

UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Displaced people in Afghanistan



Written by Sanjali Sharma
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD	3
ABOUT THE COMMITTEE	4
AGENDA OVERVIEW	5
LINK BETWEEN SDGS AND AFGHAN CRISIS	6
TIMELINE	7
HOST COUNTRIES	10
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS	11
PAST ACTIONS ON THE MATTER	12
ACCEPTABLE EVIDENCES IN THE COMMITTEE	13
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	15

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

It gives us immense pleasure to welcome you to this simulation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) at ZAMUN 2022. We look forward to an enriching and rewarding experience. The agenda for the session is 'Displaced people in Afghanistan.'

This study guide is by no means the end of research, we would very much appreciate it if the members are able to find new realms in the agenda and bring it forth in the committee. Such research combined with good argumentation and a solid representation of facts is what makes an excellent performance. In the session, the executive board will encourage you to speak as much as possible, as fluency, diction or oratory skills have less importance as opposed to the Content you deliver. So, just research and speak and you are bound to make a lot of sense. We are certain that we will be learning from you immensely and we also hope that you all will have an equally enriching experience.

We have also included certain 'Questions to consider' in this research guide. Please note that these Questions to Consider are important hints on the aspects the EB expects delegates to debate upon, having said that please keep in mind that we are only there to moderate debate and not to intervene substantively.

In case of any queries feel free to contact us. We will try our best to answer the questions to the best of our abilities. We look forward to an exciting and interesting committee, which should certainly be helped by the all-pervasive nature of the issue.

Regards,

Sanjali Sharma

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Chairperson

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created in 1950, during the aftermath of the Second World War, to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes.

The primary purpose of UNHCR is to safeguard the rights and well-being of people who have been forced to flee. Together with partners and communities, they work to ensure that everybody has the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another country. They also strive to secure lasting solutions.

UNHCR is governed by the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

The UNHCR Executive Committee approves the agency's biennial programmes and the corresponding budget. These are presented by the High Commissioner, who is appointed by the UN General Assembly.

Their mandate is defined by the 1950 UNHCR Statute (<https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c39e1.html>). In 2003, the General Assembly extended the organisation's mandate "until the refugee problem is solved." The High Commissioner reports annually to ECOSOC and the General Assembly on the work of UNHCR.

The basis for UNHCR's mandate is Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which specifically recognizes the right of all individuals to seek asylum in another country. The founding document of UNHCR is General Assembly resolution 428 (V), known as the Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1950). Here, UNHCR's mandate is defined as: "providing international protection, under the auspices of the United Nations, to refugees who fall within the scope of the present Statute and of seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees by assisting Governments and [...] private organisations to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of such refugees, or their assimilation within new national communities."

AGENDA OVERVIEW

The agenda at hand is ‘Displaced people in Afghanistan’.

After more than four decades of displacement, Afghan refugees constitute one of the largest protracted refugee situations in the world. There are nearly 6 million Afghans who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. Of those, 3.5 million are displaced within Afghanistan; 2.6 million are Afghan refugees living in other countries. The remainder are people of concern, including those who have returned to Afghanistan and are being assisted by UNHCR.

These are alarming figures, and in all likelihood, the situation isn't bound to improve soon. The deteriorating security situation is a major cause of migration from and within Afghanistan. Recently, Islamic State–Khorasan (IS-K) has carried out deadly suicide attacks in Kunduz and Kandahar, killing and injuring a lot of innocent Shia Muslims. While the Taliban vows to tackle the IS-K, it appears to be a daunting task without international support. Secondly, Afghanistan is facing a severe economic crisis. Afghanistan is an aid-dependent country; almost 21% of the Afghan’s Gross National Income (GNI) consisted of foreign aid. The international community did not appreciate the sudden takeover of power by the Taliban. Moreover, the interim Taliban government has failed to generate confidence in the major donors, and most are still hesitant to deal with the Taliban.

After its withdrawal, the US had frozen US \$9 billion Afghan foreign exchange reserves. Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are tied with international norms and cannot rescue Afghanistan unless members’ nod. The IMF programmes in Afghanistan are put on hold, including Afghan access to Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). Similarly, the World Bank also halted its projects in Afghanistan. In its recently shared regional economic outlook, the IMF estimated that the Afghan economy will contract by 30% and is under severe fiscal crisis. According to the United National Development Programme analysis, 38 million Afghans are at risk of getting into poverty and facing acute food shortages. In this regard, it is essential to note IMF’s prediction that the fragile economic situation in Afghanistan would “fuel a surge in Afghan refugees”.

LINK BETWEEN SDGS AND AFGHAN CRISIS

In December 2018, the UN General Assembly approved the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). The GCR isn't legally binding for the member states. Nonetheless, it explicitly links with SDGs since it ensures that “stateless persons are not left behind in development processes and that displacement is addressed through inclusive and comprehensive approaches”. Succinctly, without addressing the refugee issue, we will not be able to accomplish SDGs by 2030 and in this Afghan refugee crisis is pertinent. While talking about the Afghan refugees, first and foremost is the role played by neighbouring bordering countries, including Pakistan, Iran and Central Asian Republic. At present, the maximum Afghan refugees are staying in Pakistan, and their number is 1.4 million. The number of registered Afghan refugees is 780,000 in Iran. This time both Pakistan and Iran are hesitant to take more refugees. Both these countries want the fleeing Afghans to stay in camps near borders but have to return once the situation improves in Afghanistan. In other words, camps are temporary arrangements and people staying there will remain in a vulnerable condition, that too when the world is battling a pandemic. Only a proper refugee status will guarantee some economic and social rights.

Likewise, the Central Asian Republic is also dragging their feet and unwilling to take in Afghans as refugees. As per reports, both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan had negotiated with the Taliban about border security, basically for the reason to avoid refugee flow. Amongst the Central Asian Republic, it was Tajikistan that initially expressed willingness to accommodate some 100,000 Afghans. Although, recently, there has been a perceptible change in Dushanbe’s approach towards refugees. The Tajik government now cites a lack of infrastructure and monetary constraints as factors for not allowing Afghans into their territory. Even Moscow tacitly endorsed the coming of the Taliban, viewed Afghan refugees from a security lens and perceived them as a big threat.

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All these might appear as a harsh response by the neighboring Afghan countries, but receiving Afghan refugees isn’t easy; it requires substantial

monetary support if a country has to follow the GCR. Tajikistan appealed to the international community for help because its economy is not robust enough to support refugees. According to the IMF, the annual cost of hosting the Afghan refugees will be “US \$100 million in Tajikistan (1.3 percent of gross domestic product), about US \$300 million in Iran (0.03 percent of GDP) and more than US \$ 500 million in Pakistan (0.2 percent of GDP) ”. Several rich western countries too came forward to take the Afghan refugees. For instance, “Canada is willing to take some 200,000 vulnerable Afghans, the United Kingdom some 20,000 Afghan in the long term. Australia is also willing to increase the intake”. Interestingly, European countries are not forthcoming and like to avoid a Syrian refugee crisis-like situation near its border. Thus, formal visas or approval from Europe for distressed Afghans is not a possibility in the near future. The irony is that the humanitarian crisis will ultimately push Afghans out of their country, but they will not receive appropriate reception in other countries. All in all, the Afghan crisis is expected to hamper the much-desired attainment of SDGs by the international community.

To conclude, while offering support in accepting and arranging funds to assist the Afghan refugees is the immediate priority, this is not the permanent solution. The political situation in Afghanistan ought to stabilise, paving the way for the start of an economic life in Afghanistan. This is a grim situation and a challenge before the international community. Without addressing the crisis in Afghanistan, the aim to attain 17 SDGs by 2030 may remain a pipedream.

TIMELINE

a) 2000-2005

- Bin Laden is widely believed to be hiding in Afghanistan, where he is nurturing thousands of followers in terrorist training camps, by the year 2000, when he is regarded an international terrorist. The US requests that bin Laden be extradited to face charges in connection with the embassy bombings. He has been refused extradition by the Taliban. The United Nations has imposed sanctions on Afghanistan, limiting trade and economic progress.
- Ignoring international protests, the Taliban carry out their threat to destroy Buddhist statues in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, saying they are an

affront to Islam.

- Following unanswered demands that the Taliban turn over bin Laden, U.S. and British forces launch airstrikes against targets in Afghanistan. American warplanes start to bomb Taliban targets and bases reportedly belonging to the al-Qaida network. The Taliban proclaim they are ready for jihad. The US is furious due to the 9/11 attacks.
 - In december 2001, Hamid Karzai, a royalist and ethnic Pashtun, was sworn in as the leader of the interim government in Afghanistan. Karzai entered Afghanistan after living in exile for years in neighbouring Pakistan. At the U.N.-sponsored conference to determine an interim government, Karzai already has the support of the United States and by the end of the conference is elected leader of the six-month government.
 - In 2004, presidential elections were held. More than 10.5 million Afghans register to vote and choose among 18 presidential candidates, including interim leader Karzai. Karzai is elected with 55 percent of the vote.

b) 2005-2015

- In 2006, Amid continuing fighting between Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters and the Afghan government forces, NATO expanded its peacekeeping operation to the southern portion of the country. After the forces take over from American-led troops, Taliban fighters launch a bloody wave of suicide attacks and raids against the international troops.
 - The Afghan government and NATO confirm that Taliban commander Mullah Dadullah was killed during a U.S.-led operation in southern Afghanistan, in 2007.
 - The international community pledges more than \$15 billion in aid to Afghanistan at a donors' conference 2008 in Paris, while Afghan President Hamid Karzai promises to fight corruption in the government.
 - President Barack Obama appoints a special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Mr. Obama announced a new strategy for the Afghanistan war that would dispatch more military and civilian trainers to the country, in addition to the 17,000 more combat troops he previously ordered. The strategy also includes assistance to Pakistan in its fight against militants.
 - Subsequently, U.S. forces overtake a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, and kill al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden on May 2 local time.
 - President Hamid Karzai calls for American forces to leave Afghan villages and pull

back to their bases after a U.S. soldier kills 16 Afghan civilians inside their homes in the year 2012.

- In 2013, the Afghan army took over all military and security operations from NATO forces.
- In the year 2014, the US President announced a timetable for significantly reducing U.S. troop sizes in Afghanistan by 2016.
- Ashraf Ghani becomes president of Afghanistan in September after two rounds of voting, claims of election fraud and a power-sharing agreement with main rival Abdullah Abdullah.
- NATO officially ends its combat mission in Afghanistan. U.S.-led NATO troops remain to train and advise Afghan forces.
- Subsequently, Obama abandons plan to withdraw U.S. forces by the end of his presidency and maintains 5,500 troops in Afghanistan when he leaves office in 2017.

c) 2015-2019

- Trump, in 2017, commits to continued military involvement to prevent emergence of “a vacuum for terrorists.”
- U.S. and Taliban sign agreement on a peace deal that would serve as the preliminary terms for the U.S. withdrawal from the country by May 2021. ● Trump then called off peace talks after a U.S. soldier was killed in a Taliban attack.

d) 2020-present

- The U.S. announces plans to cut U.S. troop size in half — down to 2,500 by January — days before Biden was inaugurated, in the november of 2020.
- Biden announces aim to complete U.S. troop withdrawal by 9/11. This is followed by the U.S. leaving Bagram airfield without telling the base’s new Afghan commander.
- In the august of 2021, the Afghanistan government collapses as the Taliban takes over Kabul.
- Two suicide bombings occur outside the Kabul airport as thousands of Afghans try to flee the country following the Taliban’s takeover. The bombings killed at least 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. troops. The extremist group ISIS-K, the affiliate of the terror group ISIS, which uses the “K” to

reference an old name for Afghanistan, Khorasan, claimed responsibility for the explosions. That group first appeared in eastern Afghanistan in late 2014. Aug. 26 is the deadliest day for American troops in the country since 2011.

- In a speech from the White House that evening, President Joe Biden does not reverse course on the Aug. 31 withdrawal date. In a speech, he vows to retaliate against the perpetrators of the attack: “We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down to make you pay.”
- On August 30, 2021, the U.S. transports a final contingent of troops from Kabul Airport, officially ending America’s longest war.

HOST COUNTRIES

The United Nations has called on member states to assist Afghans in "their darkest hour of need," but although some nations have offered refugees safe shelter, others have indicated they will not.

Pakistan and Iran have both stated that they are unable to handle any additional flood of Afghan refugees. Any refugees who arrive will have to stay in camps near the border until they can return to Afghanistan, according to officials in both countries.

Uzbekistan has stated that it will assist in the movement of Afghans to third countries, but that it will only host refugees on a temporary basis. Tajikistan's government previously stated that it would accept up to 100,000 refugees, but it is unclear whether any have been accepted. Turkmenistan has said its airspace can be used for evacuation flights but it hasn't made any commitment to take in refugees itself.

Turkey's government has encouraged European countries to shoulder responsibility for any future migrant problem, claiming that Turkey will not serve as "Europe's migrant storage unit." To deter illegal entry, the country has accelerated construction of a border wall with Iran.

Officials in numerous European Union countries say they want to avoid a repeat of the 2015 migrant crisis, when a populist backlash erupted in response to huge numbers of Syrian refugees being admitted into the EU.

France, which evacuated around 2,800 people, largely Afghans, from Kabul airport, has said it will welcome some refugees but has not specified how many. Germany has also not specified a number but Chancellor Angela Merkel has said as many as 40,000 people still in the country may have a right to be evacuated to Germany if they feel they are endangered.

Other EU countries, like Austria, Poland and Switzerland have said they will not accept any new Afghan arrivals and are upping their border security to guard against illegal arrivals.

The UK has said it will take in 5,000 Afghans in 2021 as part of a scheme to resettle 20,000 over the next few years, focusing on those at greatest risk from the Taliban.

The US has not said how many refugees it will accept yet, but it has authorised \$500m (£367m) for "unexpected urgent refugee and migration needs of refugees". Canada has said that it will resettle 20,000 Afghans while Australia has said it will take in 3,000. Several countries, including Uganda, have also accepted US requests to temporarily accept Afghan refugees before they are resettled elsewhere.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

An estimated 667,900 Afghans have been newly displaced inside the country since January 2021 – primarily due to insecurity and violence. The impact of the conflict on women and girls has been particularly devastating — 80 percent of newly displaced Afghans are women and children.

The needs of those who have had to flee suddenly are acute, increasing demand for shelter, food, water, non-food items, health services, livelihood opportunities and cash assistance.

In addition to the acute needs of those recently forced to flee, the Afghan population as a whole has been pushed to the limit by prolonged conflict, high levels of displacement, the impact of COVID-19, natural disasters and deepening poverty.

In early August 2021, a problem erupted when a group of 32 Afghans and 41 Iraqi Kurds arrived outside the Polish settlement of Usnierz Górný on the Belarus–Poland border and were denied entry to either nation, resulting in lines of military forces on both sides isolating the camping migrants. Their arrival follows an influx of thousands of mostly Middle Eastern migrants who crossed the border from Belarus into Poland and other eastern European Union (EU) members Latvia and Lithuania in the months leading up to Kabul's fall, with the EU accusing Belarus of orchestrating the migration in response to EU sanctions. While the Belarusian authorities refuted the charge, Poland described it as a "hybrid attack" on the EU, claiming that the refugees should not be allowed to enter because they are still technically in Belarus. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) summoned Poland and Latvia to provide them with "food, water, clothing, adequate medical care, and, if possible, temporary shelter" for three weeks after the migrants requested asylum, according to a statement released by the court on August 25. Neither country was ordered to allow the migrants to cross the border.

The security vacuum left by the withdrawal of US military forces, according to a US defence official, could allow al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups to reconstitute. While the US would retain power to strike al-Qaeda targets in Afghanistan, the person warned that the lack of a strong US presence on the ground would make it difficult to identify viable targets. CENTCOM commander Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. stated that he has seen nothing that leads him to believe that the Taliban will prevent al-Qaeda from strengthening and rebuilding in Afghanistan.

PAST ACTIONS ON THE MATTER

In May of 2012 Geneva hosted an international conference on Afghan refugees. This conference adopted the Afghan Solutions Strategy which called for increased international support of the host countries and for mechanisms to increase the sustainability of the resettlements into Afghanistan.

To help those with acute needs, UNHCR and partners have provided newly displaced Afghans with emergency shelter, food, health, water, sanitation and cash assistance, although many challenges remain in accessing vulnerable

groups.

In a statement released in August 2021, the Secretary General expressed his deep concern at the deepening humanitarian and economic crisis in the country and the threat of a total collapse in basic services. “Now more than ever”, said Guterres, “Afghan children, women and men need the support and solidarity of the international community”.

The UN and partners launched a more than \$5 billion funding appeal for Afghanistan in January 2022, in the hope of shoring up collapsing basic services there, which have left 22 million in need of assistance inside the country, and 5.7 million people requiring help beyond its borders.

ACCEPTABLE EVIDENCES IN THE COMMITTEE

1. News Sources:

a. REUTERS – Any Reuters’ article which clearly makes mention of the fact stated or is in contradiction of the fact being stated by another delegate in council can be used to substantiate arguments in the committee.

(<http://www.reuters.com/>)

b. State-Operated News Agencies – These reports can be used in the support of or against the State that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any country as such but in that situation, they can be denied by any other country in the council. Some examples are,

- RIA Novosti (Russia) <http://en.rian.ru/>
- IRNA (Iran) <http://www.irna.ir/ENIndex.htm>
- Xinhua News Agency and CCTV (P.R. China) <http://cctvnews.cntv.cn/> and others

2. Government Reports:

These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country. However, a nuance is that the Executive Board as credible information can still accept a report that is being denied by a certain country. Some examples are, a) Government Websites like the State Department of the United States of America

[http:// www.state.gov/index.htm](http://www.state.gov/index.htm) or the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation [http:// www.eng.mil.ru/en/index.htm](http://www.eng.mil.ru/en/index.htm)

b) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of various nations like India

(<http://www.mea.gov.in/>) or People's Republic of China

(<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/>).

c) Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Reports

<http://www.un.org/en/members/> (Click on any country to get the website of the Office of its Permanent Representative.)

d) Multilateral Organizations like NATO

(<http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/index.htm>), ASEAN

(<http://www.aseansec.org/>), OPEC (http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/),

etc.

3. UN Reports:

All UN Reports are considered credible information or evidence for the Executive Board of the GA.

a) UN Bodies like the UNSC (<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/>) or

UNGA (<http://www.un.org/en/ga/>).

b) UN Affiliated Bodies like the International Atomic Energy Agency

(<http://www.iaea.org/>), World Bank (<http://www.worldbank.org/>),

International Monetary Fund (<http://www.imf.org/external/index.htm>),

International Committee of the Red Cross (<http://www.icrc.org/eng/index.js>),

etc. **c) Treaty Based Bodies** like the Antarctic Treaty System

(<http://www.ats.aq/e/ats.htm>), the International Criminal

Court (<http://www.icccpi.int/Menus/ICC>)

There are others sources of credible information, but these should be internationally recognised, such as Human Rights Watch

NOTE: Sources like Wikipedia (<http://www.wikipedia.org/>), or newspapers like the Guardian (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/>), etc. will not be accepted as PROOF/EVIDENCE.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. UNHCR's financial appeal for the Afghanistan situation (including operations for Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran) remains acutely underfunded, at only 43 per cent of the \$337 million needed. How can this be solved?
2. What role can regional partners play in the region?
3. How to solve the security issue of potential host countries?
4. What kind of a dialogue should be initiated with the Taliban?
5. What are the loopholes in the currently existing legislation on the matter? How can they be eliminated?
6. What should be done in order to guarantee fundamental human rights, economic and social rights of refugees?
7. How can the credibility of the statistics involving numbers of displaced people, refugees, etc. be improved?