

# VIRGINIA MODEL UNITED NATIONS



ERCPC: SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN &  
CULTURAL (SOCHUM)

Chair: Alex Smith Scales



## **Committee Letter**

Greetings Delegates!

Welcome to the Social, Humanitarian, & Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) as part of the Eleanor Roosevelt Commission on Peace, commonly known as the General Assembly of the United Nations. My name is Alex Smith-Scales and I am a third-year double majoring in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with a Gender concentration and American Studies with a race concentration.

Being the chair of this committee is very special to me as my very first Model United Nations committee was SOCHUM (where I won outstanding delegate!). The topic of this committee is even more personal to me as we will be discussing the mental health and cultural assimilation of refugees in second and receiving countries. For my January term class, the topic was Human Rights and the Refugee Crisis. While a lot will be covered with this topic, I'm sure that it will be met with excitement, passion, and ingenuity from you and your fellow delegates.

As we will be discussing some intense topics, I want to remind each and every one of you to show respect and diplomacy to your constituents. Your success will not only be determined by the thoroughness and presentation of your resolutions, but your work ethic and cooperation as well.

I truly cannot wait for this committee and I am so excited to welcome all of you to my home, the University of Virginia!

**Alex Smith-Scales, Chair**

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## **Committee Overview**

The Third Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations primarily focuses on humanitarian efforts and human rights issues as relevant to the topics. SOCHUM was created to also discuss women's issues, racism, youth, ageing peoples, and crime on an international scale. While this covers a broad scope of issues, we will attempt to cover as many issues as we can in reference to refugee mental health and assimilation. There will be representatives from countries of origin, second/border countries, and third/receiving countries in order to grasp perspectives from the various governments involved with the refugee crisis.

This committee will run on real time, beginning on November 17, 2017 and ending on November 19, 2017. Side conversations will not be allowed and note passing is heavily encouraged. As this is a general assembly committee, only resolutions will be passed and will require joint writing as there will be a limit to how many resolutions will be presented. The committee will **strictly** adhere to parliamentary procedure and will not lose focus of meeting the goal of passing deliberate, productive resolutions.

I, your vice chair, and your staff members **will not** provide feedback on your performance in-between committee sessions, as this provides an unfair advantage to certain delegates over others. If you wish for feedback after the conference, I will be more than happy to provide it to you given that you email me with your name, school, year, and position.

## **Background**

## *Explanation of the Topics*

The Syrian Refugee Crisis brought a lot of attention on issues refugees commonly face on their journeys to receiving countries. The topics of focus we will be covering will be 1. Mental Health and Refugees and 2. Cultural Integration into Second and Third Countries. While the Syrian Refugee Crisis will be the most commonly known refugee crisis, delegates are encouraged to research on other refugee crises in order to gain a broader perspective of the situation.

## *History*

While our primary focus will be the Syrian refugee crisis, it is important to note and understand other major refugee crises from around the world, both past and present. During World War I, both the Belgians and the Armenians were heavily affected by German occupation and persecution by the Ottoman Empire, respectively.<sup>1</sup> World War II resulted in over 40 million refugees just in Europe. Such a disaster this large of a scale would produce many refugee orientated rehabilitation programs including the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, the International Refugee Organisation, the Geneva Conventions, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

However, even with the establishment of these organizations and various measures taken, there would still be major conflicts that would displace mass amounts of people. Arabs in Palestine would face Zionist aggression in 1948, the Bosnian war would displace half of the country's population, over 2 million people would evacuate

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/interactive/2013/jul/25/what-happened-history-refugees#World%20War%20I>

Rwanda in 1994, 2.5 million people would be displaced by the war in Darfur, 4.7 million would leave their homes in Iraq during the Iraq war, and over 4 million would flee their homes in Columbia to other parts of the country to escape conflict.

While many of these conflicts have either not been fully resolved or still have refugees seeking asylum, the Syrian refugee crisis is the largest conflict the world has seen since World War II. The War in Syria has displaced over 12 million Syrians, 7.6 million internally and 4.1 million refugees.<sup>2</sup> This has caused the refugee crisis to become a humanitarian issue with many debates and conflict on how to address the problems that have arisen from this crisis.

### **1. *Mental Health and Refugees***

Refugees will face a lot of turmoil and chaos in fleeing their origin countries. Environmental factors have a huge impact on the mental health of all people, and refugees are commonly from environments plagued by varying levels of distress. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is caused by a traumatic experience that results in severe emotional and mental distress and a constant vivid recall of the experience. PTSD is one of the most commonly found mental disorders, along with anxiety and depression. Given the intensity of trying to migrate to safer countries, this is not surprising data. Syria, for example, is an extremely volatile situation with widespread fighting, full-scale military operations, and a number of chemical weapon attacks have taken place.<sup>3</sup> Refugees must confront and work through the loss of homeland, loved ones, and greater community.<sup>4</sup> Refugees will travel over 2,000 miles from Syria and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/world/historical-migrant-crisis/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/syria>

<sup>4</sup> The Mental Health of Refugee Children and Their Cultural Development

surrounding areas to reach European countries. They will cross the entirety of Turkey and then try to reach Europe, either by Hungary or Greece. Refugees primarily travel the Mediterranean Sea route to reach Greece by dinghy, a small boat that is not built for long travel mileage. Once they reach Greece they will then disperse and journey to other countries that have good policies on asylum seekers and enough room to take them in, such as Germany, Sweden, and Norway. Regardless of if the refugees decide to go by boat or foot, they pay a very large price to smugglers (usually around \$1000USD per person) to reach their destination.<sup>5</sup>

This process can be extraordinarily stressful. People have journeyed far from their familiar homes to harsher environments where treatment is less than respectable. They must still find a way to provide for their families, often falling into poverty and high difficulty finding employment.<sup>6</sup> And that is if the asylum seekers are granted asylum. Many of them will be living in refugee camps where resources are extremely limited and guarded by police. These camps are often divided by dialect, creating a language barrier between many of the refugees.<sup>7</sup> The condition of the camps also creates a harsh and troubling environment for the refugees and their families. Refugees reside in dwellings that are usually just tents that lack electricity, running water, and toilets.<sup>8</sup> Since a majority of the camps are makeshift and there is not enough aid being

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/a/syria-europe-refugees-cost-price/3072200.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.vocativ.com/224850/what-happens-when-refugees-get-to-where-theyre-going/>

<sup>7</sup>

<https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21690142-economist-visits-only-operational-hotspot-country-what-happens-after-refugees>

<sup>8</sup>

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/11/dire-conditions-syrian-refugees-jordan-border-161102100008396.html>

providing for their support, refugees often to go great lengths just to purchase food for the day.

Being in these environments for months, and for some years, takes an immense toll on their mental health. Different studies have shown rates of PTSD and major depression in settled refugees to range from 10-40% and 5-15%, respectively. Children and adolescents often have higher levels with various investigations revealing rates of PTSD from 50-90% and major depression from 6-40%.<sup>9</sup> These illness contribute a lot to the amount of failure in everyday lives and can be a huge hindrance to progress made in the second and third countries.

#### *Analysis:*

Mental stability is imperative to the success of refugees in their new environments, however lack of access to immediate resources can severely slow the process in regaining good mental health. Part of this can be caused by lack of accountability for refugees coupled with an absence of policies in place to provide temporary resources often regarded as citizen rights to refugees. There needs to be a general understanding of mental health issues that refugees will commonly face and how to provide resources to them from countries being affected by the crisis.

#### *Goals:*

The goals of this committee should be to establish a way to provide more immediate mental health services to those affected by the refugee crisis. While not compromising the policies on immigration and refugees, nations should try to find a

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<sup>9</sup> <http://refugeehealthta.org/physical-mental-health/mental-health/>

way to make the resources as accessible as possible. While these may be temporary resources, they should also have lasting impact on the refugees as they pass through countries.

*Questions to Consider:*

1. What is the role of the state in protecting displaced peoples from mental harm and providing mental health resources?
2. What programs can be implemented to ensure that refugees maintain good mental health at both the second and third country level?
3. How can second country host sites be better equipped to make sure the environments do not facilitate harsh conditions?
4. How can third countries provide better mental health resources for the refugees after they have settled?
5. How can the state make existing programs more accessible to both those who have been granted asylum and those still in the process?

***2. Cultural Integration into Second and Third Countries***

Displacement from refugees' origin countries puts them in a place of discomfort and unfamiliarity. Given the lack of knowledge of their new communities, refugees may not know the typical social cues or customs resulting in discrimination and an inability to thrive in their new communities. Considering the tumultuous journey to the second and third countries, the struggle to provide basic needs for themselves and their families, and general uncertainty of their fate, it is no surprise that cultural integration is not the main priority. However cultural integration into socioeconomic, civil, cultural,

and political dimensions can influence the transition into settled life heavily. Migrants and refugees face a large amount of stressors when they finally reach their second or third destinations ranging from concern over being separated from family to lack of employment to a loss of culture in their surroundings.

Alastair Ager and Alison Strong Denote the four levels of integration through foundation, facilitators, social connection, and markers and means. This will be the outline used in fully understanding cultural integration in refugees into their respective second and third countries.

#### *Foundation:*

Foundation is defined as citizenship and rights in second and third countries. Citizenship can vary from country to country in terms of requirements, qualifiers, and degrees of citizenship. Citizenship will directly affect the rights given to refugees and asylum seekers, but there is a standard of “human rights” that the United Nations adopted to better define what rights should be given to them. Citizenship gives refugees the opportunity to benefit and experience every resource their new community has to offer. They can have access to government-facilitated programs, voting rights, and healthcare. Having citizenship means having the privilege of being able to flourish fully in a country while having the support system of the government.

#### *Facilitators:*

The two markers of facilitators are language and cultural knowledge combined with safety and stability. Many of the refugees and asylum seekers have come from unstable environments that required them to leave their first countries originally.

Language competence is a two-way process in integrating refugees and asylum seekers. It requires the communities housing them to have people not only be able to teach in their first language, but proficient in the refugee's native languages as well in order to be able to adequately educate them. Without an understanding of both languages, second and third countries will need to give extra effort in providing refugees with resources to learn the primary language of the respective countries.

Cultural knowledge is aided by language competence, however they can be learned simultaneously. Cultural knowledge explains the various social customs that take place in the second and third countries, thus making the language easier to understand. Cultural knowledge can also aid in determining the likelihood of a refugee's full integration into their new society.

*Social connection:*

Three factors of social connection are social bridges, social bonds, and social links. These social connections are aids in fighting mental health issues prevalent in refugee communities such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. Social bonds indicate proximity to both family and those of "like-ethnicity". This allows for the refugees to retain their cultural ties whilst learning how to navigate their third country's culture from the perspective of someone who understands the type of integration that may work best for them.

Social bridges are the primary relationship between the refugee and the host community. This relationship is crucial to cultural integration as the host community is the refugee's main source of introduction into the third country. The host community is

responsible for the education of language and cultural knowledge of the refugees, while making them feel welcome in the unfamiliar environment.

Social links are the connection between the refugee and the government of their third country. Where refugee settlement is more established, the social links are more defined and reliable. Social links can be determined by what the third country's government's views on citizenship and rights for the refugee.

*Markers and Means:*

Finally, the markers and means that demonstrate full cultural integration are employment, education, housing, and health. Employment is responsible for providing economic independence and restores self-esteem and self-reliance for refugees and their families. By gaining employment, refugees are able to plan for the future and maintain a sense of stability crucial to living in the third country happily.

Education provides refugee children direct access to a social bridge between their household and the host community. Education also establishes necessary skills for understanding language and cultural competencies. However if the education system is not proactive in fighting racism, bullying, difficulty in making the material accessible, etc., then education can do more harm than good for refugee children.

Housing provides a place for refugee families to feel safe, secure, and reassured in their third country. By having sufficient and adequate housing, refugees are allowed to regain a sense of home in their new community while having access to the benefits the community has to offer. Health ties into this because housing locations can determine the accessibility of healthcare to communities. Having adequate health care can

determine the quality of life for everyone, especially refugees. Since refugees run a higher risk of developing mental health issues, being closer to quality health care can have a large impact on their happiness.

*Analysis:*

There are many reasons why cultural integration can be such a barrier for refugees who have recently been granted asylum. Refugees commonly face xenophobic discrimination. Xenophobia, the fear of foreigners, can originate from a place of status anxiety or general distrust of immigrants. Refugees are also regular targets of verbal and physical harassment by private citizens and even public authorities, such as police officers. Where xenophobic discrimination is not violent, it can nonetheless be a severe threat to refugee livelihood.<sup>10</sup> Discrimination can prevent refugees from obtaining jobs, forming social connections, and creates a hostile environment where refugees may not feel like they are allowed to thrive.

Refugees are more likely to be successful in their new communities when they feel supported not only by the administration, but the people around them. A sense of security establishes normalcy and comfort that they have been deprived of since fleeing their origin country, and allows for them to be able to prioritize getting accustomed to their new societies.

*Goals:*

The goals of this committee should be finding a way to integrate refugees into society while acknowledging the concerns of their citizens for respective countries. This

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<sup>10</sup> BEYOND PREJUDICE: STRUCTURAL XENOPHOBIC DISCRIMINATION AGAINST REFUGEES

will require establishing a balance of allocating resources for refugees and asylum seekers while not neglecting citizens. One of the goals should also be establishing easier paths to cultural integration and creating communities where refugees feel welcomed.

*Questions to Consider:*

1. What role should the state have in implementing integration programs for resettled refugees?
2. Should refugees that have been granted asylum be required to partake in integration programs?
3. How can these programs be made more accessible to those lacking basic English proficiency?
4. What types of programs deserve priority in implementation status?
5. How should funding be allocated between directly being received by the refugees and programs to benefit their well-being?

**Closing Thoughts**

Topics 1 and 2 are not mutually exclusive to each other. While a lot of events prior to being resettled can impact the health of refugees, there are many factors contributing to asylum seekers and refugees' mental health. Many of these people do not speak the language of their second and third, causing a huge language barrier to trying to find employment. This fuels the issue in facilitating cultural integration when there is a deficit of language and cultural knowledge and lack of safety or stability.

Because citizenship and rights can vary so vastly between each different country, it can be very hard to determine the amount of responsibility each government has in protecting refugees and asylum seekers. Because the amount of responsibility varies, this can also affect the amount of mental health aid given to refugees. Cultural differences can be an indicator of how much importance will be placed on mental wellness. If a country does not prioritize mental wellness for its natural-born citizens, chances are that mental health will not be a priority for refugees and asylum seekers.

Cultural knowledge can impact social connection which can further damage mental health. By nature, humans are social creatures and isolation in second and third countries can foster an environment conducive to poor mental health. Lack of cultural knowledge will influence how people will interact with citizens in the country, making it much more difficult to form connections. These connections are very crucial to the success of a refugee's integration and health in their new society.

Given the historical pattern of refugees, it is important to remember that many of these people fled their countries out of a lack of safety and/or fear of prosecution.

## **Research Tools and Resources**

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the United Nations Migration Agency and provides a list of useful, important terms crucial to understanding the migration process. The definitions can be accessed by going to their website: <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>.

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is a division of the United Nations specifically dedicated to working with refugees and member states of the UN. This website is good for perspective regarding the UN's role in protecting and aiding refugees. Their website is here: <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/>

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is a nonprofit that works directly in affected countries with refugees in order to find placement in third countries. This is an excellent resource to examine and think about how a nonprofit can aid policy making in regards to refugees. To find out more about the organization and what they do, you can visit their website: <https://www.rescue.org/>

BBC Two produced a documentary detailed the refugee's experience to Europe. This documentary is a good resource to understand the refugee journey and experience from a diverse set of countries and perspectives. *Exodus* episodes 1, 2, and 3 can easily be found online.

RefWorld has an incredible resource dedicated to each country's position on refugees and policy regarding them. **I highly recommend this resource to begin with if you having trouble finding information on country's position.** There are links to many articles regarding country's positions on every refugee issue and could be separated either by country or topic. You can access this resource here: <http://www.refworld.org/publisher,UNHCR,COUNTRYPOS,,,o.html>

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We appreciate your feedback about our conference. Please direct all inquiries and comments to our Secretary-General.

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