

<b>Forum:</b>	Social Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (GA3)
<b>Issue:</b>	Promoting and Protecting the Cultural Rights of Refugees and Migrants
<b>Student Officer:</b>	Maria-Loukia Mantelou
<b>Position:</b>	Co-Chair

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## PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates,

My name is Marilou Mantelou, and it is my honor to serve as a Co-Chair in the Social Humanitarian and Cultural Committee of this year's Platon School Model United Nations Conference. I am an 11<sup>th</sup> grade student at Pierce-The American College of Greece and in this year's PS-MUN conference, I was assigned to introduce you to the topic of promoting and protecting the cultural rights of refugees and migrants and help you form helpful resolutions.

By participating in a variety of conferences, one can gain a deeper understanding of the reality one lives in and in this manner, one starts to actively engage on matters that concern different corners of the world. MUN is truly one of my biggest passions. This is necessitated by the fact that it has given me the opportunity to develop as a person, become a well-educated citizen, and cultivate the ability to judge matters based on many different perspectives.

The topic 'Promoting and Protecting the Cultural Rights of Refugees and Migrants' is of high importance, since respecting and helping cultural maintenance is the key to progress. In essence, by respecting the past, we can build the future. Ergo, this guide aims to provide you with all the information you will need for constructing elaborative clauses. I strongly urge you to conduct your own research on the topic and especially regarding the policy of your country on it. If you have any questions regarding the Rules of Procedure or the topic itself, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at [m.mantelou@acg.edu](mailto:m.mantelou@acg.edu).

Looking forward to meeting you all in March!

Yours truly,

Marilou Mantelou

## INTRODUCTION

As of May 2023, more than 110 million individuals worldwide were forcibly displaced due to their persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order<sup>1</sup>. Of course, the decision to migrate can be taken due to a variety of reasons such as the willingness to find better living conditions and escape being a targeted minority because of someone's ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or political opinions. Nowadays, social, political, demographic, economic, and environmental causes of migration are the most common.

Unfortunately, the violation of migrants' ethnic and cultural rights doesn't stop in the country they migrate to. In fact, in many cases, the situation gets worse as far as cultural maintenance is concerned. The racism, xenophobia, and discrimination that migrants face contribute to the loss of contact with one's own cultural heritage as well as their social exclusion. Taking also into consideration the 'paradox of progress' and its much-needed solution, societies should be willingly open to intercultural exchange and interaction to ensure dynamic, diverse, and democratic societies.

Refugees and migrants should be provided decent living conditions by their host countries, as a means of ensuring smooth integration into their new life. More specifically, living standards for migrants and refugees must include having access to and effectively participating in all aspects of cultural habits, with the aid of the host country. Further considering that international human rights law provisions protect those cultural rights, regardless of the legal status of migrants, neglecting ethnic and cultural rights of migrants is indeed a violation of human rights. Cultural representation of migrants and refugees is necessary to foster cooperation between a plethora of different opinions as a means of developing a more accepting and open-minded society. This could be achieved through sufficient cultural education.

Learning from culture, history, and past mistakes is one of the most important steps to take to fully develop individually and as a whole. As a result, protecting and promoting the cultural rights of refugees and migrants will contribute to the personal growth of refugees and migrants. Simultaneously, safeguarding such rights will provide the general public with a better understanding of each nation and its own culture. All of the above are closely connected with 'the paradox of progress' because it can be abolished by protecting and promoting cultural rights because of the knowledge that each culture provides.

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<sup>1</sup> Refugee Statistics, *How to Help Refugees — Aid, Relief and Donations* | USA for UNHCR, [www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/](http://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/)

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### Refugees

Refugees are “people who have fled war, violence, conflict of persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country.”<sup>2</sup> They can be described as really vulnerable individuals who have limited to no access to their culture after leaving their homeland, due to lack of cultural means, unacceptance of the culture by the host country, linguistic limitations, etc.

### Migrants

A migrant is someone who moves from one area to another in search of work or leaves one country to settle permanently in another.<sup>3</sup> The difference between migrants and refugees is mainly that a migrant is someone who chooses to move, and a refugee is someone who has been forced from their home.<sup>4</sup>

### Asylum seeker

Asylum seeker refers to a person who has left their home country as a political refugee and is seeking asylum in another<sup>5</sup>. Asylum seekers are allowed to work in a foreign country only by being granted refugee status, therefore, not being granted the refugee status can lead to personal isolation and loss and marginalization of contact with their culture.

### Cultural rights

Cultural rights are human rights that aim at assuring the enjoyment of culture and its components in conditions of equality, human dignity, and non-discrimination, by protecting religious, ethnic minorities as well as indigenous societies that are in danger of disappearing.<sup>6</sup> They also include a group's ability to preserve its way of life, such as child rearing, continuation of language, and security of its economic base in the nation, in which it is located. Economic, social, and cultural rights are protected under various international and regional treaties, and in national constitutions.

### Cultural competence

Cultural competence is the ability to interact with people from different cultures, especially through acknowledging and appreciating cultural differences.<sup>7</sup> This is the

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<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugees](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugees)

<sup>3</sup> "Who is a Refugee, a Migrant or an Asylum Seeker?" Amnesty International, 18 Sept. 2023, [www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/)

<sup>4</sup> "What's the Difference Between a Migrant and a Refugee?" *Encyclopedia Britannica*, [www.britannica.com/story/whats-the-difference-between-a-migrant-and-a-refugee](http://www.britannica.com/story/whats-the-difference-between-a-migrant-and-a-refugee)

<sup>5</sup> "Who is a Refugee, a Migrant or an Asylum Seeker?" *Amnesty International*, 18 Sept. 2023, [www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/)

<sup>6</sup> Cultural Rights, *Derechos Culturales*, [culturalrights.net/en/principal.php?c=1](http://culturalrights.net/en/principal.php?c=1)

<sup>7</sup> What is Cultural Competence and How to Develop It?, *Penn State Extension | The Pennsylvania State University*, 1 May 2023, [extension.psu.edu/what-is-cultural-competence-and-how-to-develop-it](http://extension.psu.edu/what-is-cultural-competence-and-how-to-develop-it)

goal of multiethnic societies, especially ones that accommodate refugees. The ability of cultural competence can immensely contribute to the effective protection of minorities.

### Xenophobia

“An aversion or hostility to foreigners, people from different cultures or strangers, due to fear and prejudices.”<sup>8</sup>

### Integration

The process of integration can be described as the “incorporation as equals into society or an organization of individuals of different groups.”<sup>9</sup>

### Transnationalism

“As applied in the fields of economics, sociology, and politics, transnationalism generally refers to the exchange of people, ideas, technology, and money between nations.”<sup>10</sup> This exchange is extremely important for cultural acceptance and the interaction between refugees/migrants and citizens of the host countries.

### Stateless person

“A person who is not considered a national by any State under the operation of its law.”<sup>11</sup> Consequently, a stateless person cannot enjoy the rights that are associated with citizenship, which is also related to cultural representation and maintenance. It is often that asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants might also be stateless.

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<sup>8</sup> Xenophobia Definition & Meaning, Dictionary.com, Dictionary.com, [www.dictionary.com/browse/xenophobia](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/xenophobia)

<sup>9</sup> Integration Definition & Meaning, Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster, [www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/integration](http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/integration)

<sup>10</sup> What Is Transnationalism? Definition, Pros, and Cons, *ThoughtCo*, 9 Sept. 2020, [www.thoughtco.com/what-is-transnationalism-definition-pros-and-cons-5073163](http://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-transnationalism-definition-pros-and-cons-5073163).

<sup>11</sup> Stateless Person Definition, *UNHCR*, 18 May 2020, [emergency.unhcr.org/protection/legal-framework/stateless-person-definition](http://emergency.unhcr.org/protection/legal-framework/stateless-person-definition)

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The cultural rights of refugees and migrants are included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the core international human rights instruments. They are of utmost importance since they preserve cultural knowledge and the history behind it. In tandem, they can help refugees and migrants maintain their habits and sense of normality. Yet, many migrants tend to live and work in the shadows, afraid to complain, and denied rights and freedoms. They are vulnerable to discrimination and marginalization. In law, policy, and practice, many migrants are often denied access to such fundamental human rights as the right to health, to education, to an adequate standard of living, to social security, and to just and favorable conditions of work.

### Causes of migration

Migrants can be displaced due to a variety of incidents coming from social, economic, and environmental aspects. However, refugees are forced to be displaced because of armed conflicts. Regardless, all different causes of migration can lead to loss of cultural identity and violation of human and cultural rights.

#### Social and political causes

In recent years, people have been fleeing to Europe in large numbers due to conflict, terror, and persecution, mainly from Syria and Afghanistan. Persecution because of one's ethnicity, religion, race, politics, or culture can push people to leave their country since the discrimination and social isolation that they face is unbearable. In addition, due to governmental limitations in one's own country, a person may be unable to express himself/herself and practice their religion or cultural habits to a full extent. Another major cause of migration is war, conflict, or government persecution. Correspondingly, those fleeing armed conflict, human rights violations, or persecution are more likely to be humanitarian refugees. Being a humanitarian refugee can affect where they settle as some countries have more liberal approaches to humanitarian migrants than others.

An example of refugees coming from armed conflict and are being deprived of their cultural rights are Syrian refugees. More specifically, they have sought asylum in more than 130 countries, due to civil war, but the vast majority live in neighboring countries within the region.

Even though the majority of the Syrian refugees don't live in refugee camps, living in rural and urban settings doesn't mean success or stability. More than 70 percent of Syrian refugees are living in poverty<sup>12</sup>, with limited access to basic services, education, or job opportunities and few prospects of returning

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<sup>12</sup> UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, *UNHCR*, 18 Mar. 2021, [www.unhcr.org/cy/2021/03/18/syria-refugee-crisis-globally-in-europe-and-in-cyprus-meet-some-syrian-refugees-in-cyprus/](http://www.unhcr.org/cy/2021/03/18/syria-refugee-crisis-globally-in-europe-and-in-cyprus-meet-some-syrian-refugees-in-cyprus/)

home. Ergo, Syrian refugees are often deprived of their cultural rights due to their efforts to integrate smoothly into a new society. Especially when refugees embark on the dangerous, often deadly, and even illegal trip towards Europe, many of them are consciously aware that settling in the Western world will include accepting different laws and ways of life, that are not familiar or comfortable with.

#### Demographic and economic causes

According to the UN International Labor Organization, migrant workers (those migrating due to lack of employment) represented more than two-thirds of international migrants<sup>13</sup>, with them being concentrated in high-income countries. Demographic change determines how people move and migrate as well as cultural maintenance and continuation. This is also necessitated by the fact that the population's increase or decrease has an impact on economic growth and employment opportunities in the countries of origin or migration policies in the destination countries. Demographic and economic migrants leave their home country in the hope of higher wages, better employment opportunities, a higher standard of living, and educational opportunities. Moreover, many decide to migrate due to the prevalent global inequality in the 21st century. This inequality is reproduced by many multinational companies within a wider economic system that serves to directly benefit the company itself and, indirectly, industrialized countries at the expense of others. Migrants coming from developing countries have been victims of labor exploitation, thereupon, they migrate to be treated fairly and receive better payment.

#### Environmental and climate migration

The environment has always been a driver of migration, as people flee natural disasters, such as floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes. However, climate change is expected to exacerbate extreme weather events, meaning more people could be on the move, giving some estimations of even one billion environmental refugees by the year 2050<sup>14</sup>. For thousands of years, humans have lived mostly on lands where a limited range of comfortable temperatures enabled an abundance of food to grow. However, by 2070, extremely hot zones could make up almost 20 percent of the land, which means that a third of humanity could potentially be living in uninhabitable conditions<sup>15</sup>. Also,

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<sup>13</sup> Exploring Migration Causes: Why People Migrate | News | European Parliament, [www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/world/20200624STO81906/exploring-migration-causes-why-people-migrate](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/world/20200624STO81906/exploring-migration-causes-why-people-migrate)

<sup>14</sup> Exploring Migration Causes: Why People Migrate | News | European Parliament, [www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/world/20200624STO81906/exploring-migration-causes-why-people-migrate](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/world/20200624STO81906/exploring-migration-causes-why-people-migrate)

talking about migration in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, it is projected that, without taking climate action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, 143 million people from these regions could be forced to move within their own countries to flee the effects of climate change<sup>15</sup>. In conclusion, migration will be considered an adaptation to climate change.

### Enjoying cultural practices while living in the host country

Refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants are particularly vulnerable to a range of human rights violations, including violations of human and cultural rights as well as the right to adequate housing. Displaced persons are also particularly prone to discrimination, racism, and xenophobia, which can further interfere with their ability to secure sustainable and adequate living conditions. Refugee camps around the world are often overcrowded, not being able to provide a decent way of living, basic education as well as cultural education. Many times, migrants will end up living in precarious and unsafe conditions in cities and urban areas, where discrimination and prejudice don't allow them to express themselves culturally or externalize their cultural habits.

There are many cases where employers may oblige migrant domestic workers or factory workers to live at their place of work. Consequently, migrants don't have the opportunity to grow, feel welcomed, or give a new perspective on issues that the host country may have, considering that they are probably coming from another culture. Taking into consideration the living conditions of migrant workers in Qatar's 2022 World Cup, it has been revealed that 6,500 out of 30,000 foreign laborers died in Qatar. The migrant workers hired to build the stadiums after Qatar won the World Cup bid mostly come from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and the Philippines. The deaths were caused by doing heavy labor in very high temperatures. Many workers were even forced to live in squalid accommodation, to pay huge recruitment fees, and had wages withheld and their passports confiscated. Moreover, Qatari companies used to operate a system called "kafala", under which they sponsored foreign workers to come to the country but, then, prevented them from leaving their jobs<sup>16</sup>. Thus, these unbearable living conditions had also an effect on maintaining their culture.

### Causes that prevent migrants from effectively enjoying their cultural rights

#### Legal and practical obstacles for migrants

Migrants can face legal obstacles that may delay their smooth integration into their new society, such as being unable to easily transfer their legal papers from one country to another due to different government systems. Moreover,

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<sup>15</sup> Climate Migration: An Impending Global Challenge, *State of the Planet*, 21 May 2021, [news.climate.columbia.edu/2021/05/13/climate-migration-an-impending-global-challenge/](https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2021/05/13/climate-migration-an-impending-global-challenge/)

<sup>16</sup> World Cup 2022: How Has Qatar Treated Foreign Workers?, *BBC News*, 30 Mar. 2022, [www.bbc.com/news/world-60867042](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60867042)



the lack of identification or proof of residence can also pose further legal barriers for migrants, since they force refugees and migrants to live in their shadows, to protect themselves and not gain the attention of local authorities and citizens. Both aspects of this obstacle can affect practicing their religion or representing their culture since they choose to ignore that part of their identity to become a part of the masses. In addition, the unsafety due to them not being legal members of the host country causes fear and uncertainty that doesn't allow them to express themselves freely. Ergo, the fear of being reported to immigration enforcement bodies, with a possible result of being deported or getting detention, stops migrants from demanding decent living conditions and job positions, as well as cultural representation and rights. Moving on to the practical obstacles, linguistic difficulties are huge obstacles to migrants expressing their cultural needs, since misunderstandings are common. Linguistic difficulties can also lead to a lack of information, which causes migrants to not be aware of their cultural rights and their importance in being able to integrate smoothly into this new society without losing their cultural identity and connection with their roots.

#### Financial barriers

Financial barriers don't allow migrants and refugees to keep in touch with their culture as well. It is often that migrants' and refugees' economic status is weak since it is almost impossible for refugees to transfer their belongings and money to the host country. Correspondingly, economic instability forces them to accept usually low-paying jobs, with many working hours, that don't allow them to express themselves culturally. At the same time, they are unable to practice their cultural habits due to limited monetary resources that would mostly be dedicated to surviving and being provided with basic needs.

#### Social obstacles

Racism, social isolation, and exclusion cause the cultural isolation of migrants or the loss of contact with their culture, since peer pressure, the fear of discrimination, and being unequally treated or constantly targeted push migrants to abandon their culture. Many believe that in this manner, they will be able to assimilate to the host society by living in accordance with its social norms, in essence, without differentiating from the average citizen of the host country. In order to be protected and survive, they are indirectly 'forced' to change habits and beliefs as a means of fitting in the stereotypes and the suitable ways of living in their new state.

#### Obstacles coming from the host-country

The lack of support from the host country is one of the main reasons that migrants choose to abandon their roots. When the host country doesn't provide the means to protect the cultural heritage of migrants and refugees



such as providing cultural education, spaces for practicing their religion, and psychological support, migrants are ‘forced’ to distance themselves from their culture. The reason behind this is the fact that they do not have the financial means to stay in contact with their own culture, but most importantly, they unfortunately lack the moral support from their host country. This means that the host country doesn’t show that it supports them in maintaining their roots and keeping their diversity. As a result, their cultural rights will be indirectly deprived. For example, when the host country doesn’t offer them the opportunity to keep practicing their religion in a space dedicated to that purpose, it is clear that the country doesn’t prioritize their cultural maintenance or their well-being. This can lead to feelings of unacceptance and unimportance from the migrants. So, refugees and migrants experience challenges accessing services that address their individual and cultural needs.

### Vulnerability of Refugees and migrant groups

Refugees and migrants are two of the most vulnerable groups since they both start a completely different life in a different country than their own. However, rooted racism and prejudices make certain refugee and migrant groups even more prone to discrimination. More specifically, migrants with African Descent, Roma, Sinti, and travelers are targeted groups, as a result of prejudice and stereotypes that they fall into. The hatred towards Muslims and islamophobia make these immigrant groups more prone to discrimination because of their religion and their religion’s practices and strict rules. There are times at which UN treaty bodies overlook the right of minority-refugees to preserve their cultural identity because they fail to appreciate the significance of minority-refugees’ location at the intersection of persons belonging to minorities and refugees. In general, it is a topic that hasn’t been discussed thoroughly yet, meaning that not all aspects have been sufficiently addressed. This has potentially negative consequences for minority refugees and the host society. The current state of affairs has the potential to undermine the objectives of protection of human dignity, preservation and continued existence of minority identities; and social stability and cohesion.

### Consequences coming from unprotecting human rights

#### Adjustment issues

Many refugees experience cultural loss as a result of the loss of familiar cultural practices, languages, religious customs, and difficulties associated with adjustment to a new culture in host states. Losing their culture or worse not being able to practice it and represent it due to societal restrictions can lead to severe tensions between the host state and the migrants. For example, violent behaviors, which can potentially originate from the tough racism and unacceptance that the migrants face every day, will indeed become an

alarming reality. That way, discrimination toward migrants will continue due to their behavior. This vicious circle will not have an ending until society members can accept the migrants' differences and make them feel welcomed as individuals with different beliefs but with the willingness to work together for a better future.

### Mental trauma

Cultural loss is largely the consequence of physical displacement. Be that as it may, it can also be compounded by the destruction of their cultural sites in their home states and generally, the destruction of their normality and life as a whole. Consequently, cultural loss can make the refugees suffer from guilt, which leads to a higher level of emotional distress and disruption of their daily life in host states. By having one's culture represented in their host state, a sense of home will be formed much easier for refugees and migrants, because they will be able to keep a part of their past life close and will feel more welcomed. Moreover, by embracing their culture, they will be able to integrate smoothly into the new society since they will be supported and accepted.

## Cultural representation benefits

### Benefits for migrants and refugees

Cultural representation can be fundamental in increasing self-esteem for people of marginalized groups, in this case, migrants and refugees. More specifically, it will contribute to their empowerment, considering that such groups will be able to feel welcomed and accepted in their new reality, without having to abandon their culture, history, and habits. Culture may also serve as a crucial means of self-expression for migrants and refugees during their journeys. This also includes situations of trauma and loss, which can be healed through music, art, and poetry coming from their own culture. Simultaneously, they will be reconnected with their home country and a sense of home will follow them in the host state.

Moreover, the support shown by the host state will help them develop a feeling of security and reliability whose lack of existence was one of the main reasons they left their homelands in the first place. Taking all of the above into consideration, through the representation of migrants and refugees, they will be able to grow as individuals and overcome their trauma.

### Benefits for the host-country

Cultural representation is beneficial for the host country as well since it concerns society and its enrichment. Cultural diversity is an anchor in community development, considering that refugees carry a different culture and lifestyle with them, which can bring refreshing ideas to the market, while also increasing the working force. This new culture offers new ideas, different

mindsets, and views on life, and new forms of art and language which contribute to the progress of the state culturally and economically, with more voices being heard. More precisely, new perspectives are going to be added to matters that concern the host countries. Through these different perspectives, a variety of issues could be solved. This is due to the fact that the combination of different ideas, coming from people of different backgrounds, can lead to the creation of countless possible solutions. In addition, the representation of refugees' and migrants' opinions will help immensely in their better integration. Simultaneously, through cultural representation that is supported by the state, organizations and proper education, xenophobia, racism, and discrimination will start to decrease, because refugees will be supported by the government. Lastly, possible internal conflicts between refugees and citizens of the host country are more likely to disappear if refugees are sufficiently represented, able to express themselves, and seen by the government.

## MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

### Turkey

In a time when the number of forcibly displaced people across the world is hitting record levels, Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees worldwide. Turkey currently hosts 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees along with close to 320,000 persons of concern from other nationalities<sup>17</sup>. The country has been undertaking legislative and institutional reforms in order to build an effective national asylum system in compliance with international standards. Minorities and refugees in Turkey continue to suffer from rights violations. In 2022<sup>18</sup>, the government made little to no effort to address religious freedom issues. These included rights violations against non-Muslim minorities and restricting efforts of minority religious groups to train their clergy, entry bans and deportations of non-Turkish-citizen leaders of Protestant congregations, and government officials' use of antisemitic rhetoric in speeches. Hate crimes against Syrian refugees carried on increasing and the state suppression of the Kurdish language and culture continued to rise across the country. That is a result of racism and nationalism that seems to be a byproduct of the government's decisions. Lastly, Roma people didn't have proper access to healthcare, due to the well-rooted prejudices towards them.

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<sup>17</sup> UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/tr/en/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-in-Turkey](http://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-in-Turkey)

<sup>18</sup> SCF, *Minority and Refugee Rights in Turkey: 2022 in Review*, *Stockholm Center for Freedom*, 6 Feb. 2023, [stockholmcf.org/minority-and-refugee-rights-in-turkey-2022-in-review/](http://stockholmcf.org/minority-and-refugee-rights-in-turkey-2022-in-review/)

## Syria

Since 2011, the civil war in Syria has displaced more than half of its people and created the largest refugee population in the world.<sup>19</sup> In 2018, there were 6.7 million refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, more than from any other country.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, Syrians' culture has been changed, westernized, or has even vanished from the different countries that host Syrian refugees. The overwhelming majority of the people that fled from Syria stayed in the Middle East, mostly in the bordering countries of their nation. The rest have migrated largely to Europe and have undertaken perilous journeys across the Mediterranean and beyond. Last year alone, European Union countries took in more than 96,000 people from Syria, with most of them going to Germany.<sup>21</sup> In Syria, human rights abuses in government-held territory continue unabated. Authorities brutally suppress every sign of re-emerging dissent, including through arbitrary arrests and torture. In Lebanon and Turkey, Syrians face increasingly hostile government policies and growing anti-refugee public opinion.

## Germany

In the middle of 2021, Germany reported almost 1.24 million refugees and 233,000 asylum seekers, making it the biggest host country for refugees in Europe.<sup>22</sup> Half of the refugees are from Syria. Germany also hosts 27,000 stateless persons. Germany provides decent work positions for migrants and refugees, without denying them cultural representation and acceptance.<sup>23</sup> This is since the country supports the international work of UNHCR. For years, the country has been the second biggest bilateral donor for the UNHCR after the US, meaning that they try to provide the means for refugees' cultural representation and acceptance.

## Uganda

As of 30 November 2021, Uganda hosts over 1.5 million refugees and asylum-seekers mainly from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi<sup>24</sup>. It is the country hosting the most refugees in sub-Saharan Africa. Refugees and migrants live in villages known as settlements, where they co-exist with communities that host them. This approach, combined with progressive refugee laws and freedoms, provides displaced persons in Uganda with significant prospects for dignity and self-reliance. In coordination with the government, UNHCR and partners continue to provide

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<sup>19</sup> Syrian Refugees Face a Grim Future Without International Policy Shifts, *Brookings*, 2 May 2023, [www.brookings.edu/articles/syrian-refugees-face-a-grim-future-without-international-policy-shifts/](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/syrian-refugees-face-a-grim-future-without-international-policy-shifts/)

<sup>20</sup> By the Numbers: Syrian Refugees Around the World, *FRONTLINE*, 18 Aug. 2022, [www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/numbers-syrian-refugees-around-world/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/numbers-syrian-refugees-around-world/)

<sup>21</sup> By the Numbers: Syrian Refugees Around the World, *FRONTLINE*, 18 Aug. 2022, [www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/numbers-syrian-refugees-around-world/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/numbers-syrian-refugees-around-world/)

<sup>22</sup> UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/countries/germany](http://www.unhcr.org/countries/germany)

<sup>23</sup> UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/countries/germany](http://www.unhcr.org/countries/germany)

<sup>24</sup> UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/countries/uganda](http://www.unhcr.org/countries/uganda)

protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees in Uganda and support efforts towards a comprehensive refugee response. Uganda implements the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), emphasizing the inclusion of refugees into national systems, particularly in the education, health, and livelihood sectors.

### United States of America (USA)

The United States resettlement program is the largest in the world. Since the 1970s, the country has undertaken the role of the global leader in resettling refugees. Refugee resettlement to the U.S. is traditionally offered to the most vulnerable refugee cases including women and children at risk, women heads of households, the elderly, survivors of violence and torture, and those with acute medical needs. The process of refugee resettlement to the U.S. is a lengthy and thorough process that takes approximately two years and involves numerous U.S. governmental agencies. Since 1975, the U.S. has welcomed more than three million refugees from all over the world, and these refugees have built new lives for their families in all 50 states<sup>25</sup>. They have built their communities as a means of maintaining their cultural heritage but at the same time, contributing positively to other communities across the country.

### The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, works to ensure that every individual has the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge after they have fled violence, persecution, or war at home. Initially, UNHCR was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1950 in the aftermath of the Second World War to help the millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes. In today's society, it is a global organization dedicated to protecting people forced to flee. It delivers life-saving assistance, helps safeguard fundamental human rights, and develops solutions that ensure people have a safe place to call home where they can build a better future. Alongside that, UNHCR protects and promotes the cultural rights of refugees and migrants, since the organization advocates with governments to ensure human and cultural rights protection. Their scope has widened to also include supporting refugees returning home, people forcibly displaced within their own country, and those denied a nationality and left stateless. In essence, the UN Refugee Agency has helped more than 50 million refugees to successfully restart their lives, and continues to protect and provide support for the 108.4 million people currently displaced around the globe<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Refugees in America." *How to Help Refugees — Aid, Relief and Donations* | USA for UNHCR, [www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/usa/](http://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/usa/).

<sup>26</sup> UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/history-unhcr](http://www.unhcr.org/history-unhcr)

### The International Organization for Migration (IOM)<sup>27</sup>

Established in 1951, IOM is the leading intergovernmental organization, part of the United Nations system as a related organization, in the field of migration and is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. Through IOM, the importance of cultural representation and its benefits for society and individuals can be highlighted and taken effectively into consideration. IOM supports migrants across the world by developing effective responses to the shifting dynamics of migration and as such, is a key source of advice on migration policy and practice. The organization works mostly in emergencies. It builds the resilience of all people on the move, particularly those in situations of vulnerability. Lastly, it develops its building capacity within governments to manage all forms and impacts of mobility. The International Organization for Migration is guided by the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including upholding human rights for all. Respect for the rights, dignity, and well-being of migrants remains paramount in the scope of the organization.

### The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO<sup>28</sup>

UNESCO seeks to encourage the identification, protection, and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. More specifically, as far as refugees' cultural heritage is concerned, UNESCO plays a crucial role in highlighting the importance of cultural heritage and its maintenance. The organization has developed a comprehensive set of international instruments to protect cultural heritage, through the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970) and the World Heritage Convention (1972), which provide a solid basis to protect cultural heritage. Both conventions state that international cooperation is one of the most efficient means of protecting each country's cultural property against all dangers. Moreover, The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Properties in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954) and its Protocols have a crucial role in setting further international standards to deal with the specific risks faced by heritage during conflict. In addition, the Statutes of the International Criminal Court have defined the intentional destruction of historical buildings as a war crime. This provides firm ground to address impunity related to such attacks. Lastly, UNESCO prioritizes the protection of cultural heritage in war-torn regions.

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<sup>27</sup> *International Organization for Migration*, 16 Nov. 2023, [www.iom.int/](http://www.iom.int/)

<sup>28</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre. "UNESCO Strengthens Action to Safeguard Cultural Heritage Under Attack." *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*, [whc.unesco.org/en/news/1176/#:~:text=UNESCO%20has%20developed%20a%20comprehensive%20set%20of%20international,provide%20a%20solid%20basis](http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1176/#:~:text=UNESCO%20has%20developed%20a%20comprehensive%20set%20of%20international,provide%20a%20solid%20basis)

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
10 December 1948	The General Assembly adopts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
1 December 1950	The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is created.
28 July 1951	The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is adopted.
14 November 1970	The Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property is adopted.
16 November 1972	The World Heritage Convention is adopted.
19 September 2016	The United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants takes place and the New York declaration for refugees and migrants is adopted.
13 March 2017	The duties of States toward refugees and migrants are established in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.
10-11 December 2018	The modalities for the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration are adopted.
15 March 2023	The Human Rights Council (HRC) discusses migration and cultural Rights and concludes the discussion in regards to human rights defenders.

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

### UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)<sup>29</sup>

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development comprises 17 Goals, namely the Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). A variety of these goals are closely connected to the issue of refugees and migrants, especially to the promotion and protection of their cultural rights. More specifically, Goal 3 (“Ensure healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages”<sup>30</sup>), aims at good health and well-being. Refugees’ and

<sup>29</sup> Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Development Programme, *UNDP*, [www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals](http://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals)

<sup>30</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “The 17 Goals: Sustainable Development”, *United Nations*, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.



migrants' well-being are closely connected with being in contact with their culture and being able to express themselves as a means of tackling possible trauma and smoothly integrating into their new society.

Goal 4 ("Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"<sup>30</sup>) is also of significant importance. It aims at quality education, which is another complication that refugee children face, as many times they do not have access to education, especially to cultural education. Moreover,

Goal 10 ("Reduce inequalities within and among countries"<sup>30</sup>) aims at reducing inequalities, which, once again, applies to the situation of refugees, who face serious social marginalization and inequalities within their host country. Achieving Goal 10 would, thus, bring a solution to global inequality, a driving factor of migration and social isolation.

Lastly, Goal 17 ("Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development"<sup>30</sup>) refers to the needed partnership for the goals which also applies to the partnership between society members from different ethnicities for a better living. This kind of cooperation is one of the main benefits of promoting and protecting the cultural rights of refugees and migrants.

The Sustainable Development Goals have definitely motivated the global community to engage more in humanitarian matters. Regarding the cultural representation and acceptance of refugees as well as migrants, they set the standards that should be followed by every host-state. Lastly, the fact that they address a vast variety of aspects of migrants' and refugees' smooth integration in their new state will have a positive outcome, since better living standards will be settled, which will concern a variety of sectors (proper education, equal opportunities, cultural representation, an access to health etc.). However, due to the fact that the SDGs have not yet been implemented, one cannot exactly distinguish their effectiveness. Nonetheless, they have been successful in raising awareness of the pressing issues around the globe and have served as a stimulus for a more active stance toward various problems of today's society.

### [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants \(A/RES/71/1\)](#)<sup>31</sup>

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants was adopted in 2016 during the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, which was called to find a more responsible and organized system for responding to the mass influx of refugees and migrants. This declaration attacks issues such as the rights of refugees, xenophobia, violence, and refugee education. At the same time, it aims toward more safe, orderly and regular migration.

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<sup>31</sup> Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Development Programme, *UNDP*, [www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals](http://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals)

Member States have expressed profound solidarity with those who are forced to flee and reaffirmed their obligations to fully respect the human rights of refugees and migrants in the specific declaration. Further, they agreed on the fact that protecting refugees and supporting the countries that shelter them are shared international responsibilities. Simultaneously, the organization stressed the necessity of working on the core elements of a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and the adoption of a global compact on refugees as well as for safe, orderly, and regular migration. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants was adopted when the refugee crises in Syria was at one of its highest points.

To summarize, it set standards for the living conditions of refugees and migrants in a time when it was particularly necessary. Nowadays, these living conditions standards are crucial, much-needed, and more important than ever. It is important to further note that the declaration is solely focused on refugees and migrants and their host states. Thus, the clear frameworks provided by this declaration guarantee the effectiveness and success of this attempt.

#### Call for inputs: Report on cultural rights and migration (A/HRC/52/35)<sup>32</sup>

In this report, Alexandra Xanthaki, the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, underlines the rights of migrants to have access to and effectively participate in all aspects of cultural lives, both of the host State and their own cultures. The Special Rapporteur recalls that international human rights law provisions protect those rights, regardless of the legal status of migrants and notes the need to ensure substantial equality in protecting cultural rights. She reflects on overcoming the obstacles that migrant artists face and highlights the need for intercultural exchange and interaction to ensure dynamic, diverse, and democratic societies. This report, which was written for the Human Rights Council in March 2023, aims at respecting, protecting and fulfilling the cultural rights of persons in the context of migration. This report is very recent, meaning that it is not possible to examine its full effectiveness yet. However, a special mention on intercultural exchange should be added since it is a topic that hasn't fully been addressed yet.

#### Global compact for migration<sup>33</sup>

On 19 September 2016, Heads of State and Government came together for the first time at the global level to discuss issues related to migration and refugees. Annex II of the New York Declaration set in motion a process of intergovernmental consultations and negotiations towards the development of a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, which was adopted by the majority of UN Member States.

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<sup>32</sup> Just a Moment, [www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2022/call-inputs-report-cultural-rights-and-migration](http://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2022/call-inputs-report-cultural-rights-and-migration).

<sup>33</sup> United Nations, "Global Compact for Migration." *United Nations*, [www.un.org/en/migration2022/global-compact-for-migration](http://www.un.org/en/migration2022/global-compact-for-migration).

The Global Compact is the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement covering all dimensions of international migration. It is a non-binding document that respects states' sovereign right to determine who enters and stays in their territory and demonstrates a commitment to international cooperation on migration. Additionally, the compact presents a significant opportunity to strengthen the contribution of migrants and migration to sustainable development, so that they will be able to support international cooperation on the governance of international migration. Simultaneously, they will allow States to take a different approach to the most pressing issues around international migration, as well as the space and flexibility to pursue their implementation of the policy based on their migration realities, and capacities. Ergo, this compact is strongly related to the services and ideas refugees can offer to the host country, when being able to express themselves culturally, and it helps make this a reality. Taking into consideration the flexibility in the approach of international migration, this global compact is, indeed, successful since it not only covers all aspects of international migration sufficiently, it also goes into detail about what refugees and migrants can offer to the host country. However, the success of the global compact for migration can be significantly hindered due to its non-binding nature.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

### Cultural education provided by the host country

In order to protect and promote the cultural rights of migrants and refugees, it is necessary for all, especially the younger generations, to stay in contact with their culture. This can be achieved by ensuring cultural education. The cultural education will include learning about history, language, cultural habits and traditions as well as current events in their home country. However, since refugees don't necessarily have the monetary means to pursue sufficient cultural education, the host state should provide this curriculum to refugees and migrants by giving access to proper spaces and appropriate means for taking lessons. The lessons should be given by older refugees and members of their culture by passing knowledge and experiences from generation to generation, for the cultural education of the younger members of the cultural group to become more pleasing and ensure their cultural maintenance and continuation. Also, online lessons via video calls or in-person sessions with history experts and members of their community will be helpful. Lastly, the state must provide spaces for religious purposes and practices not only for the education of children but for the ability of even older refugees to practice their religion, creating a sense of home rather than one of hostility in the host society.

### Ensuring clear communication between host countries and migrants

Clear communication between migrants and host countries will immensely improve the cooperation between the two groups, meaning that a better and deeper understanding between the host society and the migrants and refugees will be formed. This can be achieved by creating agencies which facilitate communication between migrants, refugees and host societies without the loss of their culture (beliefs, traditions, healthcare methods). These agencies should provide information easily accessible to both refugees and citizens of the host state. Further, the habits of the host country should be presented as well and translated to the refugees' and migrants' language. At the same time, refugees and migrants should also familiarize themselves with the language of the host country and learn it. Hence, the two 'sides' will be able to familiarize with each other and understand better the different or even conflicting mindsets. They will be able to exchange knowledge and collaborate for their society. It is, indeed, a fact that communication is the key to overcoming any stereotypes coming from one side to the other. Be that as it may, communication requires willingness and acceptance from both sides, something difficult to achieve when discrimination and prejudice characterize the relationship between the two groups.

### Raising awareness on cultural rights and embracing cultural diversity within communities

Cultural diversity can have a positive influence on communities, meaning that the state and citizens must embrace it. With the help of a variety of events, such as fairs, presentations, and art exhibitions, cultural diversity as a value can be significantly enhanced. All of these will represent the different cultures that co-exist in society, for the citizens to be able to learn, accept and embrace other cultures. In tandem, the involvement of refugees and migrants in the economic and social life of the host society should be prioritized, given the multifaceted benefits of cooperation with people of different backgrounds. This can, also, be accomplished by raising awareness of the general public on cultural rights. This is necessary not only because citizens of host countries need to be aware of the rights of refugees and the global compacts that protect them, but most importantly because migrants and refugees themselves should be aware of the legal frameworks that protect them without having necessarily legally entered the host state.

### Emphasizing the inclusion of refugees into national systems

Emphasizing the inclusion of refugees into national systems, particularly in the education, health, and livelihood sectors through the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), is of high importance. As also succeeded in Uganda, prioritizing the inclusion of refugees in the host country's national system will help in achieving smooth integration and a sense of belonging. People from different ethnic groups will

have the opportunity to state their opinions on national matters and become active members of their new country. Simultaneously, the workforce will grow and cultural representation will be undeniable by the time right of all refugees.

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