "members of a particular social group," and State parties are obligated to protect them.²³¹ Several international law documents, including UDHR, ICCPR, and ICESCR, guarantee the rights of all individuals, and their protection as LGBTQIA+ individuals are recognized in the Yogyakarta Principles.²³² However, the laws of Member States often do not protect LGBTQIA+ persons from violence and persecution by international standards.²³³ Many national laws criminalize same-sex relationships or certain forms of gender expression, which does not reflect the protection obligations under the Refugee Convention and instead reinforces GBV.²³⁴ UNHCR notes that LGBTQIA+ refugees should have access to rights and services without facing exclusion or marginalization and is therefore in dialogue with Member States to find solutions.²³⁵ In his opening statement to the 2023 Executive Committee session, the High Commissioner

²²⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Applying the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy to LGBTIQ+ Persons*. 2021.

²²⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability 2018*. 2018. p. 19.

²²⁶ International Committee of the Red Cross. *"That never happens here": Sexual and gender-based violence against men, boys, LGBTIQ+ people*. 2022.

²²⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *LGBTI and Gender-Diverse Persons in Forced Displacement*. 2024.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Applying the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy to LGBTIQ+ Persons*. 2021.

²³⁰ International Committee of the Red Cross. *"That never happens here": Sexual and gender-based violence against men, boys, LGBTIQ+ people*. 2022; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *LGBTI and Gender-Diverse Persons in Forced Displacement*. 2024.

²³¹ United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951. p. 3.

²³² 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; International Panel of Experts in International Human Rights Law and on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. *Yogyakarta Principles: Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. 2006.

²³³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Applying the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy to LGBTIQ+ Persons*. 2021. p. 2.

²³⁴ Ibid. p. 2.

²³⁵ Ibid. p. 2.



for Refugees Filippo Grandi explicitly affirmed UNHCR's commitment to ensuring that Member States fulfill their protection obligations toward LGBTQIA+ refugees.²³⁶

LGBTQIA+ refugees are risking violence, discrimination, and exclusion in every stage of their flight from their home countries, during transit, and in the host countries.²³⁷ According to UNHCR, the discrimination LGBTQIA+ refugees face because of their sexual orientation or gender expression mutually intersects with the discrimination they experience as refugees.²³⁸ The social stigma may also affect their asylum eligibility and integration into other countries, as it is often reproduced in the countries to which they are fleeing.²³⁹ This further complicates access to even minimal protection and essential services like appropriate accommodation, food distribution, and medical care, which UNHCR is trying to ensure.²⁴⁰ UNHCR office for Central America reports that LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly transgender women, flee the region to escape exploitation, extortion, and persecution.²⁴¹ The primary reasons for their departure are death threats from criminal gangs targeting them because of their gender identities and sexual orientation.²⁴² However, their flight often increases their exposure to GBV.²⁴³

UNHCR and other actors are developing and implementing specific measures to protect LGBTQIA+ refugees from GBV.²⁴⁴ One way of prevention is addressing the causes of discrimination and violence against LGBTQIA+ refugees in the host countries.²⁴⁵ As those attacks are often driven by a desire to punish LGBTQIA+ individuals, this is crucial to prevent further violence.²⁴⁶ UNHCR addresses this through advocacy and dialogue with Member States to uphold their international legal obligations and safeguard LGBTQIA+ refugees seeking shelter in their country.²⁴⁷ UNHCR's protection efforts include practical measures such as creating safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ persons in refugee camps.²⁴⁸ IASC guidelines advise national authorities and international actors to design those camps with special consideration for

²³⁶ Executive Committee of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *High Commissioner's opening statement to the seventy-fourth session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme*. 2023. p. 10.

²³⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *LGBTI and Gender-Diverse Persons in Forced Displacement*. 2024.

²³⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Applying the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy to LGBTIQ+ Persons*. 2021. p. 2.

²³⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *LGBTI and Gender-Diverse Persons in Forced Displacement*. 2024.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR urges more effective action against gender-based violence in the north of Central America*. 2021.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *LGBTI and Gender-Diverse Persons in Forced Displacement*. 2024.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/19/41 (2011))*. 2011. pp. 8-9.

²⁴⁷ Executive Committee of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *High Commissioner's opening statement to the seventy-fourth session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme*. 2023. p. 10.

²⁴⁸ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action. Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience and Aiding Recovery*. 2015. p. 60.



their specific potential GBV risks.²⁴⁹ To prevent marginalization during food distribution, IASC recommends planning by trained specialists to ensure refugees are not excluded based on gender identity.²⁵⁰ Further, placing refugees near LGBTQIA+ communities can help provide vital community support.²⁵¹ Cooperation between UNHCR and local communities is essential for mitigating GBV risks and effectively responding to violence.²⁵² By 2022, 46 LGBTQIA+ civil society organizations were members of the UNHCR GBV sub-working group in refugee settings, to ensure the assistance responds to their specific needs.²⁵³ For LGBTQIA+ refugees, resettlement to a third-country can sometimes be a viable solution to prevent further GBV.²⁵⁴ However, UNHCR can only resettle 1% of refugees annually.²⁵⁵

Due to the long absence of protections for LGBTQIA+ refugees, humanitarian actors and organizations are often not well-equipped to comprehensively understand and address their specific needs.²⁵⁶ When working with LGBTQIA+ refugees, it is especially important to train staff to ensure sensitive treatment and effective protection of individuals.²⁵⁷ UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration jointly developed a training program for their staff and other humanitarian actors to develop a comprehensive understanding of working with LGBTQIA+ individuals in forced displacement, focusing on protection challenges, effective interactions, and specific vulnerabilities and needs.²⁵⁸ Further, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is currently developing a GBV case management e-learning program supported by UNHCR with a special focus on working with LGBTQIA+ GBV survivors, which they consider a key skill in GBV case management.²⁵⁹

Addressing Child and Forced Marriage Among Refugees

CFM is a human rights violation and a form of GBV that disproportionately affects women and girls worldwide, denying them a life free from violence.²⁶⁰ One in five girls marry before the age of 18, totaling

²⁴⁹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action. Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience and Aiding Recovery*. 2015. p. 60.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 127.

²⁵¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *LGBTIQ+ refugees*. 2024.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Protecting LGBTIQ+ people in situations of forced displacement: A Stocktaking on UNHCR progress since the 2021 Roundtable*. 2023. p. 12.

²⁵⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Need to Know Guidance: Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer Persons in Forced Displacement*. 2021. p. 38.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 38.

²⁵⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *LGBTI and Gender-Diverse Persons in Forced Displacement*. 2024.

²⁵⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Protecting LGBTIQ+ people in situations of forced displacement: A Stocktaking on UNHCR progress since the 2021 Roundtable*. 2023. p. 2.

²⁵⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Training Package. SOGIESC and working with LGBTIQ+ persons in forced displacement*. 2024.

²⁵⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Protecting LGBTIQ+ people in situations of forced displacement: A Stocktaking on UNHCR progress since the 2021 Roundtable*. 2023. p. 13.

²⁶⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Child and Forced Marriage including Humanitarian Settings*. 2024; Girls Not Brides. *Gender-based violence and child marriage*. 2024; Barcons Campmajó. *The Age of Human Rights Journal. Forced Marriages in Europe: A Form of Gender-Based Violence and Violation of Human Rights*. N.d.



at least 12 million girls yearly.²⁶¹ Child marriage is a union where one or both parties are under the age of 18, while forced marriage occurs without mutual consent and involves coercion.²⁶² CFM significantly impacts refugees by increasing the risks of abuse, exploitation, sexually transmitted diseases, and complications with pregnancy and childbirth.²⁶³ Additionally, it reduces access to education and economic opportunities, contributing to poor mental health outcomes.²⁶⁴ CFM violates CEDAW by denying women and girls their freedom from discrimination and breaches the CRC by compromising children's rights to protection, education, and development while also contradicting protections under ICCPR and ICESCR.²⁶⁵

UNHCR implements specific strategies to combat CFM in refugee settings and empower impacted communities.²⁶⁶ At the Global Refugee Forum (2023), UNHCR significantly advanced child rights through a multi-stakeholder pledge, generating over 200 child-focused commitments, including 68 on child protection, to strengthen national systems that directly address CFM by enhancing protections for vulnerable children.²⁶⁷ UNFPA's and the UNICEF's Global Programme to End Child Marriage is a global initiative to end CFM through advocacy, research, and programs tailored to various contexts, including refugee settings.²⁶⁸ UNHCR works to prevent CFM in Jordan through community awareness campaigns, educational opportunities, and safe spaces for girls while collaborating with local leaders to ensure legal protection and support for at-risk youth.²⁶⁹ As a result, the percentage of child marriages in Azraq camp decreased significantly from 56% in 2018 to 30% in 2023.²⁷⁰ In Ethiopia, UNHCR has held awareness-raising sessions, conducted follow-ups across refugee settlements, and created child-friendly spaces to protect children and reduce CFM.²⁷¹

²⁶¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Child and Forced Marriage including Humanitarian Settings*. 2024.

²⁶² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Recommendations for action against Child and forced marriages*. N.d. p. 5; Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence. *Forced Marriage*. 2022.

²⁶³ Karasapan et al. Brookings. *Forced displacement and child marriage: A growing challenge in MENA*. 2019.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ 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. *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.

²⁶⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Report 2023, Child protection*. 2023; United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Children's Fund. *UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees:Australia for UNHCR. *How UNHCR is working to prevent child marriages in Jordan*. N.d.; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Jordan, Operational Update*. 2024.

²⁶⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Report 2023, Child protection*. 2023.

²⁶⁸ United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Children's Fund. *UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage*. 2024.

²⁶⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Australia for UNHCR. *How UNHCR is working to prevent child marriages in Jordan*. N.d.; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Jordan, Operational Update*. 2024.

²⁷⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Jordan, Operational Update*. 2024. p. 1.

²⁷¹ Operational Data Portal. *Ethiopia*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Ethiopia, Operational Update*. 2024. p. 2.



Various global actors have implemented a range of programs and initiatives to safeguard refugee women and girls from CFM.²⁷² The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action established guidelines in 2019 for safeguarding children in emergencies, including those at risk of CFM, such as implementing child protection systems.²⁷³ Those systems, such as committees and hotline services, have been implemented in refugee camps to protect children, with coordination from the Child Protection Area of Responsibility within the Global Protection Cluster.²⁷⁴ Education programs, such as those facilitated by Girls' Education Challenge, work to ensure refugee girls have access to education and alternative learning opportunities, which helps tackle complex circumstantial barriers like CFM.²⁷⁵ Safe spaces and support services, established by organizations like Plan International and the International Rescue Committee, provide counseling and education to at-risk girls.²⁷⁶ Globally, 25 million child marriages have been avoided in the last decade due to increased educational opportunities for girls, governmental investments, and improved public awareness.²⁷⁷

Despite a wide range of efforts, no region is on track to eliminate CFM by 2030.²⁷⁸ Without increased efforts, over 120 million additional girls may become married before turning 18 by 2030.²⁷⁹ In refugee settings, logistical challenges like poor transportation, inadequate school facilities, and safety concerns can limit girls' access to education, increasing their vulnerability to CFM as families may view marriage as a means of economic stability.²⁸⁰ It is also essential to consider the psychosocial needs of refugees when implementing programs and policies, as trauma from conflict can significantly influence family decisions regarding marriage.²⁸¹ Furthermore, the absence of coordinated legal and social support systems increases the vulnerability of girls and women to CFM, complicating prevention efforts.²⁸² To effectively address CFM in refugee settings, stakeholders must aim to enhance response plans and educational access, advocate for legal reforms, provide psychosocial support, and collaborate with local leaders.²⁸³

²⁷² The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*. 2019; Global Protection Cluster. *Child Protection*. 2024; Girls' Education Challenge. *About Us*. 2022; Plan International. *Child-friendly spaces in emergencies*. N.d.; International Rescue Committee. *Our goals for safety*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Child and Forced Marriage including Humanitarian Settings*. 2024.

²⁷³ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*. 2019.

²⁷⁴ Global Protection Cluster. *Child Protection*. 2024.

²⁷⁵ Girls' Education Challenge. *About Us*. 2022.

²⁷⁶ Plan International. *Child-friendly spaces in emergencies*. N.d.; International Rescue Committee. *Our goals for safety*. 2024.

²⁷⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Child and Forced Marriage including Humanitarian Settings*. 2024.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Her Turn, It's time to make refugee girls' education a priority*. 2024.

²⁸¹ Al-Shatanawi et al. *Frontiers*. *Identifying psychosocial problems, needs, and coping mechanisms of adolescent Syrian refugees in Jordan*. 2023.

²⁸² Walk Free. *Understanding forced and child marriage*. 2024.

²⁸³ Girls Not Brides. *Child marriage within the global humanitarian system*. 2019. pp. 10, 11, 15, 17, 22, 35.



Conclusion

Preventing GBV among refugees is a key priority of UNHCR.²⁸⁴ The high rate of GBV, including discrimination against LGBTQIA+ persons and the prevalence of CFM, underscores the urgent need for effective interventions and safeguarding the needs of vulnerable refugee populations.²⁸⁵ Despite progress in awareness, advocacy, and interventions, considerable gaps remain, particularly regarding the needs of LGBTQIA+ refugees, which have not been adequately addressed.²⁸⁶ An international framework, along with essential data and research from the United Nations is still lacking on this pressing issue.²⁸⁷ Continued efforts are necessary to accelerate progress, strengthen protections, and empower affected communities through education, legal support, and engagement.²⁸⁸ Eradicating GBV requires a unified and sustained commitment from all stakeholders to ensure all refugees live free from risks GBV, fostering an environment with opportunities to thrive.²⁸⁹

Further Research

As delegates conduct further research and consider how to address this topic, they should consider: What can UNHCR do to effectively protect refugees from GBV? What existing barriers obstruct and hinder protection? How can prevention, risk mitigation and response mechanisms be improved and made more efficient? How can the international community better address GBV? How can the protections of LGBTQIA+ refugees be improved? How can UNHCR better address CFM among refugees? How can gaps in research and policies be filled?

²⁸⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Gender Equality and Gender-Based Violence*. N.d.

²⁸⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Applying the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy to LGBTIQ+ Persons*. 2021; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Child and Forced Marriage including Humanitarian Settings*. 2024.

²⁸⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *LGBTI and Gender-Diverse Persons in Forced Displacement*. 2024.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ United Nations, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. *UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict*. N.d.; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Child and Forced Marriage including Humanitarian Settings*. 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *LGBTI and Gender-Diverse Persons in Forced Displacement*. 2024.

²⁸⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation and Response to Gender-based Violence*. 2020. pp. 8-9; United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.



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