



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Topic A. Cultural preservation
in refugee camps with a
special emphasis on Rohingya
refugees in Myanmar



UNHCR

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

President: Mana Kawakami

Moderator: Homero Garza López

Conference Officer: Nathaly Cruz Méndez

Dear delegates,

As your chair, we are pleased to welcome you to the 15th edition of the United Nations Model of Alexander Bain Irapuato. We are truly eager to have you join us in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), where we trust that your engagement, diplomacy and critical thinking will lead to interesting discussions and innovative solutions to some of the major global challenges.

This year, the committee will address **Topic A: Cultural preservation in refugee camps with a special emphasis on Rohingya refugees in Myanmar.**

In this debate, you will have the opportunity to develop a wide range of valuable skills, like public speaking, negotiation, critical thinking and research. We encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to express your ideas, engage in thoughtful discussions, and collaborate to find effective and constructive solutions to current problems. In the debate, you will defend your perspective, listen, learn, and grow through collaboration and mutual respect.

As your Chair, we are ready to support your development as delegates, offering guidance, feedback, and resources to help you make the most of this experience. Our goal is to create an environment where you can exchange ideas, learn, and have fun while participating in thoughtful debates. We want this experience to be as enjoyable as possible, encouraging personal growth and contributions to the debate topics at hand.

We wish everyone the best of luck in this debate. We trust that this debate will give you new skills, memories, and a deeper understanding of the world's most pressing issues.

Enjoy the experience,

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees





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SEMBLANCE

History:

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in Switzerland in 1964, to provide aid to those who had lost their homes due to insecurity or armed conflict. Initially it was established for a three-year period; from January 1st, 1950 to December 31, 1953, and then was voted successively for a five-year extension.

In 1951, the UNHCR adopted the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees which provides international protection to refugees and it has been operative since 1954, besides being ratified by sixty countries.¹

From 1955 to 1958 a UNHCR material assistance program was created, called “UNREF” program (United Nations Refugee Fund), that was made for finding solutions for refugees in European camps and assistance to refugees in the Far East.² In 1967, the protocol was expanded to include the United Nations Declaration on Territorial Asylum, to improve international protection of a greater number of refugees, this with the objective of promoting legal instruments for the benefits of the refugees in accordance with the right of work and social security.³

Then, the assistance of UNHCR moved from Europe to Africa and Asia, which enabled them in 1969, to provide material assistance to refugees. In the Asian continent, the main solution for the refugee question has, since then, been to apply rural settlements and therefore develop programs for refugees to guarantee the protection of their integrity. Resources were also distributed to local populations so there was a greater awareness of the refugee question.⁴

¹ Abdelaaty, Lamis. “UNHCR: difficulties and dilemmas”. Forced Migration Review. (s.f.). <https://www.fmreview.org/recognising-refugees/abdelaaty/>

² Australian Multilateral Assessment. “UNHCR”. Australian Government. (2012, March). Access on December 9th, 2024. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/unhcr-assessment.pdf>

³ Abdelaaty, Lamis. “UNHCR: difficulties and dilemmas”. Forced Migration Review. (s.f.). <https://www.fmreview.org/recognising-refugees/abdelaaty/>

⁴ Abdelaaty, Lamis. “UNHCR: difficulties and dilemmas”. Forced Migration Review. (s.f.). <https://www.fmreview.org/recognising-refugees/abdelaaty/>

Actual State:

Nowadays, UNHCR works in 136 countries, to provide life-saving assistance, including food, shelter, water and medical care for people forced to flee from their countries.

The UNHCR works to ensure the basic human rights of people, such as health and education.

UNHCR responds to emergencies, it protects refugees, working with governments and organizations to strengthen international law, making suggestions to member states and respecting at all times sovereignty while also upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Through these actions, it ensures people have access to education, nationality, documentation and laboral opportunities.

This ensures the construction of better futures for refugees, giving them employment to support themselves and their families, help children access education, and safeguard their future.

Actions and Objectives:

The committee's main goal is to aid refugees in becoming independent and sustaining their well-being without external assistance. It's work improves their skills, resources and confidence to manage their own life, allowing them to take control.⁵

It also protects refugees, delivering protection and humanitarian assistance to populations that have been involved in an armed conflict. It also allocates resources and delivers results with governments to help refugees, protects people with disabilities with provisions and protection. And improves gender equality regardless of age, gender or race.⁶

Its main role is to create a clear and consistent corporate vision, operational priorities and strategies in consultation with senior management. It also collaborates with governments, especially with UN agencies, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations. In that way and with their support, UNHCR seeks to resolve refugees' problems through:

- Voluntary repatriation that allows refugees to return to their country.

⁵ Australian Multilateral Assessment. "UNHCR". Australian Government. (2012, March). Access on December 9th, 2024. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/unhcr-assessment.pdf>

⁶ Zavallis, Achilleas. "What we do?". UNHCR. Access on December 9th, 2024. <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do>

- Emigration, it has a cooperation with the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration.
- Integration, which has proven effective for a large number of refugees.⁷

Limitations:

Despite its efforts, the UNHCR faces several limitations. One of them is its capacity to implement projects and respond to emergencies, particularly when these are large-scale or highly complex. Additionally, it encounters difficulties in ensuring effective refugee status determination, especially in countries where responsibilities are shared with national governments.⁸

It has restrictions by political pressures from host governments, the main limit in this is independence. And there is a lack of cooperation from national authorities.⁹

Main accomplishments:

Since its creation in 1950, UNHCR has protected millions of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people in the world. In 2023, UNHCR assisted over 117 million displaced people who experienced serious conflicts and crises.¹⁰

In 2021, UNHCR provided \$100 million to vulnerable refugees, as a cash assistance. That also included emergency aid during the COVID-19 pandemic, funds for basic needs like food and shelter.¹¹

In 2023, more than 158,700 refugees were resettled in other countries, and 30,800 refugees obtained citizenship in their host countries.¹²

⁷ Azia, David. "About UNHCR". UNHCR. (2001-2024). Access on December 9th, 2024. <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr>


⁸ Abdelaaty, Lamis. "UNHCR: difficulties and dilemmas". Forced Migration Review. (s.f.). <https://www.fmreview.org/recognising-refugees/abdelaaty/>

⁹ Brown university. "Refugees and health". Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs. (s.f.). <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/refugees#:~:text=It%20includes%20lack%20of%20access,rates%20of%20in direct%20war%20deaths>.

¹⁰ Gumuchian, Marie-Louise., Heritage,Timothy. (2024, June 17th). "Actor Theo James named UNHCR global goodwill ambassador". Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/actor-theo-james-named-unhcr-global-goodwill-ambassador-2024-06-17/>

¹¹ UNHCR. "10 ways UNHCR helped refugees in 2021". UNHCR. (2021, December 22th). <https://www.unhcr.org/jo/16703-10-ways-unhcr-helped-refugees-in-2021.html>

¹² UNHCR. "Global Trends". UNHCR. (2024). <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>



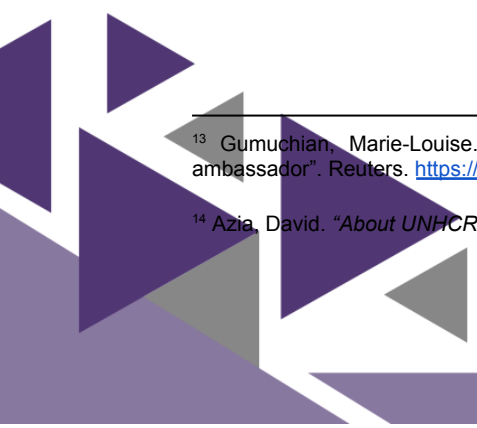
UNHCR awards the Nansen Refugee Award to individuals or organizations that have made contributions to refugee relief. UNHCR has also led emergency responses to major crises, such as the war in Ukraine, providing lifesaving aid, and continues to advocate for sustained international support to protect refugees.¹³

UNHCR works with governments, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations to strengthen international protection and promote refugee rights, like healthcare, employment, identity recovery and access to education.¹⁴



¹³ Gumuchian, Marie-Louise., Heritage, Timothy. (2024, June 17th). "Actor Theo James named UNHCR global goodwill ambassador". Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/actor-theo-james-named-unhcr-global-goodwill-ambassador-2024-06-17/>

¹⁴ Azia, David. "About UNHCR". UNHCR. (2001-2024). Access on December 9th, 2024. <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr>



Topic A. Cultural preservation in refugee camps with a special emphasis on Rohingya refugees in Myanmar

1. Introduction

Refugees' identities are shaped by beliefs, ethnicity, feelings and cultural traditions, but are also affected by the economy, political and social conditions of their host country, which often challenge their sense of identity.¹⁵ Refugees are frequently placed in camps far from urban areas. But being in unfamiliar social and cultural contexts encourages a renewal of identity, because resettlement is rarely voluntary.¹⁶

Since identity has become associated with place, when refugees are housed in territories without legal grounds, they begin a new phase of identity renewal, as they find themselves in a new social, cultural, political, and economic environment that can affect their identity in the host country. The struggles of this progression in identity are often exacerbated by social stigma linked to their "refugee status", often led by discrimination and xenophobia. UNHCR has the objective of maintaining the identity and culture of refugees, without discrimination or a complete transculturalization.¹⁷

Once granted asylum, the person must decide how to integrate into their new society through a process of transculturalization. As a process defined by the individual, the timeline of adaptation and the preservation of such relies not only on the culture itself, but also on the political climate of their host country, an issue faced by the Rohingya refugees.¹⁸

The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic group residing primarily in Myanmar (Burma). However, the Burmese government does not recognize them as citizens, and therefore lack access to basic human rights such as education, healthcare, and land ownership. This denial of citizenship, under the 1982 Citizenship Act, has rendered them stateless, depriving them of

¹⁵ Gupta, Sanjana. "Why identity matters and how it shape us?". Verywell mind. (2023, May 30th). <https://www.verywellmind.com/why-identity-matters-and-how-it-shapes-us-7504546>

¹⁶ Allolio-Näcke, Lars. "Transculturalism". Springer Nature Link.(s.f.). https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_316

¹⁷ UNHCR. "Stateless people". UNHCR. (2001). <https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-refugee/>

¹⁸ Caringa, Victor. "How Rohingya refugees preserve their culture". Doctors without borders. (2023, August 25th). <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/six-years-displaced-how-rohingya-refugees-preserve-their-culture>

access to fundamental human rights and freedom of movement. For decades, they have suffered discrimination, persecution, and military violence.¹⁹

In 2017, the Burmese military launched a brutal campaign against them, resulting in numerous deaths and the loss of their homes. This forced more than 700,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, the largest refugee settlement in the world. Most of them now live in refugee camps in poor conditions, most of which lack clean water, have limited access to education and employment opportunities, and depend entirely on humanitarian aid to survive, which exacerbates their social vulnerability.²⁰

2. Concept definition

1. **Refugee** - An individual who has been forced to flee their country due to war, violence, environmental problems or persecution and has crossed an international border.²¹
2. **Statelessness** - Conditions of individuals who are not recognized as citizens by any country. This causes them to be denied basic rights like healthcare, education and employment.²²
3. **Rohingya** - A Muslim Ethnic minority from Myanmar's Rakhine State, who has faced discrimination and statelessness.²³
4. **Transculturalism** - Transformation of culture that can occur through processes such as deculturation, this creates a new cultural phenomena from the interactions between cultures.²⁴
5. **Cultural Preservation** - Safeguard valuable documents and heritage to maintain a nation's cultural legacy.²⁵

¹⁹ Sheikh, Saqib., Morris, Carolyn. "Rohingya cultural preservation". New Lines Institute. (2024, July 17th). <https://newlinesinstitute.org/state-resilience-fragility/complex-emergencies-and-humanitarian-crises/rohingya-cultural-preservation-on-an-internationally-coordinated-response-is-urgent/>

²⁰ Global Compact On Refugees. "Multi-stakeholder Pledge". Global Compact On Refugees. (2024). <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/multi-stakeholder-pledge-rohingya-refugees-expanded-resilience-enhanced-solutions>


²¹ UNHCR. "What is a refugee?". UNHCR. (2001). <https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-refugee>

²² UNHCR. "Stateless people". UNHCR. (2001). <https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-refugee>

²³ UNHCR. "Rohingya emergency". UNHCR. (2025, April). <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/rohingya-emergency>

²⁴ Allolio-Näcke, Lars. "Transculturalism". Springer Nature Link. https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_316?

²⁵ Helling, John. "Cultural preservation". ScienceDirect. (2012). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/cultural-preservation>

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6. **Identity** - Is a set of physical, mental, emotional, cultural and social characteristics that define an individual, that develops over time and relates to personal experiences.²⁶
 7. **Cultural Sensitivity in Humanitarian Aid** - Involves recognizing and respecting the cultural norms and practices of affected communities.²⁷

3. Actual situation

Since the refugees are in camps of Bangladesh, they must deal with the social, physical and psychological struggles of adaptation. Children born in exile grow with little to no connection to their culture, given that they lack the exposure to Rohingya culture as previous generations. Children must receive education in their language and influence from their culture to carry on their identity in order to further develop a greater sense of belonging, while in exile. Aspects like traditional values and languages are difficult to maintain in any hostile environment, and the complications of cultural preservation exacerbate in the particular situation of the Rohingya, as they flee a territory that, against international law, has tried to erase their population due to the culture they embody.²⁸


Additionally, the lack of formal education in the Rohingya language with restrictions on mobility and employment, makes younger generations grow disconnected from their roots. Members of the community are limited to pass on knowledge due to the trauma created by cultural cleansing and lack of institutional resources.²⁹

²⁶ Gupta, Sanjana. "Why identity matters and how it shape us?". Verywell mind. (2023, May 30th). <https://www.verywellmind.com/why-identity-matters-and-how-it-shapes-us-7504546>

²⁷ Kang I, Bora. "The need for cultural sensitivity in humanitarian aid". United Nations Association of Australia. (2016, October 5th). <https://www.unaa.org.au/2016/10/05/the-need-for-cultural-sensitivity-in-humanitarian-aid/>

²⁸ Nijman, Shari. "Training gives Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh camps vital skills for self-reliance". UNHCR. (2025, March 5th). <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/training-gives-rohingya-refugees-bangladesh-camps-vital-skills-self-reliance>

²⁹ Noor, Muhammad. "Preservation of Rohingya identity and cultural heritage". Internet achieve. (2024, October 6th). <https://archive.org/details/dweb-camp-2024-preservation-of-rohingya-identity-and-cultural-heritage>



There is also an increasing pressure to assimilate into dominant cultures or adapt to international humanitarian norms limiting their ability to pass on their cultural heritage without some form of cleansing. One of the most affected rights is cultural identity, like the ability to maintain traditions, language and beliefs, this can lead to isolation, anxiety and depression, which impacts the right to mental health too.³⁰

Also, this pressure may violate the right to freedom of expression and belief, since refugees are prevented from practicing or expressing their worldview. This also compromised the right in cultural life when the cultural practices are denied.³¹

Forced displacement often results in the dismantling of traditional markets and community gathering spaces, which are not only vital for economic subsistence but also serve as central pillars of cultural identity and social cohesion. For the Rohingya, the loss of access to these communal spaces contributes to cultural isolation and the gradual erosion of collective identity. Given their history of systemic discrimination and violence, Rohingya communities require comprehensive and sustained support to rebuild their lives and restore their sense of belonging. This necessitates coordinated efforts from host governments, international organizations, non-governmental actors, and, most critically, the UNHCR, whose mandate is to safeguard the rights and dignity of displaced populations.³²

4. Initiatives

Despite the challenges, several initiatives have been launched with the collaboration of the UNHCR and community organizations, to help preserve the Rohingya's cultural identity.

1. **Joint Response Plans (Protracted Refugee Crisis):** UNHCR, with more than 100 partners, launched the Joint Response Plan 2025-2026, which seeks to raise \$934.5 million to assist refugees with food, shelter, and education.³³

³⁰ Eleanor Berry, Stephanie., Taban, Isilay. "The right of minority-refugees to preserve their cultural identity". Sage journals. (2021, August 23th). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/09240519211033419>

³¹ Eleanor Berry, Stephanie., Taban, Isilay. "The right of minority-refugees to preserve their cultural identity". Sage journals. (2021, August 23th). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/09240519211033419>

³²

UNHCR. "Rohingya emergency". UNHCR. (2025, April). <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/rohingya-emergency>

³³ UNHCR. "UN and partners seek \$934.5m for live-saving aid to 1.5 million Rohingya refugees and their hosts in Bangladesh". UNHCR. (2025, March 24th). <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/press-releases/un-and-partners-seek-934-5m-life-saving-aid-1-5-million-rohingya-refugees-and>

2. **Stakeholder Engagement:** UNHCR seeks to enhance resilience and scale up solutions for Rohingya refugees, thereby alleviating pressure on host countries like Bangladesh.³⁴
3. **Infrastructure Development:** UNHCR and its partners have improved conditions in refugee camps by building roads, latrines, wells, and shelters, facilitating better access.³⁵
4. **United States Financial Assistance:** The United States provided \$73 million in support to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, ensuring continued access to essential services.³⁶
5. **Mental Health:** UNHCR prioritizes mental health services for Rohingya refugees, especially those most affected by discrimination or violence, in addition to helping them regain their identity.³⁷

5. Guide questions

1. How is your country contributing to the humanitarian crisis facing the Rohingya population?
2. What measures has your country taken to support international efforts to hold Myanmar accountable for the persecution of the Rohingya?
3. Is your country involved as a host country for refugees?
4. Is your country willing to provide humanitarian aid for Rohingya refugees?
5. How can your country collaborate with other nations to ensure long-term solutions for the Rohingya, including their repatriation or integration in host countries?

6. Countries

- Arab Republic of Egypt
- Commonwealth of Australia
- Democratic Republic of Algeria
- Dominion of Canada
- Federal Republic of Germany
- French Republic

³⁴ Global Compact On Refugees. "Multi-stakeholder Pledge". Global Compact On Refugees. (2024). <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/multi-stakeholder-pledge-rohingya-refugees-expanded-resilience-enhanced-solutions>

³⁵ UNHCR. "Rohingya emergency". UNHCR. (2025, April). <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/rohingya-emergency>

³⁶ Rahman, Shafiqur. "Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh welcome \$73 million in new U.S. financial aid". AP News. (2025, March 28th). <https://apnews.com/article/bangladesh-rohingya-aid-myanmar-8c3f2a916b49d103ce7364c812d1d157>

³⁷ UNHCR. "Rohingya emergency". UNHCR. (2025, April). <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/rohingya-emergency>

- Islamic Republic of Iran
- Islamic Republic of Pakistan
- Italian Republic
- Kingdom of Jordan
- Kingdom of Netherlands
- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- Kingdom of Spain
- Kingdom of Sweden
- Lebanon Republic
- Republic of Bangladesh
- Republic of Chile
- Republic of Iraq
- Republic of Sudan
- Republic of Türkiye
- Swiss Confederation
- United Arab Emirates
- United Kingdom
- United Mexican States
- United States of America



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<https://apnews.com/article/bangladesh-rohingya-aid-myanmar-8c3f2a916b49d103ce7364c812d1d157>

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<https://newlinesinstitute.org/state-resilience-fragility/complex-emergencies-and-humanitarian-crises/rohingya-cultural-preservation-an-internationally-coordinated-response-is-urgent/>

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