Model United Nations at UCSD presents
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United Nations Development Programme: Syrian Refugee Crisis
Introduction
Welcome Delegates,

My name is Steve Ruiz, and I will be your chair for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). I am a fourth year at UC San Diego, majoring in Political Science — Comparative Politics. This is my second year being a part of Model United Nations and it has definitely become its own home for me. I have had the pleasure to vice chair twice and look forward to being your chair for the increasingly relevant UNDP.

The Syrian refugee crisis has been an ongoing issue that has only worsened rather than improved, which makes offering refugees development assistance particularly important. Using the framework of the UNDP, I hope to see solid debate between delegates that maintains relevance with country position and shows a commitment to diplomacy, while staying within the purview of the UNDP. The UNDP is highly focused on maintaining the human dignity of those around the world, and I hope to see that same spirit within committee.

I look forward to hearing all of your insights into aiding refugees with development assistance and hope you all learn and grow as delegates in the process. If you have any questions about the committee don’t hesitate to email me. Best of luck!
Sincerely,
Steve Ruiz
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Background

In March 2016, the Syrian conflict entered its fifth year. The conflict has evolved over time, from a conflict between Bashar al-Assad’s regime and supporters and various rebel fighters, including organizations such as al-Nusra, ISIL, and the Syrian National Council, to one involving The Russian Military, Kurdish and Iraqi forces. After an official request by the Syrian government for military assistance, In October, 2015 Russia intervened in the country. In March 2016, Russian forces began to scale back and withdraw, after Putin declared that their combat mission had been achieved, and cease-fire had been signed between the parties. The truce is holding, but uncertain, as those parties not involved in the negotiations have continued hostilities.

With the emergence of ISIL, the conflict has spread into neighboring Iraq as well as southern Turkey. The ongoing conflict in Syria has been highly detrimental to Syria’s civilians as well as its society. Civilians have fled their towns in order to attempt to escape the instability, and find refuge in its neighboring countries. As of the UNHCR’s most recent data (March 16th, 2016), there are currently 4,812,993 registered Syrian refugees, with more remaining unregistered. The influx of refugees fleeing the conflict has created

\[1\] SYRIAN REFUGEES INTER-AGENCY REGIONAL UPDATE
several problems that threaten the stability of the countries in which refugees preside as well as for the refugees themselves.

Firstly, in fleeing Syria, refugees have left behind their lives, including shelter, employment, access to education, and healthcare; all of which are fundamental human rights. Schools, historical monuments, and infrastructure within Syria have been permanently damaged due to the violence. However, refugees are also finding it difficult to adjust to their new lifestyles. In a report released by the International Labor Organization, it was found that on average, thirty percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon were unemployed. Specifically, for women, the unemployment rate in Lebanon was a staggering sixty-eight percent.2 Children have also been affected by the displacement, losing their access to education and nutrition. A United Nations report outlining the regional response plan for the crisis found that only twenty percent of Syrian children in Lebanon were able to attend school.3 Syrian refugees have not only fled to Lebanon, but to other countries across the Middle East and further.

Regional Hotspots: Turkey, Jordan, Europe, Lebanon

Since the start of the conflict now known as the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Turkey is estimated to have played host to over 1 million refugees. Some sources estimate that

3 http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Syria%20Regional%20Response%20Plan.pdf
this figure neared 2 million at the end of 2015. However, very few, less than 200,000 of these refugees have sought asylum in Turkey. Instead, Turkey continues to be a major migration corridor toward Greece and Eastern Europe. As of 2016, over 1 million refugees have crossed into the EU. About 60% of these have declared asylum in Serbia, Hungary and Germany. The strain this has caused within the EU has been heavy. There has been divide over the efficacy of the current refugee allocation system in Europe. Though the current system allocates asylum seekers proportionally with respect to country resources, population and other indicators, it has been criticized as being slow moving and leading to ghettoization of refugee populations. Jordan has also faced an unsustainable influx of refugees. Though thus far Jordan has remained hospitable to refugees, providing security and access to services, the nearly one million refugees from Iraq and Syria are putting stress on Jordan’s infrastructure. The fiscal predicament of the country is also making the situation more challenging. Refugees face similar challenges to those faced in Lebanon, including barriers to employment and education.

Lebanon has faced an overwhelming problem with refugees. The tiny country is hosting upward of one million refugees, destabilizing the government. The issues of unemployment, malnutrition, and lack of access to education also ultimately identify the

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4 http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e0fa7f.html
7 http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486566&submit=GO
second problem that refugees are facing. The shift of population in the host countries has caused problems of instability. Most notably, host countries are finding it difficult to accommodate the growing number of refugees. One of the examples of this is the language barrier that Syrian refugees have encountered in Lebanon. While most of the Syrian education system is in Arabic, in Lebanese schools, certain subjects are taught in French or English.4 In addition to this, high poverty rates among refugees has meant that families can also no longer afford to send their children to school, and therefore send their children to work low-wage jobs or beg in the streets.8

Non-governmental organizations have been fairly active in their attempts to assist refugees. Save the Children has been providing children with clean water and sanitation through several partnerships, and has been attempting to keep schools within Syria open.6 Save the Children has also implemented media campaigns in order to inform the public about the Syrian crisis. Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has worked with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to provide food and water, as well as medical care to those in areas most affected by the conflict. However, the ICRC has been instrumental in development assistance with displaced populations in Jordan, providing cash assistance that helps them afford rent and health care.9 The ICRC has also provided refugee camps with meals and water.

United Nations Involvement

Several bodies of the United Nations have been heavily invested in providing assistance to Syrian refugees. The High Commissioner for Refugees has been constantly collecting information regarding the demographics and population of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, and Egypt, Jordan. Along with several other international agencies, the UNHCR has initiated the Regional Response Plan (RRP6), which outlines the plan of action between January 1st, 2014 and December 31st, 2014. The RRP6 attempted to address three demographics currently facing problems: refugees within fixed camps, refugees outside of settlements, and host communities. The RRP6 seeks to go beyond providing basic needs to refugees, acknowledging the need for refugees to have access to food, education, shelter, health and hygiene, and protection, which is its primary concern. This plan established the framework which the 3RP expands and improves upon. The Security Council voiced its concern with accessibility in S/RES/2139, which called for Syrian authorities to allow humanitarian assistance travel within Syria.10

Health has also been a fundamental objective, as there have been widespread outbreaks of polio among children. In response to the outbreak in 2013, the World Health

10 http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2139.pdf
Organization launched a campaign of mass vaccination, hoping to target 22 million children under five years of age. In addition to aiding children, the United Nations is also attempting to protect women and girls from gender-based and sexual violence in refugee camps, and provide them with equitable assistance and opportunities. At most camps, UNDP has established legal counseling services and psychosocial resources in order to help victims of gender-based violence cope. The UNDP has also aided women in refugee camps through edu-tainment, a series of theater pieces used to help raise awareness surrounding sexual violence towards women. Despite this, women have been reluctant to report incidents of gender-based violence, considering it to be of high risk, and worrying that reporting incidents would endanger their families.

The UNHRC has updated its plan to 3RP, the Regional Refugees Resilience Plan. Launched in 2014, and still only 50% funded, the plan faces numerous major challenges. While lack of funding remains an issue, delivering resources to vulnerable communities has been an equal if not larger problem. The local infrastructure is often deficient, leading to waste and duplicate initiatives. In addition, competition for low wage jobs has led to wage deflation. The new plan has emphasized using existing infrastructure and national resources to deliver assistance. It has also called for better planning and execution by national leaders at the local level. It focuses on equipping refugees to cope with new and

challenging environments, by providing education and vocational training to young people and children.\textsuperscript{13}

In its assessment, the 3RP plan notes that two main sectors of the plan remain deficient: health, and social cohesion and livelihood. Though these two sectors are certainly underfunded, the main challenge has been delivering aid to the vulnerable communities. That is why the effort has shifted to focus more on oversight and coordination efforts, both inter-state and inter-agency. It should be noted that health is once again a main area of concern, and the challenge of getting medical professionals to the area is persistent.

The Execution of the plan is organized on a local level with the main actors in the region. The level of direct involvement of NGOs and the UNHCR varies by the resources of the government in question. For instance, the third parties are heavily involved in the response in Lebanon, whereas the local and national government carries out most of the efforts in Turkey.\textsuperscript{14}

Women have also been involved in efforts by the UNDP to support entrepreneurship among refugees. This has been orchestrated through the implementation of a program that teaches individuals the skills necessary for entrepreneurship and

\textsuperscript{13} Regional Refugee Resilience Plan (2016-2017).
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
supplying them with initial funding. This has been successful in generating productivity among refugees, allowing them to provide adequately for their families. It has also been fundamental in allowing refugees to become integrated in their host communities and in relieving tensions between the two communities.

In 2014 the UNDP and UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding, to coordinate inter-agency efforts. In the agreement, the 3RP plan is acknowledged as the guiding framework for both entities. The UNDP and UNCHR recognize the importance of coherence and coordination on a regional level. In particular, the memorandum calls for effective national plans to address the problem. Efforts should set clear and measurable goals, the achievement of which can be monitored and evaluated through inter-agency coordination. The memorandum calls for consultation through the Joint Secretariats of the UNDP and UNHCR. It also calls for the formation of tailored, country-specific plans.

While there have been efforts by the United Nations to provide assistance to refugees, various challenges are faced that have resulted in overall failure. Most notably are challenges within the Security Council augmented by allegiances to opposing forces. As a permanent power, Russia has the ability to veto resolutions brought to the Security Council, which Russia has used in order to block most resolutions taking an adamant stance.

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16 Memorandum of Understanding between UNDP and UNHCR -regional cooperation on the Syria and Iraq situations (2014).
against Bashar al-Assad. Other conflicts include the distribution of aid. The United Nations recognizes sovereignty, and thus must obtain consent from the Syrian government to deliver food aid. Doing so while unauthorized could result in their expulsion from Syria, denying aid to refugees within Syrian borders. What is also clear from this crisis is that ad hoc, and reactionary efforts, while impressive have not come close to meeting their targets. What is needed is a developmental approach aimed at preempting crises of a similar nature and ensure that national infrastructure is well prepared to handle mass migration.

**Bloc Positions**

**Western Bloc**

The United States and most European Union member states have been adamant about providing aid to Syria. The USAID has been committed to providing development assistance to displaced populations. As of February 4th, 2016, Secretary of State John Kerry announced that the United States would continue providing humanitarian assistance to refugees. The State Department announced that it would provide an additional $601 million in order to provide those displaced by the conflict with food, water, and health services. This is being distributed to the host countries for both needs and development

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programs for refugees. Meanwhile, the European Commission and EU members have dramatically increased assistance to Syria and its neighbors amounting to over 5 billion euros.\textsuperscript{19} Both the United States and most of Western Europe have denounced the Syrian government for its violence, which has created conflict within the Security Council. The Obama administration, for example, has been showing its allegiance by sending small arms to Syrian rebels, and training them.

**Eastern Bloc**

Russia has been highly controversial in its support of Bashar al-Assad. Russia’s concern has been that choosing sides will only further violence as opposed to quelling it, and has thus used its veto power in Security Council against resolutions that attempt to condemn Syria’s government. Russia has also vetoed a resolution that would send Syria to the ICC.\textsuperscript{20} However, Russia has voted in favor of S/RES/2139, which has called for immediate humanitarian assistance to Syria. In 2015, responding to a request by the Syrian government, Russia intervened in the country, launching airstrikes against various rebel groups. Russia has vital strategic interests in the country, including the naval resupply and maintenance facility it leases at Tartus. The stated purpose of the intervention was to ensure stability and conditions conducive to a political resolution. With Russian

\textsuperscript{19} \url{http://eeas.europa.eu/syria/}
intervention, the Syrian Army has been able to go on the offensive. In March 2016, Russia began to withdraw its forces after the signing of a cease-fire by parties involved in the ISSG Vienna Peace Process. Ostensibly, this meant that Russia had achieved its objectives in Syria. The truce has held, but only between those parties involved; parties that did not participate in the negotiations continue to fight. Parts of the Eastern bloc have also been affected directly by the Syrian crisis. Turkey has accepted over 1.5 million refugees within their borders in camps that are under the authority of the Turkish government. Additionally, it is estimated that over 1 million have cross through Turkey into the EU. Turkey has taken a stance against the Syrian government, which has also escalated tensions between the two countries. Its borders with Syria have been affected, with incidents that have.

**Asian Bloc**

There is also division among the Asian bloc over allegiances in the Syrian conflict. Along with Russia, China has also been using its veto power against resolutions that directly condemn Syria’s government. China has been supportive of efforts to provide aid to displaced civilians, however, this has been amidst accusations that China is providing little support themselves.21 Meanwhile, Japan has pledged aid, as well as support to host communities. Much of Japan’s financial assistance has been funneled through international governmental organizations and domestic non-governmental organizations that are

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distributing supplies and health care. In the South Asian bloc, India quickly condemned the Syrian government’s use of force against Syrian civilians, and has backed the efforts of the U.S. government.

**Middle Eastern Bloc**

This bloc is most directly affected by the crisis in a multitude of ways. Countries across the Middle East have been effective in acting as host countries, but have also aided in providing assistance to those displaced by the conflict. However, there is also tension across the Middle East surrounding allegiance. Iran, for example, while supporting the Syrian government, has sent aid to refugees currently residing in Jordan. On the other hand, Israel has been receiving injured civilians and rebels and treating them within Israel’s borders. Israel has also sent food and blankets to Syrian refugees. Meanwhile, host countries are facing concerns of spillover of conflict. In Lebanon, the spillover has reignited sectarian violence, endangering not only civilians, but also refugees placed in camps in Lebanon.

**African Bloc**

Members of the African bloc have not been particularly active in providing aid to Syrian refugees. Several members have abstained from voting in resolutions that condemn the human rights violations committed by the Syrian government, including Cameroon, Uganda, and Angola. Apart from these abstentions, most members of the African bloc have expressed concern in violations of human rights occurring in Syria. As of June 2014, the
sole African member of Security Council is Rwanda, who has also voted in favor of S/RES/2139, which calls for immediate humanitarian assistance to Syria.

Latin American Bloc

The Latin American bloc, while distant from the actual conflict, have been active in providing aid to displaced Syrians. Both Brazil and Colombia have offered humanitarian visas to Syrian refugees. Brazil’s system has operated throughout its embassies in Jordan and Lebanon. Meanwhile, Colombia has also accepted Syrian refugees into their borders, and has implemented a program that teaches them Spanish and aids them in integrating and re-aligning themselves.

Questions to Consider

1. Development assistance is heavily multi-faceted and can focus on various needs. What types of needs should be prioritized in programming development assistance?

2. Some of the host countries of refugees are facing threats of conflict spillover as well as domestic issues that may make it difficult for them to support refugees. What can countries do to ensure that the host countries can continue to support refugees?

3. Assistance to refugees has been provided by both international governmental and non-governmental organizations. What are the challenges each face in providing assistance and how can they
work to their strengths?

4. There are often difficulties with tracking aid and ensuring it gets into the right hands. What measures can countries make to ensure that aid is delivered to those who need it most?

5. Thus Far the United Nations response to the crisis is been ad hoc and reactionary, how can the UNDP work to prevent future crises of this nature in the region through a developing infrastructure and human resources.

Suggested Sites

For general information regarding international affairs and country profiles:


BBC World News Country Profiles:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm

Syrian Independent Journalism:

http://www.syriadeeply.org/

United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees Website:

http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home

United Nations Development Group Website:

http://www.undg.org/?P=232

United Nations Development Group Programing Reference Guide:

http://undg.org/content/programming_reference_guide_%28undaf%29/un_country_programming_principles

United Nations Human Rights Watch Website:
http://www.hrw.org/

For Model UN tips and guidelines:

Best Delegate: http://bestdelegate.com/

Bibliography


UN Development Programme and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. “Memorandum of Understanding between UNDP and UNHCR -regional cooperation on the Syria and Iraq situations” UN Development Programme and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. N.p.: The UNDP and UNHCR, 2014. Print.


