



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Chairs:  
Jennifer Ai  
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## Letter from the Chairs

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Committee at MIT Model UN Conference (MITMUNC). We, Stuti and Jennifer, are excited to be your chairs for this conference! We are truly looking forward to how you deal with the problems we will touch upon in this conference and come up with solutions. Solutions that resonate with our purpose of helping the world be a better place in general and upholding the best interests of those who are forced to flee their homes around the globe with international cooperation and support.

I am Stuti Khandwala, a sophomore from India studying EECS, bioengineering, economics, chemistry and anything else that I can fit in my schedule. I am a trained Indian classical dancer in the founding team of MIT Nritya and do RNA structure probing in a research lab on campus. I participated twice as a delegate in MUN in my high school and know exactly how your mixed emotions are right now for the conference! I have also acted as the chair for ASEAN in MITMUNC XII and COVID-19 Task Force for MITMUNC China 2020 and am the current Director of Public Relations. So far, MITMUNC has given me some of the best experiences of my college life. I love interacting with kids and cannot wait to virtually see you all!

I am Jennifer Ai, a freshman from Minnesota interested in majoring in mathematics and computer science, but still exploring various other fields. At MIT, I'm involved in the Undergraduate Math Association, UA Public Affairs, UA Community service, and the cheer team. I also write for the school newspaper and am working on research in the Urban Planning department. Having participated in many conferences as a delegate on my high school's Model UN team, I'm so excited to watch you all participate in MITMUNC!

The topics to be debated in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees include:

- I. Empowering refugees through technology
- II. Supporting the social inclusion of refugees

We hope you find this background guide informative as a starting point for your research. However, please make sure to seek additional sources, particularly those pertaining to your specific country. Our committee will be much more interesting with a variety of perspectives!

When writing your position papers, remember to use your own words unless quoting, and as always, cite your references. Submit them through this online form - <https://forms.gle/iUpA6zenUFgDr2ua7>. Of course, please feel free to reach out to us at any time if you have any questions or concerns. We look forward to reading your position papers and e-meeting you all at the conference!

Cheers,

Stuti and Jennifer

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Chairs, UNHCR, MITMUNC XIII



## **Topic 1: Empowering Refugees through Technology<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

Since the turn of the 21st century, technology in its different shapes and forms has become the bedrock of our society. From driving with a GPS to tracking weather patterns and connecting with friends on social media, many aspects of our lives are influenced by technology.

Although technology is by no means a solution for all the needs of refugees, it can enhance their wellbeing and even save lives. The three most important items refugees take with them when they are unexpectedly forced to leave their homes are water, food, and their phones, according to a 2017 survey conducted with Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

For refugees, a working mobile phone and internet connection can mean increased access to a safe home and refuge for their family. Refugees also depend on technology to keep in touch with relatives who might be in a position to help them. Furthermore, information about services offered to asylum-seekers and refugees by governments and UNHCR are easily available online. Technology also allows many refugees, who would otherwise have trouble accessing quality education, to study online.

Yet, despite the democratization of technologies, refugees are still 50 percent less likely than the general population to have an internet capable phone, and 29 percent do not own a phone at all. Refugees often spend up to a third of their disposable income on staying connected - which highlights the main obstacle to refugee connectivity: cost.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the official background guide of the MUN Refugee Challenge  
<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/events/campaigns/5fc126394/empowering-refugees-through-technology.html>

Digital technologies are playing an ever-increasing role in the lives of refugees and internally displaced people around the world. They help international organizations, governments and civil society provide services and support to refugees. Refugees and internally displaced persons often lack access to information, resources, and educational, financial and social services. Developing technology in a way that empowers and protects refugees will create positive change in the global refugee system. However, with over 25 million refugees and 40 million internally displaced people, greater effort is needed to ensure that technology brings solutions with tangible benefits and avoids potential risks and harms.<sup>2</sup>

Refugees can use technology to overcome the obstacles that accompany forced displacement. Refugees can find their way during their journeys thanks to online mapping tools, store important documentation on online cloud storage, and access information about their rights, asylum process and the services available for them. Technology can also allow refugees to access electronic cash assistance, find jobs, or complete their education via online learning programmes.

“By helping refugees maintain social networks and access information and essential services, mobile phones and internet access are as critical to refugees’ safety and security as are food, shelter, and water,” said the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. The Global Compact on Refugees outlines a blueprint on how technology can help ease pressure on hosting communities and countries as well as help refugees become more self-reliant and integrated within their host societies.

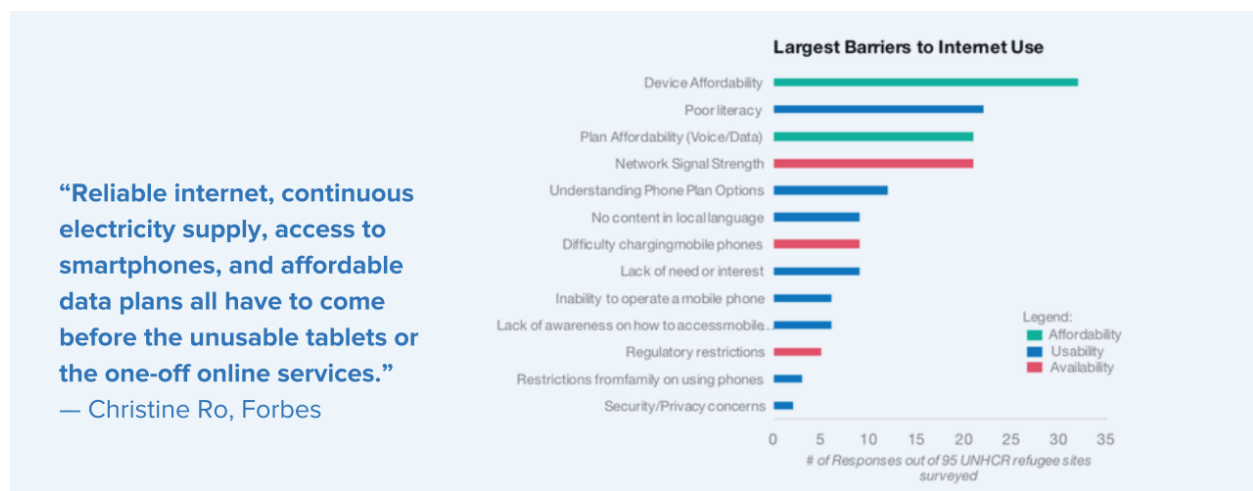
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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cigionline.org/multimedia/empowering-refugees-through-technology>

## Ways in Which Technology can Empower Refugees

*Internet Connectivity:* Without proper connectivity, programs that provide tablets and mobile phones are of little use. The issue of connectivity needs to be tackled before devising other innovative technology solutions.

Rural refugees often have less access to connectivity than the urban population. Only 17 percent of rural refugees live in areas with 3G coverage, compared to 29 per cent of the global rural population. 20 percent of rural refugees have no mobile network coverage at all, compared to 10 percent of the global rural population. For urban refugees, accessibility to an internet network is less of an issue, but affording connectivity is a challenge.



*Digital Identity:* The 2018 Global Compact for Refugees stresses the need to ensure access to identity documents, such as birth certificates and ID cards for refugees. Having an ID document is often key to accessing services, including digital ones. For example, many governments require a proof of identification in order to activate a SIM card.

New technologies are helping to improve refugees’ access to a legal and digital identity. Biometric registration was introduced by UNHCR in 2002. It consists of recording refugees’ fingerprints and

running iris scans. It enables more secure identity documents and allows to distribute humanitarian aid more efficiently. However, storing and protecting the digital data of refugees can present challenges. It is key to ensure data security and check who can access it and obtain informed consent from refugees on the data collected from them.

*Access to Electronic Cash Assistance and Financial Services:* Giving cash to refugees, rather than providing in-kind aid such as food or blankets, is a great way to help them rebuild their lives with dignity and to be more independent. Electronic payments or “mobile money” allow refugees to receive a SMS message from UNHCR and withdraw cash from a phone shop or pay goods directly with their phones in local stores. Connectivity can also allow refugees to access other financial services - for example, to open and manage their bank accounts. However, many host countries prevent refugees from accessing these services. In Jordan, where refugees are not allowed to open bank accounts, UNHCR introduced mobile wallets not only to provide cash assistance, but also to allow refugees to make transactions, savings, payments, and use credit.

*Digital literacy and IT:* Digital literacy refers to the ability to use and understand technology, such as navigating a website, using social media and sending emails. It can also refer to having marketable software skills, such as coding websites and apps and creating blogs. Digital literacy opens a wide array of opportunities to refugees. It can allow them to find job offers online but also makes them more employable in most industries. Additional training in computer science can also give them access to work in the fast-growing field of telecommunications and IT.

*Remote and Digital Education:* Refugee children in many parts of the world face discrimination when it comes to education. According to UNHCR, 3.7 million refugee children are out of school and the spread of COVID-19 has exacerbated the situation as many countries are forced to close schools

and limit numbers in classrooms. Access to remote and digital education can help bridge the educational gap for refugees. Digital education can be in the form of online education via laptops and tablets or through radio and TV.

## **Current Actions to Address the Situation**

### *UNHCR*

- 1) Through websites and social media platforms in multiple languages, UNHCR and partners provide important information to refugees about asylum applications, local policies, and the services available to them.
- 2) UNHCR is ramping up tools like biometric registration to provide refugees with more secure identity documents, and electronic cash assistance to allow refugees to become more independent.
- 3) UNHCR builds partnerships with refugees, host communities, host governments, businesses and NGOs to give refugees access to available, affordable, and usable mobile and internet connectivity.
- 4) Digital Inclusion proposals from the general public demanded through the UNHCR Innovation Service. Within this, there is also a Connectivity for Refugee initiative.<sup>3</sup>

### *Tech Companies and Other Businesses*

- 1) Businesses can help power refugee camps. For example, the IKEA Foundation's Brighter Lives for Refugees campaign allows UNHCR to provide sustainable electricity to 20,000 Syrian refugees in Azraq camp. This allows families to connect a TV, have light inside their shelters and charge their phones, which is critical for ensuring connectivity and keeping contact with their relatives abroad.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/>

2) Telecom operators can improve the quality and speed of the internet in refugee communities.

Telecom operators such as Airtel and Vodacom are setting up 3G towers in regions that host temporary refugee settlements.

3) Tech companies can boost refugees' digital literacy. For example, Microsoft signed an agreement with UNHCR to establish two facilities, in Kenya and Russia, where refugees learn computing and software skills. Microsoft also provides free resources to help refugees gain computer skills.

4) Businesses can provide online education to refugees. For example, Vodafone has partnered with UNHCR to establish the Instant Network Schools, which provides internet access and digital learning content to marginalized refugee communities in Africa.

## *Governments*

1) Host governments can offer incentives to the private sector to provide connectivity solutions.

2) Host governments can identify and invest in improving digital infrastructure in their countries for their general populations and the refugees they host.

3) Host governments can give refugees access to a legal and digital identity to allow them to access local services by including them in their national identity systems.

4) Host governments can set national legal frameworks governing the use and access of technology and data relating to refugees. For example, the European Union has enacted the General Data Protection Regulation, which keeps refugee data private and Turkey limits access to refugee data to the Turkish government and the UN.



## *By Refugees*

1) Refugees can develop skills and in turn create innovative technological solutions. For example, a team of robotics-trained Syrian refugees in the Za'atari camp in Jordan designed a Lego robot which dispenses hand sanitizer in the camp.

2) Refugees can create support platforms for other fellow refugees on social media. For example, the “I am a Syrian in Lebanon” Facebook group has gained 30,000 members seeking tips on enrolling in school, reporting assaults and much more since its launch in 2014.

3) Refugees can use technology to enhance the wellbeing of fellow refugees. For example, in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, Amina, a refugee teacher started broadcasting lessons to her students on a community station called Radio Gargaar when schools had to close. Radio lessons helped support over 100,000 students who attend the camps' schools.

## *Few concrete examples of efforts in this direction*

1) ReDI, a Berlin-based non-profit school, is offering free coding and digital courses to women refugees. Students stand to gain more than just new skills. The school offers access to a network of women working in technology, contacts that have led to job offers for former students.

2) Fifteen percent of people worldwide have a disability, and this percentage is even higher among refugees. UNHCR strives to provide digital accessibility for refugees with disabilities. For example, UNHCR provides laptops specifically designed for people who are blind or visually impaired to Burundian refugees studying with DAFI scholarship at the University of Rwanda in Rukara.

3) To support data-driven decision making in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a team made up of Cox's Bazar public health and information management professionals, scientists and domain experts from UN Global Pulse, UNHCR Innovation, OCHA, and academics from Durham University and IBM/MIT are working to model the impact of possible public health operational interventions in the Cox's Bazar settlement.<sup>4</sup>

## **Country-Specific details**

There is little chance of opposing opinions when it comes to helping the refugees because ideally no country should have an objection to this objective, unless the specific technological intervention is harming the country in any way. It is important to think about how the developed countries can help the developing countries in making their refugee community more technologically equipped; each bloc of countries should know what they want to ask for or what they can provide. When thinking about providing technology to the developed countries for their refugees, think about how to maximise the use of resources already present in the country rather than instating new every part from scratch to keep your solutions feasible. Do focus on the usability of the devices as well and not just costs, and also on how people can be trained to use new instruments. Connectivity between refugees might especially be important with highly mobile refugee populations which could be those that are subjected to extensive political pressure for going back to their country like the Rohingyas. Let's also understand that the refugees in developing countries will have more probability to be already technologically more advanced than the refugees elsewhere and are also smaller populations, but these refugees do have their own issues which cannot be ignored. Bringing the refugees at par

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<sup>4</sup><https://medium.com/unhcr-innovation-service/modelling-the-spread-of-covid-19-and-the-impact-of-public-health-interventions-in-coxs-bazar-and-b8d380d84f67>

with the citizens of the country they reside in is probably the most important goal which would enhance refugees' inclusivity in the society.

## **Food for Thought (and for debate)**

- How can we address the different connectivity needs of rural and urban refugees?
- How can we ensure the issue of connectivity is addressed before devising digital products?
- How can we incentivize the private sector to bring connectivity to refugee communities?
- How can we best use technology to help refugees access job and education opportunities?
- How can technology help tackle new challenges faced by refugees due to COVID-19?
- How can technology be used to boost refugees' local integration?
- How can we enhance the digital literacy and computer skills of refugees?
- How can technology help refugees at different stages of their journey?
- How can we ensure information about refugees is safe and their data rights are protected?

## **Resources**

[UNHCR: Connecting Refugees](#)

[UNHCR: Connectivity for Refugees](#)

[UNHCR: Internet and Mobile Connectivity for Refugees — Leaving No One Behind](#)

[GSMA: The Importance of Mobile for Refugees](#)

[Financial Times: Telecom Operators Dial in to Refugee Markets](#)

[Forbes: When It Comes To Tech, Refugees Need More Access, Not More Apps](#)

[Empowering Refugees Through Tech](#)

[EMPOWERING REFUGEES WITH TECHNOLOGY: BEST PRACTICES AND RESEARCH AGENDA](#)

[Crossing the Digital Divide: Applying Technology to the Global Refugee Crisis](#)

[Empowering refugees and internally displaced persons through digital identity](#)

## **Topic 2: Supporting the Social Inclusion of Refugees**

### **Introduction**

One of the most important aspects of helping refugees to rebuild their lives is including them in the communities where they have found refuge after fleeing conflict and persecution. Inclusion can take many forms: having the same rights as citizens, creating connections and friendships, the ability to apply for local jobs or go to local schools, and having access to different services like housing or healthcare. Social inclusion allows people to fully participate in their community and fosters peaceful societies.

Social inclusion requires solidarity - the belief that we have more in common than that which divides us. However, in societies that reject people who come from a different culture, religion, or ethnicity, social inclusion can be difficult. As a result, refugees face obstacles that hinder their participation in the social, economic and political life of the host communities where they live.

In order to accurately define and achieve "social inclusion" we must realize that it may hold different meanings for different groups of refugees:

*Resettled refugees:* Some refugees are permanently resettled to a third country because they are classified as highly vulnerable and are unlikely to be able to go back to their country in the near future. Each year, resettled refugees constitute less than one percent of the total number of refugees. Resettlement also carries with it the opportunity to eventually become a naturalized citizen of the resettlement country.

*Refugees in protracted situations:* Most refugees are hoping to go back home but they cannot because there is a war ongoing in their countries. 78% of refugees live in protracted

situations, which means that they have been in exile for over 5 years. Refugees from Somalia have lived in refugee camps for 30 years.

*Internally displaced people:* 50 million people were displaced within their own countries at the end of 2019. IDPs reside in their own country and remain under the protection of their government, but they may also face challenges to be included by communities in other regions.

*Asylum-seekers:* An asylum-seeker is someone who is seeking refuge and international protection in a new country but whose status is not determined yet. Each year, around one million people seek asylum and wait for an answer for months or years. Some are kept in detention centers. This often leaves asylum-seekers feeling isolated, lonely and hopeless.

## **Barriers to Social Inclusion**

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres once said, "Refugees must feel like they are bound to the values of the community and that their place in that society is respected." However, many factors can contribute to the negative treatment of refugees and create difficulty in achieving social inclusion.

Xenophobia and fear: Refugees often suffer from discrimination in the countries where they have found refuge. This often comes in the form of narratives centered on a phobia of the outsider – based on ethnicity and race, religion, income, language and any signs of “otherness.” As a result, refugees and migrants may be perceived as a threat to the local culture, economy and security. This can lead to social exclusion and even to violence. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR has reported an increase in incidents of assaults and hate speech towards refugees.

Tensions over resources: Sometimes, tensions between host communities and refugees result from concern over the use of local resources. In low to middle-income countries, some communities are already struggling to meet their needs and are concerned about refugee arrivals. For example, the refugees fleeing the violent Islamist group Boko Haram in Nigeria to find safety in Niger spoke the same language as the local population. Yet, tensions arose over issues such as how humanitarian aid would be distributed. This is why UNHCR makes sure to help both refugees and host communities.

Economic inclusion: The inability to find work is a significant barrier for refugees’ successful integration into society. While the right of refugees to work is embedded in the 1951 Refugee Convention, half of the member States do not recognize the rights of refugees to work legally or benefit from labor protections. Even States that grant the right to work usually impose conditions.

In addition, most refugees have no access to financial services - for example they cannot open a bank account, which makes it difficult to save or borrow money and start a business. The difficult economic situation of refugees has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Access to healthcare: Refugees often come from countries facing war or poverty and embark on long and exhausting journeys to seek international protection. This often increases their vulnerability to diseases and mental health issues. Most refugee populations have limited access to health services and do not have the funds to get adequate treatment if needed. In order for refugees to be healthy and contribute actively to the development of their host community, they need to have access to quality health services.

Inclusion in the education system: Refugee children in many parts of the world face discrimination when it comes to education. According to UNHCR, 3.7 million refugee children are out of school. Education allows refugees to recover a sense of purpose and dignity after the trauma of displacement, violence and persecution. Education also allows refugees to enter the labor market and become economically self-sufficient, breaking the dependency cycle. Thus, the lack of access to education puts refugees at risk of economic dependence and social exclusion. One particularly important aspect of education that is especially alienating for refugees is the ability to speak the language of the host country, because this is essential in communicating with local people and participating in other aspects of society.

## **Subtopics and Past Actions**

Efforts have been made in the past by certain organizations to bridge the social gap between refugees and members of their host communities. Below are examples of various types of organizations and actions that can be taken to continue working towards the social inclusion of refugees.

### UNHCR

During COVID-19, UNHCR featured stories of refugees who have been contributing heroically on the frontlines as doctors, cooks, soap makers and supportive neighbors.

UNHCR hosts global events that encourage the international community to include refugees within their societies. For example, UNHCR hosted the Global Refugee Forum in 2019, which was attended by 3,000 participants, including international organizations, businesses, heads of states, and ministries. The participants made 100 pledges in support of inclusive national policies, such as expanding access to quality education for refugees and improving access to jobs and livelihoods.

UNHCR advocates for the inclusion of refugees in host communities. UNHCR encourages states to offer more durable solutions, such as resettlement to a third country for the most vulnerable refugees, or local integration for refugees in protracted situations - with ultimately, the possibility of acquiring the nationality of the country of asylum.

### Host Communities

Host communities can teach refugees their official language by offering language courses and tutoring sessions. Several student-led campaigns provide educational support to refugees. For



example, Paper Airplanes is a nonprofit organization in the US that matches refugees with personal tutors for virtual learning sessions.

Host communities can house refugees. No Stranger Place is a UNHCR project that features a series of stories profiling refugees and their hosts across Europe. One of the examples features Hussam, a Syrian refugee who fled Syria and found Lucien's welcoming home in Lyon, France.

Host communities can create programs to enhance refugees' leadership and professional skills. For example, the Bristol City Stepping Up program was launched in 2018 to help underrepresented groups move into more senior roles in their chosen field. As a result, refugee participants are encouraged to develop their self-confidence and strive to achieve career improvement.

Host communities can gather and distribute items that refugees need, and organise events at which refugees and host communities can meet and interact. For example, FoodBlessed is an initiative by the Lebanese community that provides food assistance to vulnerable families, including Syrian refugees.

## NGOs and Civil Society

NGOs can create encounters between refugees and host communities and encourage contact between refugees, migrants and host communities. For example, Jusoor NGO in Lebanon gives Lebanese young adults the chance to volunteer at educational centers across Lebanon. In Denmark, the Red Cross' Buddy program pairs newly arrived refugees who hold residence permits with a buddy in their host community in order to nurture friendships and ties.

NGOs can help reduce tensions between refugees and host communities. In 2014, Search for Common Ground supported UNHCR to reduce tensions caused by the arrival in Niger of refugees fleeing Boko Haram. The organization created better information channels to reduce rumors about the distribution of humanitarian aid and supported community initiatives such as soccer games and theater performances.

## Businesses

Businesses can provide educational services to refugees. For example, Vodafone has partnered with UNHCR to establish the Instant Network Schools to address educational resource needs throughout marginalized refugee communities in Africa by providing them access to the internet and digital learning content.

Businesses can employ refugees. During the pandemic, global companies have joined the Tent Partnership for Refugees, a network of 130 major private businesses, to hire refugees, support refugee entrepreneurs, or create financial services that are more accessible to refugees.

## Governments

Governments can revise their laws to include refugees in society. For example in January 2019, Ethiopia's parliament revised its refugee law to enable refugees to obtain work permits, access primary education, obtain drivers' licenses, legally register life events (such as marriages), and access financial services.

Governments can include refugees in their public healthcare systems. For example, Jordan allows refugees to access national health services and has included them in its response to COVID-19.

Governments can create economic integration programs. For example, Sweden and Norway have state-sponsored integration programs along with housing and employment assistance.

Governments can increase the capacity of their national educational systems to accommodate additional refugee students.

## Refugees

Refugees can learn the language of their host country and teach other fellow refugees the local language. This fosters understanding and acceptance between refugees and host communities. This also increases their access to economic opportunities.

Refugees often give back to the community in their host country, which improves their acceptance in society. For example, Shadi Shhadeh, a Syrian refugee in Switzerland, took the initiative to run errands and do grocery shopping for the vulnerable elderly community in Switzerland to protect them from contracting COVID-19.

## **Notable Bloc Position**

### *Germany*

In 2015, Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, popularized the phrase "Wir schaffen das" ("We can do this!") as her policy regarding refugees. Though the Dublin Agreement of the European Union places refugees in the hands of the first country they enter, Merkel's policy allowed refugees to enter Germany even if their asylum claims had not yet been checked. Though Merkel's decision gave many refugees a safe place to stay, this sometimes had adverse effects on their inclusion into the societies they lived in. Tensions increased as German citizens feared that a looser policy could cause harm and chaos to their community.

## **Questions to Consider**

How can we fight xenophobia, hate speech and disinformation about refugees? How can we ensure that refugees who are victims have access to justice and psychological counselling?

What role can local citizens of the host communities play to support refugees?

How can we improve the social inclusion of different groups of people: resettled refugees, refugees in protracted situations, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people?

How can businesses support the inclusion of refugees in their communities?

How can we boost the social and cultural inclusion of refugees?

How can we make sure that resettled refugees are properly welcomed and integrated?

How can we ensure refugees' inclusion in health systems?

How can we ensure refugees' access to education in host countries?

How can we best support refugees in protracted situations, who have been living for years or sometimes decades in another country?

How can we boost the economic inclusion of refugees?

## **Resources**

[UNHCR Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion of Refugees](#)

[UNHCR Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis](#)

[UNHCR: No Stranger Place](#)

[UNHCR 2019 Global Refugee Forum](#)

[UNHCR Press Release: Inclusion during Pandemic](#)