



UN High Commissioner for Refugees

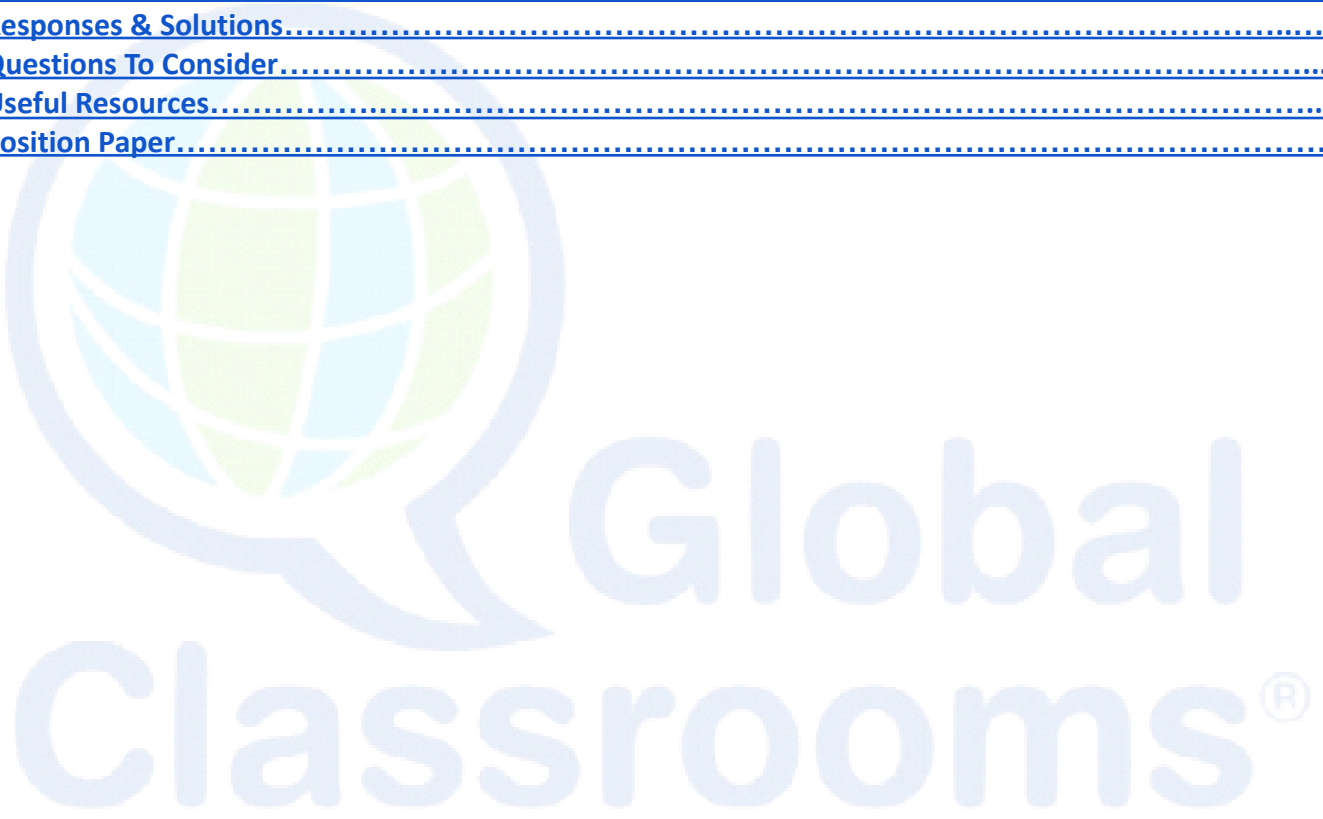
Responding to Global
Displacement Emergencies

**GLOBAL CLASSROOMS DC
SPRING 2026 MODEL UN CONFERENCE**



Table of Contents

<u>Introduction to the Committee: UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Statement of the Problem.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Priorities To be Discussed.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Key Considerations In a Refugee Emergency.....</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Responses & Solutions.....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Questions To Consider.....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Useful Resources.....</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Position Paper.....</u>	<u>9</u>



Washington, DC

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INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE: UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. UNHCR leads international action to protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities¹ and stateless people². Formally known as the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR was established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1950 in the aftermath of World War II to help the millions of people who had lost their homes.

History of UNHCR:

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established on December 14, 1950, by the United Nations General Assembly, and the agency's legal foundation was cemented by the **1951 Refugee Convention**, which defined who qualifies as a refugee and enshrined the principle of ***non-refoulement: the right not to be returned to a country where one faces serious threats to life or freedom***. UNHCR's founding mandate was initially set for just three years. The first High Commissioner was Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart of the Netherlands.

UNHCR 75 Years Later:

UNHCR's core mandate is to protect refugees³, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people, advocating for the right to seek asylum⁴ and supporting host countries⁵ in managing large refugee populations. Today the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide is more than 117 million, driven by conflicts in Syria, Ukraine, Sudan, Afghanistan and more. More than two-thirds of the world's refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries. UNHCR coordinates emergency relief, long-term protection, and durable solutions while partnering with governments, NGOs, private sector partners, and other UN agencies. Its work spans emergency shelter and food assistance, legal protection, education, and advocacy for policy change at the international level.

UNHCR works in more than 130 countries providing life-saving assistance including shelter, food, water and medical care for people forced to flee conflict and persecution, many of whom have nobody left to turn to. UNHCR defends their right to safety and helps them find a place to call home so they can rebuild their lives. In the longer-term, UNHCR works with countries to improve and monitor support for refugees, finding solutions that provide access to education and economic inclusion that leads to refugee self-reliance. From a temporary body created to address post-war Europe, **UNHCR has grown into an indispensable institution at the heart of the global response to the many defining crises of our time.**⁶⁷

SPRING CONFERENCE: Policy Advisors

Policy Advisors are subject-matter experts who support delegates during the conference. They do not participate in debate or voting, but they can provide guidance to help ensure your ideas and resolutions are realistic and grounded in real-world policy.

¹ **Definition:** UNHCR defines **forcibly displaced people** as those forced to flee their homes due to conflict, persecution, generalized violence, human rights violations, or disasters, including both those crossing borders (refugees) and remaining within their country (IDPs).

² **Definition:** UNHCR defines **stateless people** as someone who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law.

³ **Definition:** UNHCR, a **refugee** is someone forced to flee their country due to persecution, war, violence, or serious public disorder, crossing an international border to seek safety.

⁴ **Definition:** According to UNHCR, **asylum** is the legal protection granted by a state to individuals outside their home country who fear persecution, violence, or serious harm.

⁵ **Definition:** According to UNHCR, a **host country** is a nation that receives, grants asylum to, and provides protection for refugees or other populations of concern who have fled their home country.

⁶United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Mid-Year Trends 2025* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2025),

<https://www.unhcr.org/media/mid-year-trends-2025>.

⁷United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "About UNHCR," accessed April 2, 2026,

<https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr>.



How Can You Use Policy Advisors?

Delegates are encouraged to actively consult Policy Advisors throughout the conference:

- **Opening Briefing:** Advisors will begin with a short introduction to the topic and key policy considerations.
- **Q&A Sessions:** You will have structured opportunities to ask questions about feasibility, policy context, and real-world applications.
- **During Debate:** You may submit written questions or, if allowed, yield speaking time to a Policy Advisor for a response.
- **Unmoderated Caucuses:** Advisors can help you refine ideas, identify potential allies, and strengthen draft resolutions.
- **Resolution Feedback:** Before submission, you may ask Advisors to review your proposals for clarity, feasibility, and impact.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

When people are forced to flee their homes due to conflict, violence, or persecution, UNHCR provides protection, humanitarian assistance, and support to help meet immediate needs and support displaced people. The overriding priority in any humanitarian response is to save lives and minimize serious harm by meeting the most urgent needs for protection, food, shelter, clean water, and health care.

The following committee will address the topic of **Responding to Global Displacement Emergencies**, examining how the international community can strengthen its capacity to protect and assist forcibly displaced people and improve coordination in humanitarian response.

Emergencies are categorized as either Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3, depending on the size, complexity, and our capacity to respond effectively. An emergency declaration activates internal protocols that mobilize further support and resources. In these contexts, basic human needs often go unmet. Access to essential resources such as food, clean water, and healthcare is frequently limited or entirely unavailable. At the same time, shelter remains insufficient, with less than half of refugees globally having access to adequate housing, forcing many to live in temporary or unsafe conditions that expose them to disease, extreme weather, and further displacement. These shortages are often exacerbated by underfunded humanitarian responses and the growing scale of displacement worldwide.

Beyond material deprivation, displaced populations face heightened risks to their safety and human rights. Conflict and instability significantly increase exposure to violence, including widespread gender-based violence, exploitation, and abuse—especially among women and children living in overcrowded and poorly protected environments.⁸ Displacement also disrupts social systems, education, and livelihoods, leaving families in prolonged uncertainty and poverty. In many crises, infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and water systems are damaged or destroyed, further limiting access to essential services and humanitarian aid.⁹ As a result, refugees often endure not only immediate survival challenges but also long-term psychological trauma, insecurity, and marginalization, making recovery and reintegration extremely difficult without sustained international support.

When there is a surge in humanitarian needs during emergency situations, UNHCR has arrangements in place to quickly deploy experts to the field. This includes the Emergency Response Team roster: a pool of existing UNHCR personnel with a range of specialist expertise, who are on standby around the world to deploy to an emergency

⁸UN Refugees USA, "Five Ways UNHCR is Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Crisis Settings," March 2026, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/2026/3/five-ways-unhcr-is-addressing-gender-based-violence-in-crisis-settings/>.

⁹ Reuters, "UNICEF Says Over 370,000 Children Displaced in Lebanon," March 27, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/unicef-says-over-370000-children-displaced-lebanon-121-killed-2026-03-27/>.



within 72 hours. UNHCR also maintains standby agreements with government agencies, NGOs and private sector partners, whose specific expertise and capacity complement UNHCR's internal emergency and surge capacity to respond to humanitarian crises.

In 2024, UNHCR responded to 43 active emergency declarations across 25 countries, working to keep people safe while they are forcibly displaced from their homes. They are there throughout the initial crisis and remain long after the headlines have moved on.¹⁰

PRIORITIES TO BE DISCUSSED:

Key Issues:

1. Emergency Preparedness

- How can UNHCR track and prepare for emergencies wherever they may happen and provide appropriate risk management and supply chain access?
- What is the role of host governments and local partners in managing risk or responding to humanitarian emergencies?

2. Refugee Registration & Persons at Risk

- What measures need to be taken to ensure proper registration of refugees and internally-displaced persons during a humanitarian emergency?
- What strategies should be employed to manage the specific needs of those that face heightened protection risks?

3. Emergency Assistance

- What initiatives can be introduced to ensure refugees have access to clean water, shelter, proper sanitation, appropriate health care, and food assistance once they have found safety after fleeing a humanitarian emergency?
- How can UNHCR and partners work toward educational and economic inclusion of refugees to increase access to food security and self-reliance?

4. Coordination & Communication

- How does UNHCR utilize the Refugee Coordination Model to design effective, inclusive and accountable responses to refugee crises?
- What role do host governments, local partners, and other UN agencies play in supporting emergency response and helping refugees?

Goals:

1. Effective Risk Monitoring & a Ready Supply Chain

- Establish comprehensive strategies to monitor risk of a refugee emergency emerging from conflict or violence.
- Ensure access and quick deployment of core relief items, food, and assistance items to meet basic needs of those forced to flee.

2. Protection of the Vulnerable

- Ensure refugees can reach safety and are not pushed back across a border when they flee violence or conflict.
- Connect refugees facing heightened protection risks (e.g. women, children, LGBTQ+, disabled, etc) with appropriate and priority assistance needs.

3. Meeting Basic Needs of Those Forced to Flee

- Meet the immediate needs of those forced to flee with shelter, core relief items, WASH services, and health care.
- Design meaningful economic inclusion for refugees and access to education from the onset to avoid negative coping mechanisms and build self-reliance.

4. Strategic Leadership and Coordination of Partners

¹⁰ UNHCR, "Global Report," UNHCR, accessed April 6, 2026, <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/reports-and-publications/global-report>.



- Engage diverse stakeholders to create a whole-of-society approach for the emergency response that leverages capacities.
- Align government response with the principles of the 1951 Refugee Convention and ensure inclusion of refugees in national systems.

Challenges:

1. Resource Limitations

- Funding gaps to support humanitarian crises due to funding cuts or when funds are restricted to certain crises over others.
- Logistical difficulties in providing humanitarian support in hard-to-reach areas where emergencies occur.
- Dwindling and/or limited resources during protracted emergencies.
- **Example:** Some crises receive little international attention or funding despite severe need. So-called "forgotten emergencies," such as the ongoing conflict in Sudan, leave millions of displaced people without adequate humanitarian support as donor fatigue and competing global priorities divert resources elsewhere.¹¹

2. Ensuring Access to Safety

- Ensuring those forced to flee have access to safety, for example that States are adhering to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol.
- Monitoring a crisis and investigating reports of pushbacks of those seeking safety and asylum during an emergency.

3. Security of Emergency Response

- Making sure humanitarian staff are safe when providing support to refugees.
- Creating safe corridors and delivery access points for humanitarian supplies.
- Monitoring developments to ensure access to safe transport, secure communication, and medical support.¹²

4. Persons at Risk

- Monitoring risks of sexual exploitation, abuse, and trafficking for vulnerable women and children
- Ensuring vulnerable populations have access to safety, support and services like those with disabilities, special needs, and/or greater medical needs, the elderly, women and children, LGBTQ+ persons, etc
- **Example:** In Ukraine, mass displacement has exposed millions of refugees, particularly women and children, to heightened risks of trafficking, sexual exploitation, and abuse as they flee across borders with little protection.¹³

KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN A REFUGEE EMERGENCY:

Emergency Preparedness: Experience has shown that starting the delivery of emergency aid, especially at scale, takes significant lead time. Therefore, proactive emergency preparedness and early engagement are crucial for a timely and effective response. Contingency plans articulate the response strategy, including the required budget, workforce, coordination structures, and thresholds for triggering activation. Due consideration should also be paid to security, occupational health and safety, and other key institutional policies and guidance. As part of the contingency planning process, operations identify key preparedness measures that would need to be implemented in order to enable the planned emergency response.¹⁴

¹¹ Read More Here: <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/forgotten-emergencies-four-refugee-crises-the-world-cant-afford-to-ignore-in-2025/>.

¹² UNHCR, "Emergencies & UNHCR's Security Teams," YouTube video, featuring Giovanni Davila, Field Security Officer (Mozambique), posted by "UNHCR Video," accessed April 6, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmKiWVXdJHI>.

¹³ UNHCR, "Ukraine Crisis Poses Great Trafficking Risks," YouTube video, posted by "UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency," April 4, 2022, accessed April 6, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWaezI3NWA0>.

¹⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Emergency Preparedness," accessed April 2, 2026, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-we-do/respond-emergencies/emergency-preparedness>.



Access to Safety: Making sure refugees can reach safety and are not pushed back across a border is central to our work. People forced to flee must not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk. This is the prohibition against refoulement, enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention. If we expect people might be fleeing across a border, our roving teams are out in vehicles in all kinds of terrain, sometimes 24 hours a day to help ensure refugees can reach safety. We monitor whether governments and armed groups are preventing refugees from entering a safe area. When necessary, we advocate with authorities and alert the media. We also try to make sure that people who do cross a border have a realistic chance to have their refugee status recognized.

Emergency Assistance: In refugee crises, emergency assistance must prioritize coordinated delivery of shelter, water, sanitation, and essential supplies to ensure immediate survival. Rapid establishment of safe settlements is critical to reduce overcrowding and exposure to environmental hazards, while ensuring access to basic infrastructure such as latrines and drainage systems. Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services are equally urgent, as inadequate access to clean water and sanitation significantly increases the risk of disease outbreaks. Efficient supply chains are essential for delivering food, medical aid, and shelter materials, often under difficult logistical conditions, making strong coordination among humanitarian actors imperative to preventing duplicative efforts and ensuring resources are allocated effectively.¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷¹⁸

Protection of the Vulnerable: Protecting vulnerable populations is critical in refugee crises, as some groups face heightened risks and barriers to aid. Guidance from UNHCR emphasizes the need to proactively identify individuals at risk, including unaccompanied children, women, older persons, and people with disabilities, who may be less visible or unable to seek help. These populations are especially vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and exclusion in unstable settings. Effective protection requires inclusive approaches that ensure equal access to services, adapt assistance to specific needs, and establish safe systems for reporting and support. Strong coordination and community engagement are essential to reduce risks and prevent further marginalization.¹⁹

RESPONSES AND SOLUTIONS:

What UNHCR Does:

UNHCR plays a central role in refugee crises by leading international protection and delivering life-saving assistance. In the early stages of an emergency, UNHCR rapidly deploys staff, mobilizes supplies within 72 hours, and ensures displaced people can reach safety and are not returned to danger. It provides essential services including shelter, clean water, food, and medical care, while prioritizing vulnerable populations for specialized support. UNHCR also registers and documents refugees to ensure access to aid and legal protection. Beyond immediate response, it coordinates with governments and partners to organize assistance and support longer-term recovery and inclusion efforts.²⁰

What Host Governments Do:

Host governments hold the primary responsibility for protecting and assisting refugees within their territory during a crisis. According to UNHCR guidance, states are responsible for ensuring safety, granting access to asylum, and upholding international protection standards. Governments lead and coordinate the overall emergency response, often through national and local authorities responsible for services such as security, health, and infrastructure. They also work with UNHCR and partners to develop response strategies, contingency plans, and coordination mechanisms, while avoiding duplication of services and strengthening national capacity. UNHCR's effective

¹⁵ UNHCR, "Settlement and Shelter," UNHCR (U.S.), accessed April 6, 2026,

<https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-we-do/respond-emergencies/settlement-and-shelter>.

¹⁶ UNHCR, "Water, Sanitation and Hygiene," UNHCR (U.S.), accessed April 6, 2026,

<https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-we-do/respond-emergencies/water-sanitation-and-hygiene>.

¹⁷ UNHCR, "Delivering Supplies," UNHCR, accessed April 6, 2026, <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/respond-emergencies/delivering-supplies>.

¹⁸ UNHCR, "Coordinating Assistance," UNHCR (U.S.), accessed April 6, 2026,

<https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-we-do/respond-emergencies/coordinating-assistance>.

¹⁹ UNHCR, "Overview: Persons at Risk," *UNHCR Emergency Handbook*, accessed April 6, 2026,

<https://emergency.unhcr.org/protection/persons-risk/overview-persons-risk>.

²⁰ UNHCR, "Respond to Emergencies," UNHCR (U.S.), accessed April 6, 2026, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-we-do/respond-emergencies>.



collaboration with host governments is essential to ensure access to services, maintain security, and support both refugees and host communities.²¹

Ongoing Emergencies:

Ongoing emergencies require sustained support and solutions tailored to each specific context. In Ukraine, ongoing efforts emphasize helping displaced people remain where they are by repairing damaged homes, providing cash assistance, and strengthening access to services, while also supporting voluntary returns when conditions allow. In Syria, a protracted crisis has shifted toward facilitating voluntary refugee returns alongside rebuilding infrastructure and restoring basic services, though instability continues to limit progress. Meanwhile, in Sudan, responses remain largely emergency-focused due to active conflict, with severe funding gaps constraining aid delivery. Across all contexts, long-term solutions require sustained international support, coordination with governments, and investment in resilience, as many crises persist for years without immediate resolution.^{22 23 24 25}

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Using the information you now know, think critically about the following questions:

- What initiatives is UNHCR currently working on to address these refugee emergencies?
- What challenges to host governments face when a refugee emergency happens?
- What can donor countries do to ensure food assistance and health care delivery to refugees impacted by humanitarian crises?
- How can UNHCR deploy supplies to rural and/or hard-to-reach areas?
- How does the lack of access to education and economic inclusion compound the effects of displacement for those forced to flee?
- What are ways that people who have been forced to flee can build self-reliance and avoid negative coping mechanisms?
- What role can the private sector have in responding to a refugee emergency?
- What are some examples of host governments including refugees in national systems?
- How does UNHCR and other UN agencies (e.g. IOM, WFP, UNICEF, etc) work together to respond to displacement emergencies?

USEFUL RESOURCES:

- [UNHCR Emergency Handbook](#)
- [UNHCR Emergency Response webpage](#)
- [IASC Emergency Response Preparedness Guide](#)

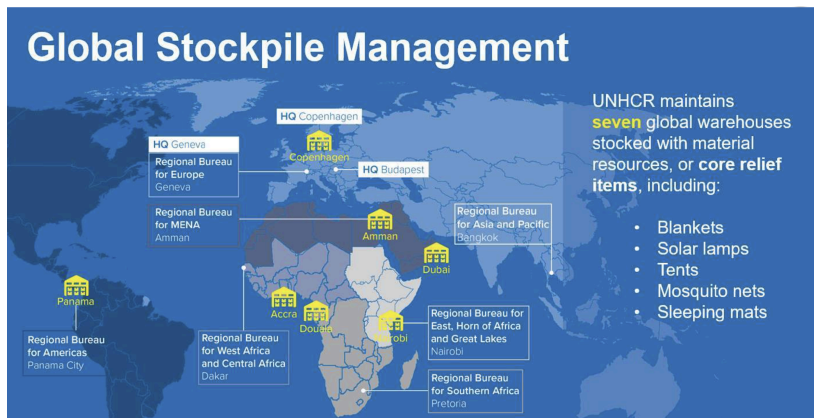
²¹ UNHCR, "Working with the Host Government," *UNHCR Emergency Handbook*, accessed April 6, 2026, <https://emergency.unhcr.org/coordination-and-communication/working-others/working-host-government>.

²² UNHCR, "Ukraine Emergency," UNHCR (U.S.), accessed April 6, 2026, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/emergencies/ukraine-emergency>.

²³ UNHCR, "Syria Emergency," UNHCR (U.S.), accessed April 6, 2026, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/emergencies/syria-emergency>.

²⁴ UNHCR, "Sudan Emergency," UNHCR (U.S.), accessed April 6, 2026, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/emergencies/sudan-emergency>.

²⁵ UNHCR, "Emergencies," UNHCR (U.S.), accessed April 6, 2026, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/where-we-work/emergencies>.



Videos:

- Emergencies Overview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKjrXdtrCLg>
- UNHCR Emergency Response Animation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0j7rTUyf8k>
- Emergencies & UNHCR's Supply Chain: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zuTOqsfqHA>
- Emergencies & UNHCR's Security Teams <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmKiWVXdJHI>
- UNHCR's protection and assistance delivery in the Ukraine crisis <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZM18ZbYeja>
- UNHCR crisis poses great trafficking risks <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWaez13NWA0>
- UNHCR responds to emerging displacement in Aleppo https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngUdN_TB-6w

Position Paper Guidelines:

In order to be eligible for a committee award, delegations must submit one (1) position paper per country (i.e. if two delegates are representing the United States, they will only submit one position paper between the two of them).

What is a Position Paper?

A position paper is a short document that outlines a country's opinion on an issue. The paper includes a short summary of what the issue or problem is, explains why the country is interested in the issue, and communicates the country's stance on what should be done to address the issue. A position paper is written as if you were the actual representative of the country stating its position. Your personal opinions on the issue should not be included. A position paper is not a summary of your country's GDP, government, economy, languages, etc. unless directly relevant to the issue. Only one position paper is written per country, per grade school committee; **if there are 2 or 3 delegates representing the same country on a committee, they should write the paper together.**

Why write a Position Paper?

Writing a position paper will help you organize why an issue matters to your country and what your country wants done on the issue. The first thing you will likely do in committee is present an opening speech about your country's position. You should be able to pull portions of a well written position paper into an introductory speech on your country's perspective.

How to Write a Position Paper

- (1) Research the Issue. The questions you want to answer are:
 - How does this issue affect your country?
 - How does this issue affect your country's neighbors or allies?



- Is this a global problem that impacts everyone?
 - What would your country like to see done on this issue?
 - Are there countries or groups of people who will be particularly sensitive to addressing this issue?
 - Are there any conventions or resolutions on the topics that your country has signed or ratified?
 - What are UN actions on the issue? Has your country supported or opposed these actions?
 - Keep in Mind: What a country says, and what it actually believes should be done may be different. Also, some countries may believe that no action should be taken on an issue. They may disagree with how others feel or may not want international involvement. It is okay if your position is that the international community should do nothing, but you will need to explain why.
- (2) **Brainstorm Specific Actions.** Come up with 3-4 specific things that can be done to reach the outcome your country desires. For example: “The United States believes we should send a peacekeeping mission to monitor human rights abuses in Syria and encourage talks between both sides.” You will present these ideas in committee as possible solutions to the problem and attempt to pass a resolution which includes these actions.
- (3) **Outline Your Paper.** Make an outline of what points you want to cover in your paper and the order in which you would like to address them. Remember a good paper should briefly explain the problem, explain why your country cares about the issue, and inform others what your country should like to see done. If you know other countries favor a solution that you will disagree with, make sure to include why your country disagrees.
- (4) **Write your Paper.** Position papers should be written from the perspective of the country you are representing. Rather than being a report on the topic, a position paper should explain what your country wants to see done to address the issue. Start by giving a brief summary of the issue and how it impacts your country. Then explain the specific actions you would like to see taken. Close by summarizing your country’s overall position. Proper grammar and spelling are a must.

Award Criteria and Eligibility

- The ideal position paper will have a clearly defined and summarized topic with your country’s position clearly outlined. Points are also awarded for organization, style and correct grammar.
- GCDC Staff will be fact checking position papers, so be sure to include the most up to date information and a bibliography (if using in text citations, a Works Cited page **MUST** be included)
 - Proper source citation: if an idea or quote came from another source, you must provide a footnote / citation.
- Papers will be disqualified if the conference staff has discovered that students did not write their own papers or that content has been plagiarized.
- **Make sure your position paper must have the required header below! Do not create any additional title pages - points will be deducted for improper format.**
- **Formatting Requirements: 500 words minimum, 1,500 words maximum. Times New Roman font, 12- point size**

REQUIRED POSITION PAPER HEADER

Committee:
Country:
Topic:
School:
Delegate Name(s)