

**Forum:** Human Rights Council (HRC)

**Issue:** Defining International Guidelines to Safeguard Conditions in Refugee Camps



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**Position:** Deputy President

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## Personal Introduction

Dear delegates,

My name is Elena Vassalou, I am an IB1 student at Pierce - The American College of Greece, and it is my utmost honor to serve as Deputy President of the Human Rights Council (HRC) at this year's American College of Greece's Model United Nations Conference (ACGMUN). I would like to start by welcoming you to the 9<sup>th</sup> ACGMUN and wishing you a wonderful experience at the conference.

The topic of this guide, namely "Defining International Guidelines to Safeguard Conditions in Refugee Camps", represents a global issue which is of utmost importance, especially in recent years. This study guide aims to help with your preparation for the conference by providing necessary background information on the topic, proposing possible solutions, and helping you have a clear and deep understanding of the issue at hand. While reading the study guide will help you have an overall understanding of the topic, I still encourage you to conduct your own research in order to understand your assigned country's stance and policy regarding refugee camp guidelines. Having spent time on your personal research will help you feel more included in the lobbying and debate procedure, and will certainly help you feel more comfortable, especially if it is your first time participating in an MUN.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the topic, the study guide, the procedures, or the conference in general, do not hesitate to contact either me or Anna, the president of the HRC, via e-mail at [e.vassalou@acg.edu](mailto:e.vassalou@acg.edu) and at [abaranova@campion.edu.gr](mailto:abaranova@campion.edu.gr), respectively.

I cannot wait to meet you all in person!

Kind Regards,

Elena Vassalou

## Topic Introduction

Refugee camps are temporary settlements that provide immediate safety and basic services to people fleeing war, persecution, or disasters.<sup>1</sup> While they are often seen as humanitarian lifelines, the reality is that many camps struggle to meet even the most basic standards of dignity and protection. Overcrowding, poor sanitation, limited access to healthcare and education, and exposure to violence are only some of the biggest challenges refugees face every day. Today, 6.6 million people reside in refugee camps worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

Refugee Camps fall under the operational jurisdiction of their host country.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the quality of life is heavily dependent on political will and host government policies, creating a need for the establishment of international guidelines to support, monitor, and organize all refugee camps. The legal foundation for the protection of refugees was established by the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, which defined the rights of refugees and the obligations of states.<sup>4</sup> However, that failed to specify the operational standards for camp conditions, so the Sphere Standards were developed in 1997, which set the minimum requirements for shelter, sanitation, water & food, health, and camp organization.<sup>5</sup> Yet, despite the various efforts, implementation remains non-specific and inconsistent.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 117 million people worldwide are forcibly displaced, with 42.5 million being considered refugees, and out of them 22% live in refugee camps.<sup>6</sup> Many of these camps are in regions facing economic and political instability,<sup>7</sup> as well as environmental challenges,<sup>8</sup> such as the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. Therefore, many camps are neglected in the name of national policies and domestic pressures.

In conclusion, defining international guidelines to safeguard conditions in refugee camps is therefore not only a necessary humanitarian action, but also a matter of global stability, equality, and human rights. Clear, universally accepted standards would ensure that all refugees, regardless of the camp's location, have access to clean water, sufficient nutrition, safe shelter, healthcare, education, and protection from violence. An international framework would also help ensure accountability, fair

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR. "What Is a Refugee Camp? Definition and Statistics | USA for UNHCR." *Unrefugees.org*, 2013, [www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/camps/](http://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/camps/).

<sup>2</sup>"Refugee Camps | Definition, Facts and Statistics." *Www.unrefugees.org*, [www.unrefugees.org/news/refugee-camps-explained/#Howmanyrefugeesliveinrefugeecamps](http://www.unrefugees.org/news/refugee-camps-explained/#Howmanyrefugeesliveinrefugeecamps)

<sup>3</sup> UNRWA. "Frequently Asked Questions." *UNRWA*, 2024, [www.unrwa.org/who-we-are/frequently-asked-questions](http://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are/frequently-asked-questions)

<sup>4</sup>UNHCR. "The 1951 Refugee Convention." *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/1951-refugee-convention](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/1951-refugee-convention)

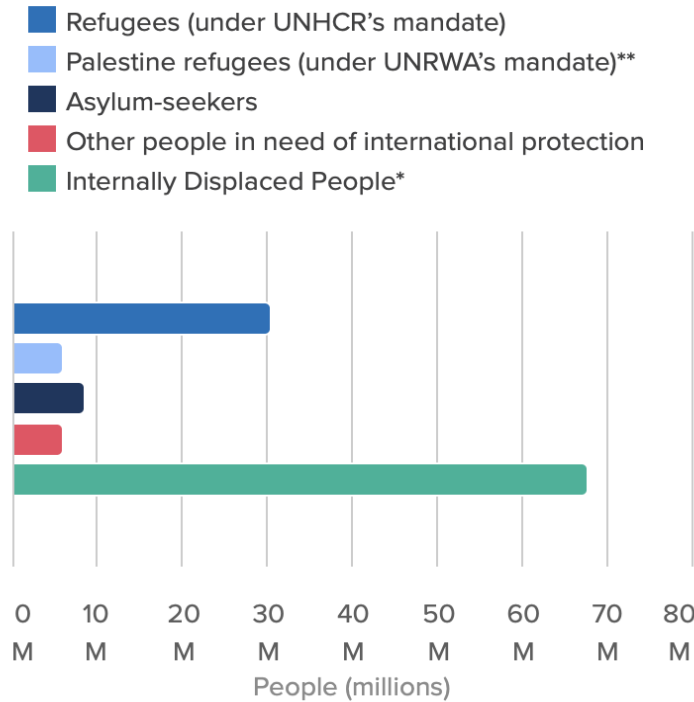
<sup>5</sup>"The Sphere Handbook | Standards for Quality Humanitarian Response." *Sphere*, [spherestandards.org/handbook/](http://spherestandards.org/handbook/)

<sup>6</sup>UNHCR. "Figures at a Glance | UNHCR." *UNHCR*, 2024, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/figures-glance](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/figures-glance)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations. "Refugees." *United Nations*, 2024, [www.un.org/en/global-issues/refugees](http://www.un.org/en/global-issues/refugees)

resource allocation, and stability for both host governments and global or local humanitarian organizations.



**Figure 1:** “Amount of people (in millions) that are forcibly displaced according to UN statistics as of 2025”<sup>9</sup>

## Definition of Key Terms

### Refugee

“A refugee is a person who has fled their country to escape conflict, violence, or persecution and has sought safety in another country.”<sup>10</sup>

### Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

“An Internally Displaced Person (IDP) has been forced to flee their homes by conflict, violence, persecution, or disasters; however, unlike refugees, they remain within their own country.”<sup>11</sup> IDPs are not covered by the Refugee Convention.

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR. “Figures at a Glance | UNHCR.” *UNHCR*, 2024, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/figures-glance](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/figures-glance)

<sup>10</sup>UNHCR. “Refugees.” *UNHCR*, 2024, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugees](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugees)

<sup>11</sup>UNHCR. “Internally Displaced People.” *UNHCR*, 2024, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/internally-displaced-people](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/internally-displaced-people)

## Refugee Camp

“Refugee camps are temporary facilities built to provide immediate protection and assistance to people who have been forced to flee their homes due to war, persecution, or violence.”<sup>12</sup> They are not permanent settlements, but they are created to “meet their most basic needs such as food, water, shelter, medical treatment, and other basic services during emergencies.”<sup>13</sup>

## International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

“International humanitarian law is a set of rules which seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict. It protects persons who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities and restricts the means and methods of warfare.”<sup>14</sup>

## International Bill of Human Rights or International Human Rights Law (IHRL)

The International Bill of Human Rights, also known as the International Human Rights Law, is a part of international law designed to “promote and protect human rights at the international, regional and domestic levels.”<sup>15</sup> It defines “the obligations of governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, to promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups”<sup>16</sup> that fall within their jurisdiction.

## Public International Law (PIL) or Law of Nations

Public International Law (PIL) or the ‘Law of Nations’ is the part of international law that “applies between sovereign states and other entities having international personality”<sup>17</sup>. PIL includes: “law of the sea, law of treaties, state jurisdiction, customary law, and the law of the (INT) Charter of the United Nations 1945”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> UNHCR. “What Is a Refugee Camp? Definition and Statistics | USA for UNHCR.” *Unrefugees.org*, 2013, [www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/camps/](http://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/camps/)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). *What Is International Humanitarian Law?* ICRC, [https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/external/doc/en/assets/files/other/what\\_is\\_ihl.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/external/doc/en/assets/files/other/what_is_ihl.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> United Nations. “Human Rights.” *United Nations*, United Nations, 2023, [www.un.org/en/global-issues/human-rights](http://www.un.org/en/global-issues/human-rights)

<sup>16</sup> United Nations. “OHCHR | International Human Rights Law.” *OHCHR*, United Nations, 2024, [www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-and-mechanisms/international-human-rights-law](http://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-and-mechanisms/international-human-rights-law)

<sup>17</sup> “Library Guides: Legal Research Guide: Public International Law: What Is PIL?” *Uwa.edu.au*, 2025, [guides.library.uwa.edu.au/pil](http://guides.library.uwa.edu.au/pil)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

## The 1951 Refugee Convention

“The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are the key legal documents that form the basis of UNHCR’s work. They define the term 'refugee' and outline their rights and the international standards of treatment for their protection.”<sup>19</sup>

## Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM)

“Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) is the technical sector that coordinates the temporary assistance and protection activities to displaced persons living in camps or camp-like settings (including all temporary communal shelter options such as formal camps, collective centers, communal buildings, spontaneous settlements, transit centers, evacuation centers, reception centers or those that may require relocation due to proximity to hazard, insecurity or eviction).”<sup>20</sup>

## United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

“The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (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.”<sup>21</sup>

## Background Information

### Historical Background

Post World War II (WWII), specifically on the 10th of December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) unanimously adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).<sup>22</sup> In Article 14 (1) of the Declaration, it is stated that “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution<sup>23</sup>.” This was the first time in history that the term “refugee” was officially recognized by the UN and its Member States. Article 14 (1) was the first step towards the protection of refugees by universally accepted guidelines and legal frameworks.

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<sup>19</sup>UNHCR. “The 1951 Refugee Convention.” *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/1951-refugee-convention](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/1951-refugee-convention)

<sup>20</sup>International Organization for Migration (IOM). *Camp Coordination and Camp Management Manual*. IOM, <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl2616/files/documents/CampCoordinationandCampManagement%20Manual.pdf>

<sup>21</sup>UNHCR. “About UNHCR.” *UNHCR*, 2024, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr)

<sup>22</sup>UNHCR. “History of UNHCR.” *UNHCR*, 2 Sept. 1945, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/history-unhcr](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/history-unhcr)

<sup>23</sup>United Nations. “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *United Nations*, 10 Dec. 1948, [www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights](http://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights)

On the 14th of December 1950, 2 years after the Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was formed<sup>24</sup>, mandated to "assume the function of providing international protection [...] to refugees who fall within the scope of the present Statute and of seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees".<sup>25</sup> The original mandate declared that all post-WWII refugees must be resettled within three years, and then the UNHCR would disband. As multiple refugee crises unfolded across the globe, the mandate was extended multiple times throughout the 20th century until a UNGA resolution in 2003 ([A/RES/58/153](#)) made the mandate of the UNHCR permanent.<sup>26</sup> Today, the UNHCR is the frontrunner in protecting and aiding refugees, IDPs, and stateless people all around the globe.

Throughout the 20th century, there have been numerous international and regional attempts to establish a framework that will adequately protect refugees and define the minimum standards for refugee camps. However, none of them managed to tackle the issue holistically. Some lacked specificity, others lacked clarity or were overlapping with already existing guidelines, and others only dealt with a specific part of the issue, ignoring the gravity and complexity of regulating conditions in refugee camps. Inconsistency between frameworks, contradictions between regional and international standards established, and a lack of enforcement were key problems in the initial attempts at defining international guidelines to safeguard conditions in refugee camps.

## Fundamental Frameworks

### International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

The International Humanitarian Law (IHL) was first discussed during the First Geneva Convention on the 22nd of August 1864, and it included four conventions that focused on the protection of wounded combatants and the medical personnel aiding them, making it the first treaty to establish humanitarian rules during periods of warfare.<sup>27</sup> Yet, it did not include anything regarding the protection of civilians during periods of war. It was only post - WWII that the

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<sup>24</sup> UNHCR. "History of UNHCR." *UNHCR*, 2 Sept. 1945, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/history-unhcr](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/history-unhcr)

<sup>25</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *Mandate of the High Commissioner for Refugees*. UNHCR, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/mandate-high-commissioner-unhcr.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM). *A/RES/58/153*. IOM, 2018, [https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl2616/files/2018-07/A\\_RES\\_58\\_153\\_en.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl2616/files/2018-07/A_RES_58_153_en.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> "The Geneva Conventions: 160 Years of History | Genève Internationale." Geneve-Int.org, 2024, [geneve-int.org/geneva-conventions-160-years-history](http://geneve-int.org/geneva-conventions-160-years-history)

protection of civilians, including refugees, was added with Convention IV of the 1949 additions.<sup>28</sup> Specifically, on the 12th of August 1949<sup>29</sup>, the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949 were adopted, and together they form the core of the IHL. The Four Geneva Conventions of 1949 are universally ratified. However, more recent additions to the IHL, such as Protocol I (1977), Protocol II (1977), and Protocol III (2005), are not universally ratified and thus, their enforcement is limited.<sup>30</sup>

Refugees are defined as civilians under IHL, and must therefore be protected from violence, forced return, and discrimination. Furthermore, IHL has strict measures regarding the protection of refugees. It prohibits attacks on refugee camps,<sup>31</sup> all types of forced displacement unless required for civilian safety,<sup>32</sup> and the denial of humanitarian aid.<sup>33</sup> Under the Geneva Convention IV Article 55,<sup>34</sup> it is stated that host regions must ensure adequate shelter, hygiene, and health conditions for displaced civilians during periods of conflict. There is no reference in the IHL regarding detailed refugee camp standards. Thus, while its universally ratified treaties help provide strong legal protection for refugees, the absence of specified guidelines for refugee camp regulation, the lack of a global enforcement body, and the often-restricted humanitarian access by host countries for political reasons severely limit its effectiveness, making enforcement completely dependent on state cooperation.

### **International Human Rights Law (IHRL) or International Bill of Human Rights**

The beginning of the drafting process for an international framework designed to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of all individuals, at all times, was the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UNGA on the 10th of December 1948.<sup>35</sup> Later, in 1966, the formation of the International Bill of Human Rights was concluded with the addition of The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and The International Covenant

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<sup>28</sup> Shaw, Malcolm. "Geneva Conventions | 1864–1977." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 26 Dec. 2018, [www.britannica.com/event/Geneva-Conventions](http://www.britannica.com/event/Geneva-Conventions)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> [icrc.org](http://icrc.org), 2022, [ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977/article-52](http://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977/article-52)

<sup>32</sup> ICRC. "Article 49 - Deportations, Transfers, Evacuations." *icrc.org*, 2022, [ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-49](http://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-49)

<sup>33</sup> *icrc.org*, 2023, [ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-59](http://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-59)

<sup>34</sup> *icrc.org*, 2023, [ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-55](http://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-55)

<sup>35</sup> UNHCR. "History of UNHCR." *UNHCR*, 2 Sept. 1945, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/history-unhcr](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/history-unhcr)

on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).<sup>36</sup> Under IHRL, refugees are entitled to all human rights, except those explicitly limited to citizens (e.g. voting); thus, it protects refugees from discrimination, arbitrary detention, torture, denial of basic services (adequate housing, healthcare, education, nutrition, water), and it established the right to seek asylum, successfully forming the base for modern refugee protection. Similarly to IHL, the absence of an enforcing mechanism limits IHRL's efficiency and impact. Moreover, IHRL has omitted any reference regarding the regulation of refugee camp conditions and thus, additional international and regional guidelines were needed to regulate conditions in refugee camps.

### 1951 Refugee Convention & 1967 Protocol

The 1951 Refugee Convention is the central international treaty which defined who a refugee is and specifies refugee rights, and it was adopted on the 28th of July 1951, by the United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons.<sup>37</sup> It outlines the legal and physical protection, rights, and standards of treatment that refugees must receive while staying in a host country. The 1967 Protocol<sup>38</sup> is an amendment to the 1951 Convention, it removes any geographical and temporal limitations of the original convention, making it global and timeless, thus increasing its legitimacy. The post-1967 amended version of the Convention declared that refugees must be protected from refoulement and that host countries must provide identity papers, travel documents, and access to legal courts, education, work, public relief mechanisms; however, it does not include any specification for refugee camp conditions. So, while the Refugee Convention and Protocol protect the legal status of refugees, they leave out the practical regulation of conditions in refugee camps.

### Regional Frameworks

Overall, all of the initial international attempts to protect refugees did not explicitly specify any guidelines in order to safeguard the conditions in refugee camps. The IHR, the IHRL, and the 1951 Refugee Convention, along with its 1967 Protocol, are the foundational international frameworks for modern refugee protection. Yet, none of them include neither any specific guidelines on the regulation

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<sup>36</sup> United Nations. "OHCHR | International Human Rights Law." *OHCHR*, United Nations, 2024, [www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-and-mechanisms/international-human-rights-law](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-and-mechanisms/international-human-rights-law)

<sup>37</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol*. UNHCR, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/1951-refugee-convention-1967-protocol.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

of refugee camps, nor were they compatible with all regions that faced refugee crises. Thus, defining new guidelines and updating the existing guidelines was a necessity, which led to the creation of many regional frameworks, conventions, and declarations that tried to tackle the issue.

### **1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention**

The 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention is a regional refugee treaty adopted by the OAU, now African Union (AU), which was signed on the 10th of September 1969, in Ethiopia, East Africa.<sup>39</sup> It was drafted in the mid and late 60s, as an attempt to respond to the mass displacement caused by decolonization and the numerous liberation wars in Africa. As of 2025, 46 out of the 55 member states of the African Union (AU) have ratified the convention of 1969.<sup>40</sup> It is considered the most progressive regional protection instrument in the world. The 1969 OAU Convention's broader definition of the term 'refugee' allows protection for millions who would not qualify under the 1951 Convention.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, it was tailored to the reality and the needs of the refugee problem in Africa, where both civil and external conflicts, colonialism, socio-political and economic instability, were, and still are, constant burdens for the African population and the governments. However, the 1969 Convention does not provide guidelines for camp standards and declares that each of the African host countries must establish national refugee laws to regulate camp standards, which created inconsistencies in resource management and living conditions among different camps, since there was not any continent-wide guidelines. Thus, the treatment a refugee receives was left to be determined by political will, with no room for international (by the UN) or continental (by the AU) involvement.

### **1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees**

The Cartagena Declaration on Refugees is a non-binding regional refugee protection instrument, adopted by the Colloquium on the International Protection of Refugees in Central America, Mexico and Panama, and it was signed in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, on the 22nd

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<sup>39</sup>“OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa | African Union.” *Au.int*, [au.int/en/treaties/oau-convention-governing-specific-aspects-refugee-problems-africa](https://au.int/en/treaties/oau-convention-governing-specific-aspects-refugee-problems-africa)

<sup>40</sup> OAU CONVENTION GOVERNING the SPECIFIC ASPECTS of REFUGEE PROBLEMS in AFRICA \* LISTE DES PAYS QUI ONT SIGNE, RATIFIE/ADHERE CONVENTION de L'OUA REGISSANT LES ASPECTS PROPRES AUX PROBLEMES DES REFUGIES EN AFRIQUE. 2019.

<sup>41</sup> “OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.” *International Journal of Refugee Law*, vol. 7, no. Special\_Issue, 1995, pp. 321–327, [https://doi.org/10.1093/reflaw/7.special\\_issue.321](https://doi.org/10.1093/reflaw/7.special_issue.321)

of November 1984.<sup>42</sup> The Declaration was initially signed by 10 South American countries, and later it was incorporated into the national laws of more than 14 countries in the region.<sup>43</sup> Similarly to the 1969 OAU Convention, the Cartagena Declaration, also expanded the definition of the term ‘refugee’, beyond the 1951 Convention & its 1967 Protocol, in order to be adjusted to the regional problems in South America at the time.<sup>44</sup> Thus, under Article 3 of the Declaration “includes among refugees persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order”.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, the Declaration reinforced the right to asylum, suggested that the UNHCR should be allowed to continue its humanitarian work in the region, encouraged regional solidarity, resource-sharing, and collaboration, and promoted long-term solutions, such as voluntary repatriation.<sup>46</sup> The fact that these measures were designed to offer both short-term and long-term relief to refugees and refugee camps, along with their incorporation into national laws across Latin America over the years, made the Cartagena Declaration one of the most influential regional instruments, which is evident from the fact that it has been integrated into the national laws of more than 14 countries. Nevertheless, the absence of specification regarding operational standards for refugee camps, the Declaration’s non-binding nature, and the absence of an enforcement mechanism resulted in making the Declaration a highly effective legal protective instrument, but ultimately, it held no practical regulatory guidelines, thus limiting its impact.

## Recent & Updated International Guidelines

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<sup>42</sup>“Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, Adopted by the Colloquium on the International Protection of Refugees in Central America, Mexico and Panama, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, 22 November 1984.” *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/media/cartagena-declaration-refugees-adopted-colloquium-international-protection-refugees-central](http://www.unhcr.org/media/cartagena-declaration-refugees-adopted-colloquium-international-protection-refugees-central)

<sup>43</sup> “Cartagena Declaration on Refugees – Rights in Exile.” *Rights in Exile*, 13 Aug. 2023, [rightsinexile.org/cartagena-declaration-on-refugees/](http://rightsinexile.org/cartagena-declaration-on-refugees/)

<sup>44</sup>“Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, Adopted by the Colloquium on the International Protection of Refugees in Central America, Mexico and Panama, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, 22 November 1984.” *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/media/cartagena-declaration-refugees-adopted-colloquium-international-protection-refugees-central](http://www.unhcr.org/media/cartagena-declaration-refugees-adopted-colloquium-international-protection-refugees-central)

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

## Sphere Standards

The Sphere Standards are a set of universal minimum standards for humanitarian response to crises, which includes refugee camps, and they are based on the universal principle of the “right to life with dignity” as found in the UDHR.<sup>47</sup> They were initiated in July 1997 by multiple NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to ensure quality and accountability in humanitarian assistance.<sup>48</sup> The Sphere Standards have been revised periodically, in order to be tailored to updated practices and recent challenges, with the most recent edition being the 2018 Sphere Handbook, which is the one still in use globally.<sup>49</sup> The Sphere Standards provide guidelines for four core sectors in humanitarian response: Water supply, Sanitation and Hygiene promotion (WASH), Food security and nutrition, Shelter and settlement, Health.<sup>50</sup>

Today, Sphere resources are the primary reference tool for national and international NGOs, UN agencies, governments, the private sector, and volunteers, making them the most widely used humanitarian tool worldwide.<sup>51</sup> The Sphere Standards are the first protection instrument that attempted to define international guidelines for refugee camp regulation with the Sphere Handbook.<sup>52</sup> The Handbook provides detailed operational and management standards for refugee camps in order to ensure equitable living conditions for refugees living in camps. It provides guidelines on minimum water quantity per person per day, latrine ratios, shelter size and materials, health service requirements, nutrition standards, and sanitation standards.<sup>53</sup>

Overall, the Sphere Standards effectively cover the operational, technical, practical, and regulatory gaps left by the foundational frameworks. Moreover, they are the most consistent and cohesive documents for regulating conditions in refugee camps. The fact that they are based on widely acknowledged documents (such as the UDHR and the IHRL), are

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<sup>47</sup> United Nations. “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *United Nations*, 10 Dec. 1948, [www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights](http://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights)

<sup>48</sup> “About Sphere.” *Sphere*, [spherestandards.org/about/](http://spherestandards.org/about/)

<sup>49</sup> “The Sphere Handbook | Standards for Quality Humanitarian Response.” *Handbook.spherestandards.org*, [handbook.spherestandards.org/en/camp/#ch001](http://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/camp/#ch001)

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> “About Sphere.” *Sphere*, [spherestandards.org/about/](http://spherestandards.org/about/)

<sup>52</sup> “The Sphere Handbook | Standards for Quality Humanitarian Response.” *Handbook.spherestandards.org*, [handbook.spherestandards.org/en/camp/#ch001](http://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/camp/#ch001)

<sup>53</sup> “Standards of Assistance and Minimum Requirements.” *Migrant Resource and Response Mechanisms*, 2024, [migrantcentres.iom.int/en/toolkit/management-migrant-centres/standards-assistance-and-minimum-requirements](http://migrantcentres.iom.int/en/toolkit/management-migrant-centres/standards-assistance-and-minimum-requirements)

regularly updated, and are widely adopted, boosts their effectiveness significantly. However, enforcement and compliance with them is limited due to their non-binding nature, and their dependence on the host country having sufficient funding and capacity in order to implement them.

### **Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Framework**

The Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Framework is a global humanitarian framework, developed by the CCCM Cluster, an Inter-Agency Standing Committee, that is globally co-led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UNHCR.<sup>54</sup> It is designed to ensure coordination and management of refugee camps and camp-like settings, and it was first developed as part of the UN Cluster System in 2005.<sup>55</sup> It was revised between 2020 and 2024 to reflect new practices and respond to new challenges.<sup>56</sup> Its primary aim is to improve living conditions, ensure protection, and coordinate services for displaced populations living in camps.<sup>57</sup>

The CCCM Framework defines guidelines for site management policies, community participation, site environment, services coordination, monitoring and accountability, exit and transition planning. It also acknowledges and reinforces the Sphere Standards, further expanding their legitimacy. Additionally, the CCCM Cluster and Sphere have collaborated to introduce a joint Handbook on Camp Management standards, called “MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR CAMP MANAGEMENT” (latest edition in 2021).<sup>58</sup> In summation, the CCCM Framework provides clear, cohesive, structured, and practical operational guidelines for managing camps, it strengthens coordination between agencies and national authorities, it tries to improve accountability and community participation, and it helps prevent service gaps and protection risks. However, the CCCM Framework’s effectiveness is heavily dependent on host government cooperation, available funding, and the capacity of site management agencies; also, its non-

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<sup>54</sup> “Global CCCM Cluster | CCCM Cluster.” *CCCM Cluster*, 2025, [www.cccmcluster.org/about-us/global-cccm-cluster](http://www.cccmcluster.org/about-us/global-cccm-cluster)

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Key Points*. <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/documents/CampCoordinationandCampManagement%20Manual.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> “The Sphere Handbook | Standards for Quality Humanitarian Response.” *Handbook.spherestandards.org*, [handbook.spherestandards.org/en/camp/#ch001](http://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/camp/#ch001)

binding nature does not allow it to override restrictive national policies that might overlap with it, and thus compliance cannot be enforced and is therefore restricted.

## Challenges over the years

### Longterm Encampment

Refugee camps were initially designed for short-term use during emergencies, but with many conflicts lasting decades, especially in high-risk areas (e.g. Africa, the Middle East), there is a constant strain on resources and capacity in refugee camps, which the current guidelines were not built to address.<sup>59</sup> The UNHCR documented that by 2014, the average duration of protracted refugee situations reached 25 years, with refugee camps becoming the place where refugees stay with no plans for a durable solution.<sup>60</sup> And in 2024, around 67% of all refugees remained in "protracted refugee situations".<sup>61</sup> The current frameworks focus on emergency and short-term standards, not long-term development, employment, or permanent housing. Furthermore, the definition of maximum camp duration, transition planning, or camp-to-community integration cannot be found in any of the existing international guidelines, further complicating the refugee crisis in many regions.

### Overcrowding and land limitations.

While under the international guidelines, the minimum space per person in refugee camps is specified, host governments are the ones in control of land allocation, and there is no international enforcing mechanism.<sup>62</sup> Thus, refugee camps become overcrowded, which more often than not also stretches their resources, leading to deteriorating living conditions in many camps across the globe. Overall, the non-binding nature of the guidelines and the limited political will in many countries lead to minimal compliance by the host governments and multiple violations of the minimum standards. Examples of refugee camps facing severe overcrowding

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<sup>59</sup> *Protracted Refugee Situations: The Search for Practical Solutions*. <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/4444afcb0.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> UNHCR. "UNHCR Global Trends 2014." *UNHCR*, 2014, [www.unhcr.org/media/unhcr-global-trends-2014](http://www.unhcr.org/media/unhcr-global-trends-2014)

<sup>61</sup> Malteser International. "Refugee Camps: Challenges and Assistance on Site | Malteser International." *Www.malteser-international.org*, 2025, [www.malteser-international.org/en/current-issues/refugees-and-displacement/refugee-camps.html](http://www.malteser-international.org/en/current-issues/refugees-and-displacement/refugee-camps.html)

<sup>62</sup> The Sphere Handbook | Standards for Quality Humanitarian Response." *Handbook.spherestandards.org*, [handbook.spherestandards.org/en/camp/#ch001](http://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/camp/#ch001)

and are in critical condition, include Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh), Zaatari (Jordan), Kakuma or Dadaab (Kenya).<sup>63</sup>

### **Lack of medical support for camp-specific health needs**

The people living in refugee camps have distinct medical care requirements due to the nature of their living conditions. A systematic review did not find any World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, published between 2007 and 2018, which focused exclusively on clinical guidelines for healthcare in camp settings.<sup>64</sup> The latest international guideline devoted to clinical care in refugee camps was published by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) more than 20 years ago.<sup>65</sup> The day-to-day reality of most refugee camps includes complex medical issues that the current frameworks omit, such as: chronic overcrowding diseases (e.g. Tuberculosis, scabies, cholera, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, also known as STDs), the protection of the mental health of refugees (e.g. impact of long-term encampment, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, also known as PTSD), while sexual and reproductive health is another aspect of healthcare that is usually ignored in refugee camp guidelines.<sup>66</sup>

## **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

### **Ethiopia**

Ethiopia is one of Africa's largest refugee-hosting countries, sheltering over 1 million refugees and asylum seekers, with most coming from African countries currently in conflict like Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea.<sup>67</sup> Refugees in Ethiopia reside in 24 camps across five regional states, while more than 70,000 live in Addis Ababa as urban refugees.<sup>68</sup> Thus, Ethiopia is a key figure in conventions for the draft of new or for the revision of international guidelines, and in debates on camp standards, resource allocation, and burden sharing; especially in regional conventions and debates. In

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Blundell, Harriet, et al. "WHO Guidance for Refugees in Camps: Systematic Review." *BMJ Open*, vol. 9, no. 9, Sept. 2019, p. e027094, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2018-027094>

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> "Refugee Health | EBSCO." *EBSCO Information Services, Inc.* | *Www.ebsco.com*, 2021, [www.ebsco.com/research-starters/consumer-health/refugee-health](http://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/consumer-health/refugee-health)

<sup>67</sup> "Ethiopia | UNHCR." *UNHCR*, 14 Nov. 2025, [www.unhcr.org/where-we-work/countries/ethiopia?dataset=POP&yearsMode=range&selectedYears=%5B2012%2C2026%5D&level=OPR&category=PTY&fundingSource=ALS&compareBy=%5B%22category%22%5D&levelCompare=%5B%5B%22OETH\\_ABC%22%5D%5D&viewType=chart&chartType=bar&contextualDataset=BUD&tableDataView=absolute](http://www.unhcr.org/where-we-work/countries/ethiopia?dataset=POP&yearsMode=range&selectedYears=%5B2012%2C2026%5D&level=OPR&category=PTY&fundingSource=ALS&compareBy=%5B%22category%22%5D&levelCompare=%5B%5B%22OETH_ABC%22%5D%5D&viewType=chart&chartType=bar&contextualDataset=BUD&tableDataView=absolute)

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

regard to the local policies and legal framework on refugee camps, Ethiopia has aligned its policies with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, Ethiopia has made legal reforms to expand self-reliance in resources, inclusion in national mechanisms, and access to education and local integration for people in refugee camps, focusing on the importance of moving beyond survival standards and camp-based inhabitation, and instead moving towards more sustainable models for refugees. However, severe underfunding and regional instability mean that many camps still fall below minimum standards, with over 1.1 million lives at risk in refugee camps as of December 19th, 2025.<sup>70</sup> Ultimately, these facts reveal a gap between the country's theoretical reforms and policies and the practical capacity to implement them.

## Germany

Germany is known for being a major donor of resources and a regulations setter, specifically, Germany has been recognized as the 2nd largest humanitarian donor.<sup>71</sup> Over the years, Germany has provided humanitarian aid during refugee crises indirectly by donating resources and aid to organizations, such as the UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and by directly providing asylum and aid, by taking in people from regions including Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Germany supports defining strict guidelines for refugee camps, protecting refugees, and improving their living conditions, through promoting resilient and integration-focused approaches, Sphere-aligned frameworks, and host state accountability.

After a refugee crisis occurred in the early 2010s, Germany and other member states of the European Union (EU) became host countries for millions of refugees. Germany managed to accommodate the large numbers of refugees that arrived by establishing temporary collective centers with strict minimum standards for shelter, WASH, food, health, and protection; simultaneously, the German government began the integration process to avoid long-term encampment. In 2025, Germany has become the third largest refugee-hosting country in the world and the largest in the EU, with 2.5

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<sup>69</sup> "Ethiopia." *The Global Compact on Refugees* | UNHCR, [globalcompactrefugees.org/gcr-action/countries/ethiopia](https://globalcompactrefugees.org/gcr-action/countries/ethiopia)

<sup>70</sup> "UN World Food Programme (WFP)." *Wfp.org*, 19 Dec. 2025, [www.wfp.org/news/refugee-response-ethiopia-breaking-point-11-million-lives-risk-funds-dry](https://www.wfp.org/news/refugee-response-ethiopia-breaking-point-11-million-lives-risk-funds-dry)

<sup>71</sup> Kreidler, Corinna, et al. "Germany's Rise as a Humanitarian Donor - Centre for Humanitarian Action." *Centre for Humanitarian Action*, 12 July 2024, [www.chaberlin.org/en/publications/germanys-rise-as-a-humanitarian-donor/](https://www.chaberlin.org/en/publications/germanys-rise-as-a-humanitarian-donor/)

<sup>72</sup> "Germany | UNHCR." *UNHCR*, 2025, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/planning-funding-and-results/donors/germany?dataset=CNT&yearsMode=single&selectedYears=%5B2025%5D&level=DNR&category=EMK&fundingSource=SOF&compareBy=%5B%22fundingSource%22%2C%22category%22%5D&levelCompare=%5B](https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/planning-funding-and-results/donors/germany?dataset=CNT&yearsMode=single&selectedYears=%5B2025%5D&level=DNR&category=EMK&fundingSource=SOF&compareBy=%5B%22fundingSource%22%2C%22category%22%5D&levelCompare=%5B)

million refugees from all over the world, including more than 1 million refugees from Ukraine.<sup>73</sup> Germany has consistently advocated in the EU and the UN sessions for a dignified reception of refugees and the definition of clear, strict standards for all camps and camp-like accommodations, which will pay attention to overcrowding, human rights, protection from violence, and access to services, like healthcare, employment, and education.

For decades, Germany has been a forerunner in establishing higher education for refugees. In 1992, the UNHCR and the German government launched the Refugee Higher Education Scholarship Programme, known as the "Deutsche Akademische Flüchtlingsinitiative Albert Einstein" or the DAFI scholarship program.<sup>74</sup> By 2025, the DAFI program will have helped more than 22,500 young refugees in 55 countries to obtain an accredited higher education qualification in their first country of asylum.<sup>75</sup> Overall, Germany's financial contribution and political advocacy help significantly strengthen and promote international frameworks on camp standards, while Germany's approach regarding handling refugees serves as a positive model for other countries.

## Turkey

Turkey is one of the largest host countries for refugees globally. During the Syrian crisis, which began in March of 2011, Turkey hosted millions of refugees, accommodating them using more than a dozen refugee camps and urban settings. The Turkish government agency AFAD ("Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı", the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority) established camps with relatively high standards in WASH, shelter size, food, health, and services when compared with host states in similar financial situations.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, Turkey developed national camp standards that were often in coordination with the UNHCR and consistently in alignment with Sphere and CCCM standards, thus increasing their efficiency.

As of 2024, the Turkish government has shifted its primary strategy from refugee camps to urban integration, with almost 99% of refugees living in urban settings rather than refugee camps, more specifically only nine large-scale refugee camps remain open, which accommodate about 60,000 people in total. Specifically, Turkish urban regions where refugees have been integrated include: Istanbul, with over 532,000 registered Syrian refugees, Gaziantep, with approximately 462,000

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Global Compact on Refugees. "Republic of Türkiye." GCR, <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/gcr-action/countries/republic-turkiye>

Syrians,<sup>77</sup> and many provinces along the Syrian border, such as Hatay, Şanlıurfa, Kilis, Adana, Malatya, and Osmaniye.<sup>78</sup> Overall, Turkey is a prime example that long-term encampment and its negative consequences, can be avoided with strict domestic camp guidelines that abide by the international ones, strong political will, and a structured plan towards integration.

### **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)**

The ICRC is the primary guardian of IHL, and it focuses on protecting civilians affected by armed conflict, including refugees, since they are considered civilians under IHL.<sup>79</sup> The ICRC does not operate refugee camps, but it works on ensuring IHL compliance, security, safety, protection, essential services (e.g. emergency medical services) in conflict affected areas, and ensuring that refugee camps abide by the international guidelines and meet the minimum standards set. Furthermore, the ICRC advocates for refugee rights and protection and provides operational guidance and aid on key issues of camps, such as water and food management and distribution, sanitation, health, and protection.<sup>80</sup> More specifically, the ICRC offers aid in problems such as establishing safe water systems, providing equitable medical support, and ensuring the prevention of sexual violence.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, the ICRC systematically detect, monitors, documents, and denounces violations of international frameworks that affect the operation of refugee camps, such as attacks on civilian objects (as they are defined by the Geneva Conventions and IHL),<sup>82</sup> cases of forced displacement, denial of humanitarian aid in a conflict zone, or any other type of violation of IHL. To summarize, the ICRC tries to reinforce member states' legal obligations, ensure accountability, and strengthen camp protection guidelines. While the ICRC provides strong legal protection for refugees in conflict zones, technical and practical expertise in WASH and healthcare, as well as strong international advocacy for the reinforcement of internationally accepted guidelines, it cannot force implementation, thus relying on the states' or third parties' cooperation, to improve conditions in refugee camps.

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<sup>77</sup> "Syrian Refugees in Istanbul and Gaziantep: Comparative Findings on Settlement, Livelihood and Support." *CMI - Chr. Michelsen Institute*, [www.cmi.no/publications/8332-syrian-refugees-in-istanbul-and-gaziantep-comparative-findings-on-settlement](http://www.cmi.no/publications/8332-syrian-refugees-in-istanbul-and-gaziantep-comparative-findings-on-settlement)

<sup>78</sup> "Housing." *Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles*, [asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkiye/content-temporary-protection/housing/](http://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkiye/content-temporary-protection/housing/)

<sup>79</sup> ICRC. "Protecting the Rights of People in Conflict." *International Committee of the Red Cross*, 29 Dec. 2023, [www.icrc.org/en/what-we-do/protection](http://www.icrc.org/en/what-we-do/protection)

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> "Migrants." *International Committee of the Red Cross*, 2024, [www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/protected-persons-migrants-refugees-asylum-seekers](http://www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/protected-persons-migrants-refugees-asylum-seekers)

<sup>82</sup> [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org), 2023, [ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule9](http://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule9)

## United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF is an organization of the United Nations (UN) which focuses on the protection of children and the availability and reinforcement of basic services in refugee camps all over the globe. Refugees are often hosted in marginalized areas where infrastructure is worn out from overuse, development investment is minimal, almost nonexistent, and access to essential services is often limited not just for refugee families, but also for the local host communities so, to target that problem, the UNHCR and UNICEF drafted the Global Compact on Refugees, which was adopted by UN member states in 2018.<sup>83</sup>

The UNHCR and UNICEF have a common vision, to achieve a world where all children are safe from harm and are able to learn, grow and evolve equitably and thus, in February 2023, the UNHCR and UNICEF signed a Strategic Collaboration Framework.<sup>84</sup> This Framework declares the importance of “promoting the inclusion of displaced children and their families in national plans, budgets, datasets and service delivery systems.”<sup>85</sup> It is applicable globally and builds on strong collaboration and learning from the ‘Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children’, which was jointly implemented by the UNHCR and UNICEF between 2020 and 2022.<sup>86</sup> The framework establishes a commitment between both organizations towards the inclusion of refugee children in national systems, with specific sectors targeting: education, child protection, water and sanitation, social protection, and the elimination of childhood statelessness, all set to be achieved by 2030.<sup>87</sup> It also supports the continuation and strengthening of UNHCR and UNICEF collaboration in other areas, including nutrition and health.

Moreover, on June 3rd of 2025, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, UNICEF and the UNHCR further reinforced their collaboration and commitment to strengthening refugee protection and support by signing a Letter of Understanding (LoU) at the UNICEF Ethiopia office.<sup>88</sup> The LoU was first signed in 2016, and it was renewed and has been in effect from June 2025 and will continue to be until June 2027.<sup>89</sup> The LoU aims to strengthen collaborative efforts to safeguard and empower refugees and host communities in Ethiopia, with a particular focus on protecting vulnerable children and families, by

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<sup>83</sup> “UNICEF-UNHCR Strategic Collaboration Framework | UNHCR.” *UNHCR*, 2018, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/our-partners/un-and-international-institutions/unicef-unhcr-strategic-collaboration](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/our-partners/un-and-international-institutions/unicef-unhcr-strategic-collaboration)

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>“UNICEF and UNHCR Sign Letter of Understanding to Strengthen Collaboration in Ethiopia.” *Unicef.org*, 2025, [www.unicef.org/ethiopia/press-releases/unicef-and-unhcr-sign-letter-understanding-strengthen-collaboration-ethiopia](http://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/press-releases/unicef-and-unhcr-sign-letter-understanding-strengthen-collaboration-ethiopia)

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

establishing: “a robust framework for cooperation, prioritizing refugee protection and host communities’ support through expanded access to critical services, and comprehensive child protection and youth engagement programs”.<sup>90</sup> Overall, UNICEF has been providing aid and guidance, and has been crucial in ensuring education, security, and WASH are accessible to all children, its impact is limited in regions where host governments do not prioritize children’s inclusivity and equitable access.

## World Food Programme (WFP)

The World Food Programme (WFP) is the world’s largest humanitarian organization. The WFP saves lives during emergencies and uses food assistance to build a pathway to peace, stability, and prosperity for people recovering from conflict, disasters, and the impact of climate change. The WFP works in over 120 countries, with over 20,000 dedicated staff members worldwide, and in 2020, its work was so impactful that it earned it the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>91</sup> In 2024, the WFP managed to feed over 124 million people, which is quite a substantial amount when considering that in total, globally, 318 million people face acute hunger.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, in 2024, the WFP delivered 2.5 million metric tons of food and distributed US\$2.82 billion in cash-based transfers and commodity vouchers, therefore strengthening food and nutrition security and sustaining local economies around the world.<sup>93</sup>

In Ethiopia, the WFP has been working with the national Refugee and Returnees Service (RRS) and the UNHCR to deliver basic resources, such as food and water, to refugees; however, on the 19th of December 2025, a joint statement warned that “the refugee response in the region is on the verge of collapse, and without an immediate injection of funds, essential life-saving services—including food, water, and healthcare—for over 1.1 million refugees will cease within weeks.”<sup>94</sup> In countries like Ethiopia, the WFP’s support and aid are vital in order to ensure that refugee camps can function at even minimal standards. The WFP develops nutrition, cash-based transfer, resilient building, and social standards for refugee camps, which often serve as a reference for several of the Sphere’s standards chapters.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, the WFP advocates for the establishment and enforcement of international nutrition standards for all refugee camps. Overall, the WFP is an organization that provides essential

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> World Food Programme. “Who We Are.” *World Food Programme*, 2022, [www.wfp.org/who-we-are](http://www.wfp.org/who-we-are)

<sup>92</sup> World Food Programme. “World Food Programme.” *World Food Programme*, 2023, [www.wfp.org/](http://www.wfp.org/)

<sup>93</sup> World Food Programme. “Who We Are.” *World Food Programme*, 2022, [www.wfp.org/who-we-are](http://www.wfp.org/who-we-are)

<sup>94</sup> “UN World Food Programme (WFP).” *Wfp.org*, 19 Dec. 2025, [www.wfp.org/news/refugee-response-ethiopia-breaking-point-11-million-lives-risk-funds-dry](http://www.wfp.org/news/refugee-response-ethiopia-breaking-point-11-million-lives-risk-funds-dry)

<sup>95</sup> World Food Programme. “World Food Programme.” *World Food Programme*, 2023, [www.wfp.org/](http://www.wfp.org/)

aid to refugee camps, concerning food and nutrition, but its ability to safeguard the minimum camp conditions set is entirely dependent on the available funding, which limits its impact.

## **Blocs Expected**

### **Pro-Integration**

Countries that favor alternatives to camps, like urban hosting, and the integration of refugees within the society and the working force. Such countries include most European states, like Germany, France, Greece, and states like Canada and Great Britain.

### **Pro-Encampment**

Host countries in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, such as Ethiopia, South Sudan, Chad, Iran, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, emphasize that camps are necessary for security and resource management.

## **Timeline of Events**

Date	Description of Event
22 August 1984	The 4 Geneva Conventions were signed, forming the base of the IHL.
10 December 1948	The UNGA unanimously adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which is also the base for the IHRL.
12 August 1949	Additions to the Geneva Conventions were made to include the protection of civilians and refugees.
14 December 1950	Formation of the UNHCR, with the original mandate declaring it as a temporary agency.
28 July 1951	The United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons adopts the 1951 Refugee Convention.
16 December 1966	The ICCPR and the ICESCR were adopted by the UNGA, concluding the formation of the IHRL.
31 January 1967	The 1967 Protocol to the 1951 Convention was signed, removing the temporal and geographic limitations of the original convention, making its refugee protections globally applicable.
10 September 1969	The OAU, now AU, adopted the 1969 OAU Convention, a regional treaty on refugees.
22 November 1984	The Cartagena Declaration on Refugees was adopted by the Colloquium of the International Protection of Refugees in Central America, Mexico and Panama.
July 1997	Multiple NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement begin the first phase of the formation of the Sphere Standards.

22 December 2003	UNGA adopts resolution A/RES/58/153, making the UNHCR a permanent agency of the UN.
December 2005	The UN Cluster System starts developing the CCCM Framework.
March 2011	The Syrian Civil War, and the subsequent humanitarian and refugee Syrian crisis begin.
17 December 2018	The UNGA adopted the Global Compact on Refugees.
February 2023	The UNHCR and UNICEF signed a Strategic Collaboration Framework.
3 June 2025	UNICEF and the UNHCR signed a Letter of Understanding, reinforcing their commitments to refugee protection in Ethiopia.
19 December 2025	Joint warning by the UNHCR, WFP, and RRS declaring that funds are drying out, and 1.1 million refugees in camps in Ethiopia are in critical danger.

## Relevant UN Resolutions, Treaties & Events

### New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants - [A/RES/71/1](#)

In 2016, at the UN headquarters, the UNGA adopted resolution A/RES/71/1, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The Declaration reaffirmed the importance of international refugee protection and the need to improve living conditions for refugees and migrants. The resolution also suggested the implementation of a new framework, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which proposed the establishment of better reception conditions and stronger protection capacity, the increase of humanitarian aid, and the inclusion of refugees in all national services. Additionally, it laid the foundation for the creation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), and it recognized the need for adequate regulatory, technical, and operational assistance during refugee crises. Overall, the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants was crucial since it was a global political commitment to share responsibility for refugees, and it created the CRRF; however, like all the UNGA resolutions, the Declaration is a non-binding agreement, meaning that implementation

depends on national political will. Lastly, it makes political commitments, but it does not declare any specific technical standards for camp management, WASH, shelter, or protection, limiting its effectiveness.

### **UNHCR Guidelines**

The UNHCR provides universally accepted, detailed operational guidelines for refugee camps. The UNHCR provides standards for refugee camps through the [UNHCR Emergency Handbook](#) and its “Principles & Standards for Settlement Planning.”<sup>96</sup> The UNHCR emphasizes that alternatives to camps should be preferred and refugee camps (encampment) should be treated as a last resort, and if built, camps should abide by very specific, detailed standards that ensure dignity and safety for their inhabitants. According to the UNHCR Guidelines, “Settlement planning must follow the Master Plan Approach, ensuring coordinated, multi-sectoral planning from the beginning.”<sup>97</sup> The guidelines further emphasize the need for the consideration of the geographical context, climate, cultural practices, and available materials when building refugee camps. Furthermore, the guidelines declare minimum size requirements, infrastructure and services standards (like drainage systems, healthcare facilities, and educational facilities) and that ventilation, weather protection, privacy, fire safety, and accessibility for persons with disabilities must be ensured in all camps. Overall, while the UNHCR guidelines are very detailed, concise, and applicable all over the globe, they are non-binding, minimizing compliance, since it is heavily dependent on political will and funding (host state’s capacity).

### **Global Compact on Refugees - [A/RES/73/151](#)**

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) is a global framework that focuses on refugee protection, and it was adopted by the UNGA on the 17th of December 2018. It builds on the CRRF and introduces operational standards, more specifically it aims to improve burden sharing between states, expand the framework to be more inclusive towards Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), and support host countries in the reception and accommodation of refugees. Additionally, it calls for the improvement of camp infrastructure, protection systems, and investment by host countries for access to education, health, and WASH for refugees. The GCR further seeks the inclusion of refugees in national systems by advocating for the integration of refugees in the national educational system, the

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<sup>96</sup>“Principles & Standards for Settlement Planning | UNHCR.” *UNHCR*, 26 June 2025, [emergency.unhcr.org/emergency-assistance/settlement-and-shelter/guidance-settlements/principles-standards-settlement-planning](https://www.emergency.unhcr.org/emergency-assistance/settlement-and-shelter/guidance-settlements/principles-standards-settlement-planning)

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

workforce, the national healthcare system, and the social protection systems to reduce refugees' dependence on camps and promote total societal integration. Moreover, the GCR is a framework that promotes coordinated global action in order to solve the refugee issue; with the intent that a collaboration between states, UN agencies, NGOs, the private sector, and local authorities will increase the effectiveness and maximize the implementation of the framework.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### **Médecins sans Frontiers (MSF) direct medical aid and protocols for refugee camps<sup>98</sup>**

During various refugee crises over the years MSF have been very involved in the medical sector of refugee camps. More specifically, MSF is an essential provider of direct medical care in refugee camps, which includes transportation to hospitals, maternity care, vaccination campaigns, nutrition programs, sexual health care, and emergency outbreak response. Furthermore, MSF has developed its own medical protocols and operational guidelines for use in refugee camps, since they noticed that global health bodies lacked camp-specific clinical guidance and that already existing guidelines did not include instructions for refugee camps. Additionally, MSF publicly documents failures in upholding minimum camp standards; such violations include overcrowding, unsafe water, lack of sanitation, and inadequate access to healthcare, and in order to minimize such violations, MSF uses field reports to pressure governments and UN agencies to try to improve conditions in refugee camps. The MSF's operational model focuses on rapid deployment by medical professionals and humanitarian workers, who provide direct medical aid wherever needed, independent assessment, and overall neutral humanitarian action; which often exposes gaps in existing international guidelines, because MSF personnel are providing on site aid and guidance and can, therefore, identify them in real time. Overall, MSF provides crucial medical aid; their protocols and guidelines are non-binding and thus, their effectiveness is limited and dependent on political will.

### **Emergency support in refugee camps by the LIFE organization<sup>99</sup>**

LIFE is a humanitarian NGO that works in refugee camps by providing essential aid and support during crises. More specifically, LIFE provides emergency support in refugee camps by building temporary shelters, installing sustainable water systems, helping with food rationing and nutrition,

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<sup>98</sup>MSF. "Refugees and Displaced People." *Médecins Sans Frontières UK*, <https://msf.org.uk/issues/refugees-and-displaced-people>

<sup>99</sup>LIFE ONG. *LIFE*, <https://life-ong.org/en-us>

distributing emergency hygiene kits and supplies, and supporting educational and mental health programs. LIFE, also, advocates for the use of a 'community-based approach', by empowering refugees to participate in their camp's governance and express their concerns or dissatisfactions, so that they can be reported and, possibly, resolved. LIFE has been a key factor that helps improve living conditions for many refugees in camps in underfunded and, usually, neglected areas. Additionally, their interventions regarding WASH, food, and shelter have helped many camps minimize disease outbreaks and improve the level of dignity and quality of life for many refugees. However, LIFE cannot define international guidelines, so its impact is local and practical, rather than international and normative. On the contrary, the limitation on their jurisdiction and radius of impact is also a point of strength, since it allows LIFE to be flexible and adaptable for rapid and direct intervention in emergencies.

### **World Vision intervention to provide humanitarian relief in refugee camps<sup>100</sup>**

World Vision is a major humanitarian NGO that works with refugees, specializing in aiding child refugees during crises, such as those in Syria, South Sudan, the Rohingya, and Somalia. World Vision is an on-site organization that focuses on establishing child protection systems in refugee camps, building WASH infrastructure, providing shelter support, and distributing non-food essentials items (such as clothing). Additionally, World Vision runs nutrition programs for children and mothers living in refugee camps, as well as educational programs; by sending trained personnel (e.g. teachers, instructors) and creating temporary learning spaces, so that children can have access to education, to a limited extent. Moreover, World Vision advocates for the inclusion of children - specific humanitarian standards in international guidelines on refugee camps; often influencing Sphere and UNHCR child protection guidelines. While World Vision has been an impactful organization for refugees in camps, especially children, its impact is limited depending on host country cooperation, political will, available funding (with most coming from private donors), and restricted jurisdiction.

## **Possible Solutions**

### **Climate-resilient camp infrastructure**

A big challenge for refugee camps is that the materials and planning strategies used are not climate resilient, which endangers refugees living in them to floods, storms, extreme heatwaves, and other climate dependent disasters. The first step towards protection is adequate planning and risk

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<sup>100</sup> World Vision. "Refugees." *World Vision*, <https://www.worldvision.org/our-work/refugees>

assessment before site selection. Local authorities and UN agencies would use detailed climate mapping to minimize risks; instead of just using any available land to build a refugee camp, site choice would be based on projected natural disaster patterns, climate change scenarios, earthquake rates, etc., thus making camps safer before they are even built. Within the camp, roads, shelters, and communal buildings would be laid out along natural drainage lines, with specific measures to manage heavy rainfall. Critical infrastructure such as medical sectors, warehouses, schools, and water points would be built on elevated ground with reinforced foundations and proper drainage systems, so that even in extreme weather, they remain functional. Water systems will be sustainable and not dependent on the delivery of drinkable water by a third party or a local authority. Lastly, wherever possible, refugee camp infrastructure (water networks, energy systems, roads, drainage) will be integrated into the national systems, making them more resilient, more sustainable, and, usually, of better quality.

### **Alternatives to camps**

Long-term encampment is one of the biggest challenges for refugees. Governments have, in recent years, started to move away from refugee camps and towards other alternatives, such as societal integration. The first step towards integration is the existence of a foundational legal framework; thus, host governments, with UN support, have started adopting or expanding policies that promote the integration of refugees. These laws allow and promote refugees to live in towns and villages rather than being confined to camps, which will be done gradually, starting with pilot areas and specific categories of refugees (families with school-age children, people with skills needed locally), to not overpressure national systems. During a refugee crisis, member states would declare their capacity by providing scientific reports to the UN, and according to that, the UN, specifically agencies such as the UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, and the HRC, would allocate the appropriate amount of refugees in each host country; therefore, avoiding overcrowding and ensuring that host countries do not go past state capacity. At the same time, local ministries of education, health, labor, housing, and local governments would make a specific plan to integrate refugees into existing schools, clinics, housing programs, and job markets, according to the needs and the availability of each country. This planning would map where refugees will live, what services already exist, what needs to be expanded, and how financing will be shared between donors and the host state. Lastly, from the first weeks in the host country, host governments would start the documentation process, and refugees would be offered intensive language courses, cultural orientation, and “daily life” skills training (e.g. ‘how to use public transport’, ‘how to navigate

health and school systems’, ‘how to understand basic local laws and rights’). These programs would be tailored according to age group and literacy level to ensure the optimum outcome.

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