Record levels of displacement due to wars, persecution, and state failure in countries around the world have captured headlines and the attention of politicians, policymakers, and the public. Most of today's refugees are in less developed countries neighboring their home countries and live not in camps but in towns and cities. The 1951 refugee convention requires its signatories to protect those who have crossed an international border while fleeing persecution, yet refugees are often mischaracterized as threats to societies and prevented from crossing borders.

Discussion Questions

1. Definitions. Discuss the following terms and their different meanings: refugee, asylum seeker, asylee, internally displaced person (IDP), migrant, and immigrant.

2. Protection. How can governments, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) protect refugees? What actions can keep people safe while ensuring their legal rights are respected?

3. Aid. The United Nations sought $25 billion for humanitarian aid in 2018 but raised only $14.5 billion. The biggest contributors to UN humanitarian appeals are European Union member states, the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, and South Korea. In 2018, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia were also among the top donors. What factors prompted these two Gulf States to make significant contributions? What might convince other countries to become major donors?

Useful background: Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2018

4. Protracted refugee crises. A refugee crisis is considered protracted when twenty-five thousand or more refugees originating from the same country have taken refuge in another country for at least five consecutive years. More than half of the world’s refugees have fled protracted conflicts. These refugees are living in a sort of limbo, not knowing if or when they will be able to return home. Are any protracted conflicts nearing resolution? What role does the Security Council play in them?

Useful background: Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017

5. The private sector. How can the private sector best help refugees? What are examples of private-sector firms making significant contributions?

Useful background: The Tent Partnership for Refugees
6. **Self-sufficiency.** Choose two countries and compare the opportunities they offer to refugees to pursue their education and build skills and livelihoods.

7. **Innovation.** How can technologies, such as smartphones or iris scans, improve the provision of humanitarian assistance to refugees and other victims of conflict?

   *Useful background:* “Phones are now indispensable for refugees,” *The Economist, February 11, 2017.*

**Essay Questions**

1. Pick one of the following countries and discuss the commonalities of the crisis there with other refugee and IDP situations, as well as its differences. Include mention of both the origins of the crisis and the international response.

   Countries: Burundi, Central African Republic, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, and Venezuela.

2. Many people on the move face life-threatening situations in their home countries but do not qualify as refugees under the 1951 convention. Discuss other frameworks or options that would provide them with protection.

3. Is it easier or more difficult to provide protection and assistance for IDPs than for refugees? Give your reasons.

4. Most refugees live in towns and cities, not camps. What are the best ways to provide help and protection to urban refugees, and why?

5. What are the pros and cons to erecting camps? Consider this from the points of view of governments, aid agencies, and human rights advocates.

6. Review the InfoGuide section “Repairing a Broken System.” Are there policy options that are not mentioned? Why have reforms proved so difficult?

7. A [UN report](https://www.unhcr.org/) found, “Disputes and grievances over natural resources are rarely, if ever, the sole cause of violent conflict. . . . However, disputes and grievances over natural resources can contribute to violent conflict when they overlap with other factors, such as ethnic polarization, high levels of inequity, poverty, injustice and poor governance.” Do you agree? Provide examples from refugee crises you have studied.
Projects

1. **Memo on a Panel Discussion**
   Write a one-to-two-page memo summarizing an event at a think tank or a congressional hearing on refugees. Attend an event or find one that can be viewed online. Draft it as if you were a staff member of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) reporting to the organization's executive director or head of advocacy.

   Check out the website of the following organizations to find events: American Enterprise Institute, Atlantic Council, Brookings Institution, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Center for American Progress, Center for a New American Security, Center for Global Development, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Council on Foreign Relations, Heritage Foundation, Stimson Center, and United States Institute of Peace. (Be aware of their political leanings.)

   In Congress, relevant hearings are held by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission.

2. **Refugee Resettlement Policy Brief**
   Draft a three-page policy brief to your town or city mayor explaining the costs and benefits of resettling refugees locally.

3. **Advertisement for a Charity**
   Mock up an advertisement for a nonprofit organization—real or imaginary—that helps refugees. The ad can ask viewers or listeners to give money or to take other actions (e.g., sign a petition or call members of Congress). Present your ad for discussion.

   Reference [Radi-Aid’s guidelines for using images](#) and the [ICRC’s code of conduct](#).

4. **Role Play**
   Split up into teams of two. One student will play the role of a senior diplomat or UN official who seeks to convince the prime minister of another country to allow refugees to cross their borders. The second student will be the prime minister, who maintains that the country must help its own citizens before it can help vulnerable foreigners and that refugees pose a security risk. What are each of your best arguments?