# DAISMUN XI

**FORUM:** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
**ISSUE:** Supporting Refugee Assimilation and Wellbeing Through Promoting Their Access to Technology
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**POSITION:** President

## Introduction to Committee:

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, abbreviated as UNHCR, was established January 1, 1951 by the UNGA. As the UN Refugee Agency, the UNHCR works to provide protection for refugees and find solutions for refugees to better assimilate into their new environment. The UNHCR works with host governments of these refugees and provides humanitarian aid. Another goal the UNHCR has is to provide education for school age refugees, as they believe education plays a key role in the thriving and survival of refugee children. The UNHCR stands in the center of the refugee response system, taking a leading role and assuming lots of responsibility to provide aid for refugees. By definition, the UNHCR aids anyone considered a refugee, from IDPs to those who are exiled. As of 2021, the UNHCR has over 16.1 million refugees under their jurisdiction, over half that number being children under the age of 18. The UNHCR also has the elected high commissioner, who is picked every 5 years by the UNGA. Currently, Filippo Grandi is the 11th UN high commissioner for refugees, and will serve his place in office until June 30, 2023.

## Introduction to Topic:

The advent of super-diversity and politicization of migration has been accompanied by heightened interest in migrant settlement. Much has been written in policy and academic fields about the importance of integration, particularly concerning refugees' settlement. However, little attention has been paid to individual refugees' varied settlement experiences or how personal, cultural, and experiential factors combine to influence settlement experiences. Still, countless refugees lack choice about acculturation strategy in the current policy environment; hence are exceedingly vulnerable to psychosocial stress and struggle to integrate. This particularly applies to the youth. Refugee children and youth, specifically those who have experienced trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), have different developmental needs than their counterparts who are not refugees. Meticulously, ACEs are traumatic events experienced by children that shape their development that has a high potential of producing adverse outcomes in adolescence and adulthood, including disruptive behavior, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression.

These children may experience myriad ACEs in their countries of origin and during their asylum-seeking processes, such as political unrest, war, violence, poor living conditions, death or loss of family members, chronic fear, and poverty. Upon arriving in the hosting country, children may experience extreme stress by being separated from their parents and having to adapt to a new and unacquainted culture. Additional post-resettlement stressors may include lack of access to resources, financial stress, and poor living conditions, as well as language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, family separation, and the struggle to reconcile new cultural faiths with the culture of origin. These stressors—in addition to institutional and societal marginalization, discrimination and harassment from peers and law enforcement, emotions of loneliness, and internalization of stereotypes—are not well-accustomed with the young, as they tend to be more vulnerable to stress, hence can result in unfavorable health outcomes for children and youth.

Fortunately, technology has opened a new frontier in mental health support and data collection- a frontier that is much more straightforward yet effective. Mobile devices like cell phones, smartphones, and tablets are giving the public, doctors, and researchers innovative ways to provide aid, monitor progress, and increase mental well-being. Such technological innovations include apps, precisely, apps that utilize the device's built-in sensors to collect information on a user's everyday behavior patterns. This way, if the app detects a behavior change, it may signal that help is needed before a crisis occurs. Additionally, it may also assist the user to connect to a peer counselor or a health care professional when necessitated. These technological innovations, packed with information, are able to allow the refugees to have access to numerous amounts of knowledge, therefore could facilitate the process of them assimilating with the host country. However, in order for technology to sufficiently aid the refugees and displaced people, it is vital to work with communities to identify, amplify, and modernize solutions for further development.

## History:

Currently, the UNHCR has created a division dedicated specifically to innovation and technology. Known merely as UNHCR Innovation, the division is headed by Olivier Delarue. The primary mandate is to empower refugees in new ways, including expanding opportunities to foster quality education and create genuine livelihood opportunities. By a short period of 18 months, UNHCR Innovation has created several vital partnerships to support the creation of new processes and use technology to improve displaced people's lives. In addition to its collaboration with the Ikea Foundation, it has also teamed up with global courier service UPS to create a system to track the delivery of services and non-food items. Additionally, there are other measures taken such as but not limited to the following:

- The South African-based Praekelt Foundation is also dedicated to creating mobile technologies to help non-profit organizations work with society's marginalized people. Praekelt has developed a mobile messaging platform called *Vumi* that aims to help organizations develop population-scale messaging applications. The idea is that people who only have access to feature phones can access dedicated Wikipedia page. Moreover, this Wikipedia page can be written to provide region-specific information to assist refugees in the future.

- *UN Women*: Using WhatsApp to disseminate reliable information on COVID-19 prevention and services made available by the Government and WHO. As many beneficiaries are also community mobilizers, they have created their own WhatsApp groups to reach out to other women to disseminate information on protecting themselves from the virus and safely care for the family that may fall ill.

- *Family reconnection for the displaced*: In 2010, the system became available through a free mobile service, allowing people with even the most basic handsets to quickly register their details via SMS and be matched up with those looking for them. Prior to this innovation, family tracing had been a laborious and intensive process done with pen and paper, with traditional non-profit organizations only able to help a small number of people. Refugees United's platform can now also be accessed through unstructured supplementary service data (USSD) - a sort of souped-up text message system that works more like a secure form of chat - and via a toll-free number staffed by multi-lingual operators, as well as online. It has recently reached 250,000 registered users, many of which are across Kenya, which has an estimated 500,000 displaced persons.

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**Key Terms:**

**Refugees/Migrants-** Used to describe people that have been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

**Child Refugee Crisis-** A type of humanitarian crisis in which refugees under the legal age of 18 have been forced to leave their homes.

**Assimilation**- the absorption and integration of people, ideas, or culture into a wider society or culture

**Post Migration Living Difficulties Scale (PMLD)**- assess current life stressors of asylum seekers.  Each of the 23 items of this administered survey is rated on a 5-point scale from "no problem" to "a very serious problem," with a composite score determined.

**Refugee Health Screener – 15 (RHS-15)-** An efficient instrument to screen for distress, anxiety, and depression in refugees. The RHS-15 is valid for predicting diagnostic level anxiety, depression and PTSD in at least three refugee groups and has been translated into eleven different languages.


**Major Parties Involved:**

*UNESCO, Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization-* From its origins in 1945, UNESCO carried the global mandate for education, including for refugees and other displaced populations. However, by the mid-1960s, it was clear that with UNESCO's focus on national-level policy, there was little capacity to act on this field-level responsibility (hence, the creation of UNHCR).

*World Health Organization (WHO)-* A specialized agency of the United Nations that is responsible for international public health. The WHO Constitution, which establishes the agency's governing structure and principles, states its main objective as "the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health."

*International Organization of Migration (IOM)-* Intergovernmental organization that addresses issues and concerns on migration, as well as provides services and advice to governments on matters involving such topic.

*International Labor Organization (ILO)-* United Nations agency whose mandate is to advance social and economic justice through setting international labor standards.

*Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)-* A global open network of members working together within a humanitarian and development framework to ensure all humanitarian aid.

*Department of Operational Support (DOS)-* Provides operational support to all UN Secretariat entities, including advisory, operational and transactional support services.

*Division of Programme Support and Management (DPSM)-* Provides the knowledge, guidance and tools necessary to design and deliver UNHCR programmes that demonstrate quality, technical integrity and innovation.

*Division of International Protection (DIP)-* A series of legal research and protection policy papers issued by the UNHCR Division of International Protection.

**Timeline:**

| Date | Event |
|---|---|
| 1900-1951 | The period spanning the World Wars saw the creation of the highest number of refugees the world had ever seen, in part because the end of free movement across borders brought with it compulsory passports, visas and other travel documents. The collapse of the Ottoman, Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian empires as a result of the First World War created ethnic, political and religious refugees and stateless persons. During hostilities, individuals were forced from their homes as invading armies made the land uninhabitable. |
| 1933-1945 | The coming to power of the antisemitic, anti-Communist Nazi party caused displacement from as early as 1933. The Nuremberg Laws in 1935, the Anschluss with Austria and Kristallnacht in 1938 prompted more departures of Jews and political dissidents from Germany and Austria, while the annexation of Sudetenland created significant numbers of Czech and Jewish refugees (c.90,000) |
| 1951 | Establishment of the *Refugee Convention*. World War II had created such large-scale displacement that the United Nations felt the need to create international guidelines relating to the protection and acceptance of refugees. 26 States were represented at the conference in Geneva in July 1951. While this document gave significant rights to refugees to ensure their protection, ultimately it was only a guide to national legislative policies. |
| 2018 | UNHCR's Innovation Service is committed to creating an enabling environment for innovation to flourish in UNHCR by equipping staff with the knowledge, resources, and skills needed to ensure that they can increasingly draw on structured innovation to solve the most pressing challenges. |

**Possible solutions:**

1. **Creation of specific apps that would aid the refugees in their process of becoming accustomed to the host country-** This may include but not limited to maps, short video clips describing the culture, online free education in regards of language, and monitoring health by a specialized health worker. Especially considering the four preliminary targeted areas for policy: infectious disease, mental health, reproductive health, and language barriers. With the high population densities and atypical living conditions, refugee camps can be settings conducive to the spread of communicable diseases – especially infectious diseases, like tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and cholera. Some illnesses spread through contaminated water or food supplies, while others spread through mosquitos, blood, or respiratory droplets; therefore, the creation of Health support apps would be able to assist this matter.

2. **Educate future generations about refugees by creating connections**- To counter xenophobia, governments can reform their education systems to include aspects/themes in regards to refugees' rights through the usage of technology. For instance, just like regular "pen-pals" children may interact together, which will create a bond and break the boundaries at the same time.

3. **International database of job opportunities for refugees-** More specifically, these international database of employment opportunities for refugees are set in order to allow employers to e-scout refugees based on their qualifications and skills, hence boosting the economic inclusion of refugees.

4. **Better internet access and online education platforms-** By improving internet access in refugee communities and to providing education platforms with pre-recorded lectures and assignments for children facing connectivity issues, this would facilitate a learning environment for those that cannot 'physically' attend school due to other factors.

5. **Monitoring Refugee Flows Using Drone Technology-** Given their adaptability and general use, drones present an area of opportunity for the UNHCR. One possible example is tracking refugee populations before they arrive in camps. Often local authorities struggle to predict and ultimately assemble required logistical resources for refugee settlements because they have little information beforehand. Tracking refugee groups with drones in the air might provide authorities with the information they need to make better logistical decisions.

6. **Bridging the Information Gap through Smartphone Technology-** Smartphones already play a significant role in the refugee experience. With the proliferation of smartphones and associated technologies (e.g., apps) over the past few years, they have become handy tools for those fleeing war-torn countries. Smartphones and apps have been providing solutions to the numerous obstacles that refugees face. These include navigation and GPS, translation, communication, finding shelter, and managing money. Apps like Google Maps, Facebook, WhatsApp, Bitcoin, and others serve to provide refugees with the tools necessary to find a better life outside of their home countries.

7. **Global connection program for refugees-** To further improve refugees' mental wellbeing, production of other programs, such as platforms in which refugees worldwide can communicate and share their struggles while living in another country or dealing with PTSD, ACEs, etc. By communicating with those that are under similar circumstances, it is likely that they would be able to feel a sense of comfort.

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