



Massachusetts  
Institute of  
Technology

Model United Nations  
Conference

Background Guide



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## Letter from the Secretary Generals

Dear Delegates,

It is with great pride and excitement that we formally invite you to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's 16th annual Model United Nations Conference!

MITMUNC is a premier Model UN conference in which students from all over the world come together to solve the most pressing issues facing society today. This year's conference will be held during the weekend of Friday, February 9th through Sunday, February 11th, 2024, in-person.

At its core, MITMUNC is planned, organized, and directed by a passionate and ambitious team of MIT students that collectively form a diverse family of academic backgrounds and experiences. Our chairs and staff coordinate MITMUNC's committees from the ground up, posing questions and controversies that even the most experienced delegates will find challenging. Our dedicated Secretariat members complement the chairs and staff by overseeing all conference preparations, months in advance of the conference in order to ensure that our delegates walk away with one of the greatest experiences of their lives.

In previous years, MITMUNC delegates grappled with complicated human rights, economic, and environmental topics such as the Syrian Refugee crisis, argued the pros and cons of nuclear energy in the International Atomic Energy Agency, and even reacted to a flurry of assassinations witnessed in the Historical Committee! Attendees also enjoyed inspiring keynote addresses by Nazli Choucri, Professor of Political Science at MIT and leading researcher in international relations and cyber politics, as well as Richard B. Freeman, Faculty co-Director of the Labor and Worklife Program at the Harvard Law School. Delegates also enjoyed a well-deserved respite at the Delegate Dance social night.

We pride ourselves in hosting smaller committee sizes. This allows our attendees more freedom to contribute and distinguish themselves in their individual committee sessions. MITMUNC offers its attendees a truly unique opportunity to immerse themselves in a demanding intellectual environment, exposed to the ideas of others and tasked to employ the art of negotiation to pass meaningful resolutions.

Having experienced MITMUNC as chairs, then as Secretariat members and Secretaries General, we are both humbled and thrilled to guide MITMUNC into its best conference yet. I now invite you to explore our brand new website to learn more about our conference. Do not hesitate in contacting us should you encounter any doubts along the way. Best of luck in the path ahead!

Sincerely,

Your Secretary Generals: Jad Abou Ali and Maya Abiram

For further inquiries, do not hesitate to contact us at [sg-mitmunc@mit.edu](mailto:sg-mitmunc@mit.edu).

### MITMUNC XVI 2024



## Letter from the Chairs

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 16<sup>th</sup> annual Model United Nations Conference and, specifically, to the UN Refugee Agency! We look forward to being your chairs, and we hope this year's topics interest you as much as they interest us. We are especially excited to be hosting a beginner committee, and we hope you each leave this conference with a heightened appreciation for research, debate, and policy.

I'm Price, a sophomore majoring in mechanical engineering with a focus on robotics and autonomous control. I am involved in MIT Motorsports, a Formula SAE team that works to design, build, and race a formula car over a one-year design cycle. I have also conducted research on campus pertaining to the causes of comet outbursts in space. I previously chaired the UN Human Rights Council, and I have 3 additional years of debate experience (particularly public forum), both competing and judging. Can't wait to meet you all!

I'm Xavier, a junior majoring in civil & environmental engineering with a focus in mechanics and materials. I was VP of my high school Model UN club and have more than 3 years of debate experience both as delegate and committee chair. I am also a member of the Youth Division of the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP). It is truly an honor to be able to welcome you all to this amazing conference. See you soon!

The topics you will be discussing are the Mediterranean Refugee Crisis and Developing a Response Framework for Future Refugee Crises.

Sincerely,

Your Chairs: Price Taylor & Xavier Mercado

For further inquiries, do not hesitate to contact us at [unhcr-mitmunc-2024@mit.edu](mailto:unhcr-mitmunc-2024@mit.edu).

**MITMUNC XVI 2024**



## Committee Introduction

Refugees are people who have fled their country in response to persecution, violence, or disaster. They are often unable to return to their homes, and many face persecution in the places they travel to. Similarly, an internally displaced person (IDP) is an individual who has fled their home but remains in their country of origin. IDP's lack many protections of refugees because they are seen as under the aid of their own government. Stateless persons are those who have no official nationality, often making it difficult to obtain education, work, housing, or medical care.

The UN Refugee Agency (formally known as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees), charges itself with protecting refugees, stateless people, and IDPs through multiple avenues. UNHCR directly provides refugees shelter, food, water, and medical assistance, works to provide housing and draft resolutions, and collaborates with countries to improve refugee policy and uphold human rights. Work does not stop there, as the Agency also works to support refugees returning to their homes after crises. UNHCR was initially formed after World War II as a temporary organization to help displaced Europeans, and it has now grown into a permanent fixture of the UN that works in 135 countries.

The High Commissioner reports to the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The Agency works with many kinds of organizations to tackle this high-stakes issue, such as fellow UN institutions, NGOs, and the private sector. Some of UNHCR's collaborators are the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), Educate A Child, and the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).



# Topic A: European Involvement in the Mediterranean Refugee Crisis

## I. Introduction

A variety of catastrophes are taking place across Africa and the Middle East. Civil wars, economic collapse, and natural disasters in places like Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria, and the DR Congo have resulted in an unprecedented mass displacement of persons. Millions are forced to flee their homes, and many choose to take the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean Sea. According to Human Rights Watch, the Mediterranean has been an established migration route, however numbers have been especially high in recent years and new sub-routes have emerged, with migrants hoping to find asylum in European Union countries. HRW also states that the Mediterranean is the world's deadliest migration route, with around 20,000 deaths on the route between 2000 and 2015 (Sunderland et al). Doctors Without Borders reports that 2,367 people died in 2022 alone trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea. These refugees are often exposed to "horrific levels of violence" on the way to Europe, and those who do make it suffer from poor living conditions and a hostile establishment (Leung).

Both sources, and many others, agree that the EU member nations have had a lackluster and sometimes backwards response to this humanitarian crisis. European nations have been often hesitant to initiate search and rescue operations, which the Syrian American Medical Society claims is against maritime law (SAMS). HRW states that European efforts have largely been focused on preventing people from attempting the crossing; however, these efforts are doomed to fail because they ignore the desperate reasons refugees make the journey in the first place. DWB continues, stating that European nations act to strengthen detention centers in affected countries, where human rights abuses are prevalent. Horrifyingly, even when refugees make it to their destination, they may be denied entry from their would-be host countries, leaving them abandoned on boats.

The refugee crisis in the Mediterranean is a critically urgent issue that necessitates swift and meaningful action. While the root causes of the crisis stem from a variety of conflicts, ecological disasters, and economic downturns across a wide spectrum of countries, there still

exists a common and controllable thread compounding this issue – the lack of European involvement. By adopting more humanitarian practices, Europe can play a great role in the battle for human rights.

## II. History

Although the Mediterranean Sea has long been a common migration route, especially in response to crises, the current catastrophe stems from 2015, where Europe was inundated with over 1.3 million refugees seeking asylum. PEW Research Center states that this was the then record of refugees to Europe in a year, nearly doubling the previous record in 1992, which followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. While not all of these refugees crossed the Mediterranean, PEW marks that 2015 witnessed a rise in passages across the Sea (Pew). Thomson Reuters Foundation reports that the majority of the migrants were from Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iraq, and Eritrea (Batha). Each of these countries suffered from many crises, such as civil war, foreign invasion, and terrorism. More than 8,000 migrants died crossing the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 and 2016, most of them departing from North Africa.

Europe has seen itself inundated with refugees, and many nations have responded negatively. The European Union struck a deal with Turkey to limit the number of refugees entering Europe, while Hungary closes their borders, preventing access to central and western Europe. Additionally, DWB claims that their NGO efforts have been hampered by European agents. They claim that their search and rescue operations have been subject to harassment, political pressure, and outright denial by European countries and European-funded groups. Multiple countries, such as France, Italy, and Britain, have refused to take in asylum-seekers. Even worse, there have been instances where refugee vessels had capsized, shipwrecked, or run out of fuel, and European countries ignored their pleas for help, a direct contravention of international maritime law (Levinson).

The EU did attempt to implement reforms during the 2015 initial crisis, but these reforms did not achieve much and have not addressed the current deleterious actions of many member nations (Hatton).

Asylum is a fundamental human right safeguarded by the Geneva Convention, and Article 18 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union further protects this right. (“Charter of Fundamental Rights”; “Common European Asylum System”)

### **III. International Actions**

#### **A. European Union Response**

The European Council on Foreign Relations issued a report on the EU’s response to the Mediterranean crisis. Libya is a launchpad for many refugees looking to cross the Mediterranean, which the EU (and Italy, especially) has targeted. The Union has focused on blocking departures, not addressing the causes of migration. This solution is not sustainable and, in fact, makes the situation in Libya even worse for migrants. Refugees are packed in detention centers where they face physical and psychological abuse. The UNHCR does relocate refugees from Libya to Niger to Europe, but only in very small quantities.

The EU has created programs like the EU Trust Fund for Africa and the Migration Partnership Framework, but these initiatives have also failed to address structural issues. When migrants do reach Europe, reception programs are also lacking. It is difficult for displaced persons to achieve safe, legal entry and support from nation states (Torelli).

#### **B. United Nations**

The United Nations has not ignored the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean, but it has also not done enough. As previously stated, the UNHCR has transferred small numbers of refugees from Libya to Europe. The UN Rights Chief, Volker Türk, has called for concerted efforts to rescue migrants at sea and has urged Europe to organize a more refugee-friendly response and protect human rights. He also implored Italy to reconsider its new legislation restricting NGOs (UN News).

## IV. Countries' Positions

### A. Italy & Greece

In 2016, 370,000 migrants arrived in Europe, most of them from the Mediterranean. Of those, 340,000 arrived in Greece and Italy, countries that receive large numbers of migrants due to their proximity to the Mediterranean Sea. As a result, these countries have responded drastically and cruelly to the crisis. Boston University's Center on Force Displacement reports that Italy (and other EU member states) works with Libya, where many refugees embark from, to capture and return refugees to Libyan detention centers, where they are subjected to inhumane conditions, including torture. Italy has also passed legislation limiting the entry of NGO boats into Italian waters in an attempt to prevent the arrival of more refugees (Wright). Italy, specifically, has recently acquired a far-right prime minister with neofascist roots, which has implemented pushback policies for Mediterranean male migrants. Notably, in November 2022, Italy completely denied entry to a vessel of 234 rescued refugees (Chrisafis).

Greece has conducted many pushback operations. BU claims that in between 2020 and May 2022, Greece conducted 42,000 pushbacks, leaving asylum-seekers in abhorrent conditions. These refugees are often found stripped completely naked, with their belongings and documents stolen. As a direct result of Greece's actions, many of these asylum-seekers die. Greece has repeatedly denied allegations of human rights violations.

### B. Germany

Germany has historically been relatively friendly to refugees, although the country's situation is more precarious now. During the 2015 refugee crisis, Germany implemented an open-door policy, whereby Germany admitted over 1.2 million refugees in 2015 and 2016 (Keaten). The Guardian claims that around 10% of those refugees have mastered German enough to enroll in university, while over 50% of those who entered work and pay taxes.

(Oltermann <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/30/angela-merkel-greatmigrant-gamble-paid-off>) As a result, the Observatory of Contemporary Crises states that Germany's GDP increased by 2.2%, demonstrating short-term growth. The influx of migrants alleviated the nation's declining population and labor market, allowing Germany to grow. While Germany's policies suffered severe backlash from some states, others followed the nation's example (Ajluni). However, Germany cannot remain the only nation taking in refugees, as such a drawn-out crisis has caused dissenting views among the public. Many are starting to believe refugees as harbingers of terrorism, antisemitism, poverty, and crime. As the public opinion shifts against refugees and Germany's leadership faces pressure, steps may be taken against migrant interests.

## V. Projections and Implications

### A. No End in Sight

Although 2015 remains the record for migration to Europe, refugees are still traveling across the Mediterranean in massive numbers. In fact, the number of refugees dying or going missing over the Mediterranean has increased in recent years. The UNHCR's New

York director has said there is "no end in sight" to the lives lost in the crisis ("More than 2,500"). Without sufficient action from European member states, this issue will persist.

## VI. Conclusion

As long as instability persists, so will displacement. Refugees are being forced out of their homes at record numbers, a trend which shows no signs of stopping. European countries are attempting to quell this issue by ignoring it – pushing migrants back out to sea, denying entry, interfering with search and rescues, and capturing refugees on voyage. Such a strategy has only led to rampant human rights abuses and atrocities. A system of pro-refugee policies is necessary to comply with international law and to support basic

human rights. Moreover, Europe stands to gain by assisting and integrating refugees. The Mediterranean crisis presents an untenable situation, one which we must combat with compassion and humanity.

## VII. Questions to be Addressed

- Why are so many people embarking on the dangerous journey to Europe? How can we address the root issues that are displacing thousands in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East?
- Providing refuge and asylum is mandated under international law. How can we ensure that countries uphold their moral and legal obligations?
- How can we protect refugees once they reach their destination and ensure they have the means to rise above their station?
- Many European citizens feel overwhelmed by the number of incoming migrants. How can we alleviate this sensation?

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## Topic B: Developing a Sustainable Response Framework for Future Refugee Crises via Employment Pathways

### I. Introduction

The world refugee crisis stands as one of the most pressing and complex humanitarian challenges of our time, affecting millions of people who are forced to flee their homes due to conflict, persecution, and other forms of violence. As geopolitical tensions, armed conflicts, and environmental disasters persist, the number of displaced individuals has reached staggering proportions, creating a global phenomenon that demands urgent attention. In the first months of 2022, the world witnessed a disheartening milestone as the number of people forced to flee war, violence, and persecution surpassed 100 million, signaling an alarming escalation in global displacement (UN News). Filippo Grandi, head of the UNHCR, said the number was “a record that should never have been set.” As we head into 2024, these trends do not seem to slow down. Over 2.4 million refugees globally will need resettling in 2024, a 20-percent increase compared to 2023 (CGTN).

Amidst this escalating crisis, it is crucial to recognize the multifaceted challenges that refugees face in their host countries. According to UNHCR, 59% of refugees live in countries with restricted access in practice to registering and operating a business. These challenges include language barriers, lack of market knowledge, unfamiliarity with local legal regulations and tax systems, and limited access to finance.

However, despite these obstacles, employment pathways emerge as a fundamental component for successful refugee integration. By addressing these challenges head-on, employment opportunities not only provide refugees with economic stability and self-sufficiency but also contribute to overcoming linguistic and regulatory barriers. They become a crucial conduit for cultural exchange and mutual understanding between refugees and host communities. As we navigate the complexities of the world refugee crisis, fostering employment pathways becomes not just a practical solution but a cornerstone for building resilient, integrated societies that benefit both displaced individuals and their new communities.

## II. History

The history of addressing the world refugee crisis is marked by significant international agreements and conventions aimed at providing protection and support for displaced individuals.

The 1951 Refugee Convention, adopted in the aftermath of World War II, represents a landmark in international law concerning the status and rights of refugees. Crafted in response to the large-scale displacement resulting from the war, the convention established a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of refugees. It defines who qualifies as a refugee, outlines their rights and responsibilities, and emphasizes the principle of non-refoulement, prohibiting the return of refugees to a country where they would face persecution.

While the convention primarily focuses on issues such as the right to seek asylum and protection from forcible return, it also recognizes the importance of facilitating the integration of refugees into their host societies. Article 21 of the convention, for instance, highlights the need for contracting states to promote the economic and social assimilation of refugees. The convention, therefore, sets the groundwork for considering employment as a vital component of refugee integration, acknowledging that economic stability is essential for the overall well-being of refugees.

Building upon the principles of the 1951 Convention, the Global Compact on Refugees, adopted in December 2018, represents a contemporary and comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges posed by the refugee crisis. Developed under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly, the compact seeks to strengthen the international response to refugee situations by promoting burden-sharing, enhancing refugee self-reliance, and facilitating long-term solutions.

The Global Compact on Refugees explicitly recognizes the importance of enhancing economic opportunities for refugees as a key element of self-reliance and integration. It emphasizes the need for host countries to support the inclusion of refugees in national labor markets, acknowledging that access to decent work is fundamental for refugees to rebuild their lives with dignity. By endorsing the notion of "economic inclusion," the compact aligns with the understanding that employment pathways are not only crucial for economic stability but also contribute to the social fabric of host communities.

However, amid hope for the Global Compact on Refugees and fear over the impact of

COVID-19, there has been no significant net change in the right to work since the GCR was created. As of 2022, approximately 28 percent of the global refugee population lives in a country where access to wage employment in practice has improved, while 29 percent lives in a country where it has worsened (Ginn et al.)

### **III. International Actions**

#### **A. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**

To help host countries benefit from the skills and talents of refugees and help refugees better integrate into their new societies, the UNHCR and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have developed an innovative Action Plan to expand employment opportunities for refugees. Launched in 2018, the plan not only identifies the challenges, opportunities and best practices in the integration of refugees to the labor market but also provides a list of concrete actions to assist the successful employment of refugees (Devdiscourse).

#### **B. European Union (EU)**

The EU has a bumpy history with helping refugees integrate into its member states, as highlighted by the current Mediterranean refugee crisis. However, it should be highlighted that the resources and policies are there for a viable solution to this issue.

In 2022, an article published in the European Journal of Migration and Law concluded that “the analysis demonstrated the potential of work-based complementary pathways to facilitate legal access to the EU for people in need of protection under the EU labor migration *acquis*. This, however, depends entirely on the willingness of interested Member States, supported by the European Commission through exchange of information and funding, rather than targeted EU legal action” (Vankova). In the aftermath of the war in Ukraine, there are signs that the displaced are managing to enter the labor market. In Poland, about 30 percent of working-age newcomers had found a job three months from the beginning of the war, while in the Czech Republic, about 40 percent were working six months on (Desiderio & Hooper). This demonstrates that

Europe can play a vital role in helping refugees find a viable path towards stable integration into their society if enough support is provided.

## IV. Countries' Positions

### A. United States

The U.S. has historically been a significant contributor to humanitarian efforts and refugee assistance globally. While specific policies may vary depending on the administration in power, the United States has often supported initiatives that aim to address the root causes of displacement and promote self-reliance among refugees.

The U.S. government and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have implemented programs to facilitate employment opportunities for refugees resettled in the country. However, a study by researchers at Cornell ILR School, the Harvard Center for Population and Developmental Studies and Baruch College found that after living in the U.S. for five years, refugees' employment declines, despite gaining lawful permanent residency status, known as a green card. Federal government resources are designed to last approximately six months after refugees arrive in the U.S., with support vanishing after that point. Results show that in 2003, refugees had a higher propensity to be employed compared to non-refugees. However, by 2007–2009, refugees experienced a decline in their likelihood of employment. In other words, their employment advantage becomes a disadvantage (Kreisberg et al.).

### B. Germany

Germany is experiencing a high demand for skilled workers due to a large number of job vacancies. In 2022, Germany had nearly 2 million job openings. To address labor shortages and boost economic growth, the German government has introduced a new migration policy. This policy aims to attract foreign talent by inviting 60,000 professionals annually from non-EU countries. If your application for asylum has been accepted, i.e. you have been recognized as a refugee, or an individual entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection, you may work as an employee or a self-employed person without any restrictions. That means you have the same

rights as a German citizen in the job market. One underlying problem, however, is that many refugees are overqualified for the jobs that they end up getting. A recent study by the government-funded Institute for Employment Research (IAB), found that 41% of refugees who had been in Germany for six years said they were employed below the level they had before they arrived. The figure is even higher for Ukrainian refugees, more than half are working in jobs for which they're overqualified, the IAB found (Knight).

## V. Projections and Implications

### A. Aging Populations Spur Demand for Foreign Workers

Many developed countries will need more migrant workers to care for their growing elderly populations. During the next two decades, the combination of aging populations and shrinking workforces in developed countries is likely to spur demand for more foreign workers. Increasing life expectancies will cause the number of people worldwide who are age 65 and older to nearly double from about 728 million in 2020 to 1.3 billion in 2040, according to UN projections. This older cohort will account for about a quarter of the developed world's population by 2040.

## VI. Conclusion

Addressing the world refugee crisis requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. Focusing on employment opportunities is not merely a response to immediate needs but a strategic investment in building resilient, integrated societies that benefit both refugees and host communities. The global community must continue to work together to refine and implement sustainable frameworks, recognizing the transformative potential of meaningful employment in the lives of displaced individuals and the societies that welcome them.

## VII. Questions to be Addressed

- How do we find the right balance between protecting our national interests and fostering global solidarity to collectively address the refugee crisis and promote the well-being of all?
- How can we address concerns about national security and border control while still upholding our humanitarian values, ensuring citizens feel secure and confident in the measures we take to address the refugee crisis?
- Given changes in the right to work since the Global Compact on Refugees was created, how can we assess and improve its effectiveness in promoting refugees' access to employment and enhancing their overall situation?
- How can we create and implement policies that not only help refugees secure jobs but also ensure they can keep their jobs in the long run, considering legal protections, workplace integration, and community support?

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