

**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Briefing Paper

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**Topic of Debate**: **The Question of LGBTQIA+ Refugees**

**Background Information**

While LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and all other identities not encompassed in the acronym) rights have improved significantly in a number of jurisdictions and countries across the world, there are still 64 UN members where LGBTQIA+ these activities are still institutionally criminalized. In 12 of these members the death penalty is either a legal possibility or implemented.

Under the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Geneva Protocol, LGBTQIA+ refugees are protected as “members of a particular social group”. Despite many refugees being forced to flee criminalization and societal pressures in their homeland, they can still face discrimination, stigmas and abuse, while in transit and in their asylum countries. It is the responsibility of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to protect all LGBTQIA+ refugees to provide inclusive services, protect their rights and identify safe options. These refugees, even if not fleeing for specific persecution of their real or perceived identity, are at greater risk when seeking safety from other factors such as ethnicity, faith, nationality or political opinions because of the minimal support and resources on offer for these refugees, results in them facing additional barriers, compounding their sense of exclusion and vulnerability, while in transit and in asylum countries.

Since 2017, the UNCHR has convened an annual panel of independent experts to commission a report on global LGTBQ+ issues, with the 2021 Global Roundtable focusing on LGBTIQ+ Persons in Forced Displacement and Statelessness: Protection and Solutions. The summary of the Roundtable, recommended UNHCR increase empowerment of LGBTQIA+ refuges, increase capacity of humanitarian professionals to improve quality of care and work with strengthening links with partners and communities to build a coalition. In asylum countries, the UNHCR has an integration handbook, outlining 9 criteria for successful integration of LGBTQIA+ refugees into communities.

 Given such significant challenges faced by the international LGBTQIA+ refugee community it is imperative, UNHCR works towards resolving discrimination and inadequate care faced by these refugees in transit, and helps with their integration into host communities.

**Points to consider**

* How can UNHCR work to reduce discrimination and additional barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ refugees, in transit, refugee camps and host countries?
* Are there methods for people working with refugees to create more sensitive and friendly environments for LGBTIA+ refugees in order to allow them to be more comfortable in expressing their identities in transit and in their host countries?
* By what means could member nations improve integration of LGBTQIA+ refugees into their communities, removing as many barriers as possible, to make these refugees feel included and safe?

**Useful Websites**

* <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/what-we-do/how-we-work/safeguarding-individuals/lgbtiq-persons>
* <https://www.unhcr.org/media/2021-global-roundtable-protection-and-solutions-lgbtiq-people-forced-displacement-summary>
* <https://www.unhcr.org/handbooks/ih/age-gender-diversity/lgbtiq-refugees>
* <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/>
* <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity/lgbti-and-gender-diverse-persons-forced-displacement>

**Topic of Debate: The Question of Climate Change and Displacement**

**Background Information**

Climate Change, is one of the most critical issued facing the world in both the present and the future, with scientists forecasting an unprecedented scale of impacts unbeknown to humans. The incredible disruption to global society expected will result in a scale of environmental refugees, usually only associated with conflicts.

Already many member states are facing the burden of rising average global temperatures, exacerbated by the current episode of El Nino and the recent breach of the landmark 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Since 2008 an estimated 22.5 million people have been displaced by climate or weather-related events. In 2022, 81% of refugees came from climate vulnerable countries, but the worsening global situation means only 1% or less will be able to ever return home. Increased regularity of severe weather events ranging from droughts and wildfires to floods and storms have displaced millions, but a vast majority (70%) ended up in a neighboring country, as those most severely affected are often also those who lack the means and resources to protect themselves and make long cross-border journeys.

The impacts of global warming will mean that the number of displaced people will only grow exponentially in the future, with the potential for an extraordinary 1 billion displaced by 2050 due to climate-related reasons. Rising sea levels threaten coastlines all over the world with research suggesting anywhere between 200 and 400 million people are at risk of losing their homes to rising sea levels by 2100. Desertification is a growing issue in many arid and semi-arid areas which in the future may well not be able to sustain human settlements, a particular concern given that many of these areas are amongst the fastest growing in the world. And UN estimates suggest almost 700 million people could live in regions experiencing water stress, igniting the risk of conflict amongst member states, in already tumultuous regions such as the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Moreover, according to a report in March 2022 by UNHCR titled Climate Change, Displacement and Human Rights highlighted how Highly Climate Vulnerable countries host 40% of refugees and 70% of those displaced by conflict and violence. The current climate crisis risks not only significantly increasing the number of refugees, but also pushing already over-stretched countries with limited resources to breaking point, severely affecting the quality of life for many of those displaced, without a permanent home.

The issue of Climate Change and Displacement risks eradicating much of the hard work done in the past, plunging millions of displaced into poverty and creating irreversible gaping inequalities between the world’s most fortunate and those displaced.

**Points to Consider**

* How can UNHCR achieve the ambitious goals of allowing refugees to lead self-sufficient lives , protected from the impacts of climate change aligning with UNHCR’s Strategic Plan for Climate action 2024-2030?
* What can UN member states do to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change on their local populations to minimize the number of future refugees, due to the climate crisis?
* Through what means can UN member states support and co-operate with each other and other NGOs to help strained member states to build resilience and protection to lessen the effect on climate change on displaced people?

**Useful Websites**

* <https://www.ipcc.ch/>
* <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/what-we-do/build-better-futures/environment-disasters-and-climate-change/climate-change-and>
* <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/media/unhcr-and-climate-change-overview>
* <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/media/climate-change-displacement-and-human-rights>

**Topic of Debate: The Question of Local Integration of Displaced People**

**Background Information**

UNHCR has long spoken of 3 main ‘durable’ solutions to refugees: Voluntary Repatriation, Resettlement and Local Integration. However, in recent times this solution has been forgotten by many, to the extent it does not have a formal definition in international law. However, in 1951 refugee convention, Article 14 states that states have a responsibility to “as far as possible facilitate the naturalization of refugees”.

According to a working paper, commissioned by UNHCR, Jeff Crisp defines local integration as a multi-dimensional process with three key facets: Legal, Social, Economic. The legal aspect involves the progressive granting of a progressively wider range of rights and entitlements by the host state, tending towards complete rights entitled by citizenship. The economic aspect is viewed as refugees attaining sustainable livelihoods, progressively decreasing reliance on humanitarian and state assistance. Socially, local integration of refugees, sees them able to successfully live amongst the host state’s population without experiencing systemic discrimination, exploitation or intimidation. The term local integration is therefore often confused with local settlement where large groups of refugees are granted new land to establish settlements, where they would progressively become self-sufficient and not dependent on humanitarian assistance.

According to UNHCR, over the past decade 1.1 million refugees have successfully been locally integrated. However, given record number of refugees, local integration has been increasingly frowned upon due to various factors, ranging from limited resources to support refugees to tensions between populations in host states and refugees. This has resulted in many refugees being trapped in a state of limbo, trapped in refugee camps and being discouraged from engaging with the host nation’s local population. This has led to significant problems for refugees who are unable to rebuild their lives and achieve sustainable livelihoods where they are self-sufficient, thus they are instead left reliant on the generosity of their host nation and their humanitarian assistance because they are unable to return to their country of origin (Voluntary Repatriation). Therefore, the question of local integration of refugees in host nations has become increasingly prominent as a possible large-scale solution. However, it has also led to significant controversy in global political landscapes.

**Points to Consider**

* How can member nations work on reducing barriers in host nations towards local integration in order to work towards sustainable, long-term solutions towards refugees’ future?
* To what extent can local integration be considered as a significant and a respectable alternative, by member states, towards durable refugee solutions?
* By what means can UNHCR and NGO’s support member states to assist in the local integration of refugees, to make it less of a burden for both refugees and host nations?

**Useful Websites**

* <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/what-we-do/build-better-futures/long-term-solutions/local-integration#:~:text=Local%20integration%20is%20a%20complex,the%20culmination%20of%20this%20process>.
* <https://www.unhcr.org/media/local-integration-and-local-settlement-refugees-conceptual-and-historical-analysis-jeff-crisp>
* <https://www.fmreview.org/issue71/crisp>
* <https://www.roads-to-refuge.com.au/settlement/settlement-global-response.html>