



The Winchester School Jebel Ali

European Union

Background Guide

Letter from the Chairs

Greetings Delegates,

It is an honour to welcome you all to the European Union here at Winchester Model United Nations 2026! We are deeply honoured to chair this committee, and are incredibly stoked for the conference!

As we navigate through these unprecedented times, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering dedication and commitment to the mission of the EU. As your chairs, we are looking forward to meeting, leading, and helping you all in person and hearing about all of the arguments and ideas that our delegates have to offer. In light of the global security challenges we face, your expertise, leadership, and tireless efforts are invaluable to the EU.

The significance of our collective endeavours cannot be overstated. As we convene here, fostering an atmosphere of open and respectful dialogue becomes crucial in cultivating a sense of unity and collaboration. Our diverse backgrounds and perspectives are invaluable assets we must harness to navigate the complex challenges ahead. We'll undoubtedly face difficult decisions and strive to establish consensus on pivotal issues in the days to come. However, don't be afraid to engage, debate, and even stir a bit of chaos to shape solutions and unearth valuable insights. That's precisely our intent within the European Union.

We eagerly await seeing you all at the conference, and we look forward to heated debates, fruitful discussions, and innovative solutions.

Regards,

The Dias of the European Union

Mir Faraz and Maryam Shahzad

Agenda 1: Resolving Sanction Fatigue in the Context of the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict

Vocabulary

- **Sanctions:** Measures imposed by states or international organisations to influence the behaviour of a target state through economic, financial, or diplomatic restrictions.
- **Restrictive Measures:** The European Union's formal term for sanctions, including asset freezes, travel bans, and sectoral restrictions.
- **Sanction Fatigue:** The declining political, economic, or public willingness to sustain sanctions over time due to rising costs or limited perceived effectiveness.
- **Economic Sanctions:** Restrictions on trade, investment, or financial transactions aimed at weakening a target state's economy.
- **Targeted (Smart) Sanctions:** Sanctions directed at specific individuals, entities, or sectors rather than the general population.
- **Sectoral Sanctions:** Restrictions imposed on entire economic sectors such as energy, finance, or defence.
- **Asset Freezes:** The blocking of access to financial assets and economic resources owned by sanctioned individuals or entities.
- **Sanctions Evasion:** Efforts by sanctioned actors to bypass restrictions through alternative trade routes or intermediaries.
- **Secondary Sanctions:** Penalties imposed on third parties that assist in sanctions circumvention.
- **Humanitarian Exemptions:** Provisions within sanctions regimes allowing access to essential humanitarian goods.
- **Unanimity Rule:** The EU requirement that all member states must agree to adopt or renew sanctions.

- **Political Cohesion:** The degree of unity among EU member states in sanctions policy and implementation.
- **Economic Spillover Effects:** Unintended economic consequences of sanctions on sanctioning states or third countries.
- **Cost-of-Living Crisis:** A rise in the cost of essential goods and services that places pressure on households.
- **Public Opinion:** The collective views of citizens influencing national and EU-level policy decisions.
- **Annexation:** The forcible acquisition of territory by a state, considered illegal under international law.
- **Crimea Annexation (2014):** Russia's incorporation of Crimea, which triggered the EU's initial sanctions regime.
- **Full-Scale Invasion (2022):** Russia's large-scale military invasion of Ukraine beginning in February 2022.
- **EU Sanctions Packages:** Successive rounds of EU restrictive measures imposed on Russia since 2014.
- **Energy Dependence:** Reliance on external sources for energy, particularly oil and natural gas.
- **Energy Weaponisation:** The use of energy supplies as political or economic leverage.
- **Energy Security:** The uninterrupted availability of energy sources at affordable prices.
- **SWIFT Exclusion:** The removal of Russian banks from the SWIFT system, restricting international financial transactions.
- **Frozen Russian Assets:** Russian state or central bank assets immobilised within EU jurisdictions.
- **War Weariness:** Public and political exhaustion caused by the prolonged conflict and its economic impacts.

Introduction to the Agenda

Since the events of the Russian Federation annexing Crimea in 2014, and launching the full scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the European Union has adopted an extensive sanctions regime. The EU's foremost aims with this regime are to collectively uphold international law, defend the sovereignty of Ukraine, and deter any at all future aggression, whether from Russia itself or other entities. These efforts of these restrictive measures have primarily been directed towards individuals, strategic industries, financial institutions, and key sources of state income; these standout measures have thereby heralded and marked one of the EU's most comprehensive sanctions efforts in its entire history.

However, due to the conflict regrettably being increasingly prolonged, a multitude of ever-growing challenges, critically to do with sustaining this sanctions framework, have persistently presented themselves to the European Union. The EU is faced with the following - rising energy prices, inflationary pressures, and broader cost-of-living concerns. These adversities have significantly strained and worn down EU economics and societies. Concurrently, it is essential to take into account the fact that enforcement efforts and political cohesion have been complicated and weakened due to a couple of crucial factors - economic impacts being uneven in severity across member states, and persistent attempts at evasion of sanctions.

The agenda invites delegates to minutely examine the widespread phenomenon that is sanction fatigue in the European Union. Assessment on how this circumstance affects the European Union's response to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, especially in terms of credibility, unity, and overall effectiveness in the long term, is adamantly needed in the committee. Expectations for all delegates entail a careful balance of strategic, economic, and humanitarian considerations, while simultaneously comprehensively exploring methods to maintain unity, strengthen enforcement, and adapt sanctions policy according to evolving realities; all of this must be achieved

while consciously avoiding the undermining of the European Union's core objectives and principles.

Background of the Agenda

The European Union's foreign and security policy has evolved over time, and it was those changes that gradually developed and adapted the European Union's sanctions regime, which was established in response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The EU finds sanctions, which operate under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) to be one of its primary tools; in the EU framework, sanctions are formally known and referred to as "restrictive measures". All sanctions require total unanimity among EU member states to be passed, and it is this unanimity rule that has, historically, repeatedly limited the outreach, effectiveness, and recurrency of sanctions. Therefore, EU sanctions usually end up being unsatisfactorily cautious and restrained, which makes the scale and duration of the current sanctions regime unusual and likely unforeseen, sustaining a regime like the current one is heavily demanding politically, and straining institutionally.

To truly understand the current sanctions regime, its origins must be noted. The EU's first sanctions against Russia were seen in 2014. These sanctions were a direct response to both Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine. The earliest of the sanctions were primarily aimed at individuals and entities that were found to be linked to the actions that undermined Ukraine's territorial integrity. The first sanctions also implemented sectoral restrictions, targeting the finance, energy, and defence sectors. Overall, the measures originally implemented in 2014 weren't as focused on being comprehensive as they were on being cautious and wary. The true goal was to apply political pressure without cutting diplomatic channels, at least fully. A key

consideration was minimising economic harm to member states within the EU, and it was this caution that strongly reflected the robust economic integration between the EU and Russia at that time.

Following the introduction of the initial regime, sanctions went on to become a recurring issue within EU politics. The issue was that sanctions required regular, repeated renewal, therefore mandatorily forcing a number of political negotiations; these negotiations, almost inevitably, ended up exposing and widening divisions between EU member states, due to differences in priorities. Some states prioritized the upholding of international norms and geopolitical deterrence. Meanwhile, others prioritized economic pragmatism, energy security, and domestic political stability. However, at the end of it all, despite the disagreements, sanctions would still ultimately be renewed consistently, and these renewals would reinforce the non-recognition of Crimea's annexation by the EU, while concurrently signalling the continued full commitment to a regulation-based world order.

The next fundamental turning point in the European Union's sanctions regime came in the form of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022. The invasion marked a major shift in the EU's approach, as the body rapidly attempted to drastically expand the ambition and scope of its sanctions policy. As a result, multiple sanctions packages were promptly adopted in quick, frantic succession. These measures targeted the most core pillars of the state and economy of Russia. These measures included the following: restrictions were placed on the Russian Central Bank; coal and most oil imports were banned; access to advanced technologies and multi-use goods was limited; exclusions from the SWIFT system were expanded upon; and broad asset freezes took place. Another mechanism that was implemented, coordinated with G7 partners, was the oil price cap. The aim of the G7 partners with the price cap was to apply pressure to Russia without risking the destabilisation of global energy markets.

These measures ultimately ended up having a mixed set of impacts, they did end up being successful in the sense that they increased pressure on Russia, but also unfortunately led to the intensification of internal economic and political challenges within the European Union and its member states. Structural vulnerabilities, stemming from many member states' long-time reliance on Russian fossil fuels, were made apparent by the energy supply disruptions that followed the implementation of the sanctions. As a method of response, the EU accelerated its energy diversification efforts post-2022. This diversification entailed increasing LNG imports, sourcing from alternative supplies, and increasing investment in renewable energy, so that member states could viably transition away from Russian energy. However, this transition was uneven across the various member states, as the process of indulging in the aforementioned diversification methods was costly to governments and economically disruptive. The ever-rising energy prices contributed to inflation, cost-of-living pressures, and industrial slowdowns. As a result, economic resilience and public tolerance, understandably, varied majorly across states.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict would continue to persist, and the longer the conflict went on, the more intense debate over sanctions became. Pressing questions and doubts regarding long-term effectiveness and sustainability emerged, and evidence of sanctions circumvention by Russia would become increasingly visible. This circumvention occurred via third party states, complex logistics networks, and alternative financial systems. These new developments raised further concerns about enforcement capacity, there was still no clear signal of the conflict ending, and this lack of a tangible endpoint would only increase uncertainty. Simultaneously, prolonged economic strain contributed to public fatigue and war weariness, which influenced domestic politics and made consensus building within the EU more complicated over time.

In this context, sanction fatigue has emerged as a multifaceted challenge encompassing economic exhaustion, political fragmentation, and declining public

support. It does not imply a rejection of sanctions in principle, but rather reflects the growing difficulty of maintaining unity, credibility, and strategic resolve over time. Understanding this background is essential for assessing how the European Union can adapt its sanctions policy to evolving realities while continuing to support Ukraine, uphold international law, and safeguard internal cohesion.

Overall, and more than ever in this context, sanction fatigue has emerged as a complex and multi-layered challenge that includes challenges like economic exhaustion, political fragmentation, and ever-declining public support for sanctions regimes. The issue of sanction fatigue is not necessarily about simply outright rejection of sanctions, it is about a deep, underlying difficulty in sustaining unity and commitment, and by extension credibility and resolve, amongst nations over time. Truly understanding this fact and this background is more than imperative to policy evaluation as to how the EU can continue to adapt sanctions in ever-changing realities - this includes the continual support of Ukraine, upholding of international law, and preservation of cohesion within the European Union.

Key Stakeholders

1. Ukraine

Ukraine is the primary beneficiary itself of the aforementioned, extensively discussed, sanctions. The country views the European Union's sanctions as a vital tool for limiting the Russian Federation's capacity, economically and militarily. However, contrary to the obvious, Ukraine does not just see sanctions as a harbinger of economic pressure on Russia, but also as a symbol of political and strategic support. Consequently, any form, sign, or inkling of easing, delay, or weakening of sanctions is perceived as a reduction of commitment by the EU. Ukraine's security outlook and diplomatic leverage is directly affected by the ongoing sanction fatigue, and therefore the country

closely monitors any internal debates on sustainability and unity within the EU.

2. Russian Federation

On the other side of things, the Russian Federation is the very target of the EU's restrictive measures. Russia has adapted to the onslaught of these "hostile measures" by restructuring economically, increasing domestic production, and expanding trade with non-EU partners. In an effort to reduce the impact of the EU's actions, Russia utilizes sanctions evasion mechanisms and alternative payment systems; this acute ability to essentially absorb economic pressure significantly influences EU perceptions of sanctions effectiveness - and if sanctions begin to appear ineffective, political justification for maintaining them quickly weakens, further contributing to fatigue.

3. Germany

As the single largest economy in the entirety of the European Union, the Federal Republic of Germany is a central driver of sanctions credibility, and an EU economic anchor. However, that is not all that makes Germany a key player in this agenda, the nation has a historically high dependency on Russian gas, which makes sanctions economically costly domestically. Increases in the price of energy have ripple-like adverse effects, particularly on industry, manufacturing, and cost-of-living for the general public. The subsequent undeniable pressure from Germany's own people to prioritize economic stability within the country over sanctions on Russia therefore heavily contributes to further fuelling sanction fatigue debates. And so, Germany's continued commitment is a key piece of the puzzle in maintaining EU-wide unity.

4. France

The French Republic, as is the case in so many worldwide discussions, debates,

and conflicts, is key due to its leading political role and strategic influence within the European Union, most notably in foreign policy. France may be relatively less energy-dependent than some other states, at least directly, but is still exposed to inflationary pressures. The country heavily emphasises EU strategic autonomy and diplomatic credibility, and takes a cautiously evaluative approach to debates; it balances both the desire for long-term pressure on Russia with concerns over sustainability, viability, and potential for escalation. Broader EU narratives on endurance and legitimacy are, crucially, shaped by what France's stance happens to be.

5. Poland and the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)

Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are firm supporters of sanctions; their severe views are driven by strong historical and geographic concerns that lead them to perceive the Russo-Ukraine war as a direct security threat. Therefore, these nations are willing to accept higher economic costs if it means a stronger guarantee of deterrence of the conflict. They are consistent in their advocacy against sanction relaxation, and growing sanctions fatigue elsewhere creates tension with their hardline positions.

6. Southern and Central European States (Eg. Italy, Hungary, Slovakia, etc.)

Internal divergence within the European Union is caused by the fact that some states face differing economic vulnerability and political resistance to sanctions. Note the following examples; Italy experiences pressures relating to industry and energy prices, which affect domestic support; Hungary is an open critic of sanctions and delayed or diluted measures; Slovakia, and many others, voice concerns over economic sustainability. These divisions from within almost automatically invalidate hopes of unanimity, and intensify sanction fatigue within EU decision making.

7. European Union Institutions

The European Union consists of several subdivisions and institutions, which collectively are all crucial to policy continuity and enforcement. The significance of the various institutions are as follows; the European Council is responsible for maintaining high-level political unity among leaders; the Council of the EU formally adopts and renews sanctions, vitally under unanimity; the European Commission drafts the very regulations themselves, and monitors their enforcement, while also designing strategies for economies and energy mitigation; lastly, the European External Action Service coordinates general widespread diplomacy and overall international consensus.

Key Issues

1. Sanction Fatigue within EU Member States

The term “sanction fatigue” essentially refers to the gradual lack of, or decrease in, effort to enforce or maintain sanctions. This can come in many forms, including decline in political willingness, economic tolerance, or public support over time. The imposition of prolonged sanctions has created an EU-wide sustained effort of applying economic pressure. However, differences in severity of conflict, such as rising energy costs and inflation, are undeniably ever-present within the EU’s member states. These differences in national experiences can greatly intensify internal disagreements, as disparities make it increasingly difficult to reach consensus on the renewal or expansion of sanctions. Overcoming the phenomenon of sanction fatigue is absolutely essential for the preservation of a coherent, united, and credible EU sanctions policy.

2. **Economic and Energy Impacts of Sanctions**

Many EU member states, even some of the most powerful of them, are heavily dependent on Russia for its oil and gas. Therefore, an overpowering instability has been caused in the global energy markets as a result of sanctions targeting Russia's energy sector. EU nations that rely on Russia for energy therefore face rising energy prices, supply disruptions, and broader inflationary pressures. Crucially, economic strain heavily influences public opinion and domestic political debates and viewpoints, and so it is imperative that governments give all their sincerest efforts to balancing economic resilience with foreign policy objectives. At the end of the day, the long-term viability and sustainability of sanctions depends on whether or not national economies can absorb prolonged shocks, as economic pressures directly feed into the wider issue of sanction fatigue.

3. **Effectiveness of Sanctions**

Amongst all the debate, the crux of the problem is simply whether or not EU sanctions truly, meaningfully, restrict Russia's economic and military capacity. Confidence in the impact of these sanctions is directly challenged by the numerous reports of sanctions evasion, as these reports make evident the fact that Russian financial institutions and industries have found ways to adapt to the restrictions placed on them. Some of these methods include the use of alternative supply chains and trade routes, which significantly reduce the originally intended pressure that the sanctions were planned to produce. This reduction of impact seemingly reduces sanctions to merely symbols - minor conveniences that can be easily bypassed. If sanctions become widely perceived in this way, support for them may decline rapidly; doubts surrounding effectiveness may generally increase reluctance among both governments and the public to maintain sanctions, and this reduced confidence would directly contribute to sanction fatigue.

4. Political Cohesion and Decision-Making Challenges

The critical point regarding EU sanctions decisions is the fact that they operate centrally under the rule of total unanimity - every member state must agree to adopt, renew, or expand restrictive measures. The problem arises when internal divisions are taken into account. These divisions are caused by differences in economic vulnerability, political priorities, and domestic public pressure, leading to delays and disagreements. It must be noted that maintaining overall unity is absolutely critical to political credibility, and disunity runs the risk of heavily damaging the European Union's standing amongst international partners and institutions.

5. Humanitarian Considerations

As is obvious to most, sanctions are aimed at solely targeting the Russian government and any associated entities. However, it is almost inevitable that unintended humanitarian consequences may arise. For example, completely innocent civilian populations in Russia can be indirectly affected by sanctions. In fact, vulnerable groups in even third party countries can experience some spillover effects. It is a necessity that access to essential goods - such as food, medicine, clothing, housing, etc. - is never halted; however, this remains a persistent challenge. Balancing targeted pressure with humanitarian protection positively affects legal legitimacy, moral credibility, and public support for sanctions.

6. Coordination with International Partners

It's an irrefutable fact that sanctions are greatly more effective when implemented collectively, with harmony between all stakeholders. Pressure on Russia is immensely increased when coordination with parties such as G7 states, NATO allies, and other international partners is achieved. However, as has been extensively explained, differences in economic exposure among various member states and partners complicate the realism of the ideal of

alignment. Not only that, but political will and scope of sanction vary between states, and it is this very inconsistency that creates loopholes ready to be exploited, thereby weakening the overall impact of sanctions. It is imperative that the question of how to balance EU unity with broader international cooperation is carefully considered, as strong coordination will certainly help sustain pressure while simultaneously reducing fatigue.

7. Long-Term Strategic Implications

It cannot be ignored that sanctions have consequences that extend far beyond short-term economic effects; these long-term impacts - such as EU geopolitical influence, economic stability, and energy security - are just as important, and must be taken into consideration. Every minute modification or extension, or a lift of sanctions, has a profound impact. Each one of them shape's Russia's future behaviour, affects how the EU is perceived globally, and puts the EU itself into a spotlight - a position where it becomes the object of scrutiny. For example, the EU's credibility and reliability in situations of crisis management become at stake. Delegates must fairly weigh the more obvious immediate domestic pressures against the equally imperative. long-term strategic goals, and that is where the challenge lies - balancing short-term costs with enduring objectives.

Past UN Actions

1. UN General Assembly Resolutions on Ukraine

The UN General Assembly has been quite active in addressing the situation in Ukraine, having adopted multiple resolutions since 2014 aimed at remedying it. The resolutions heavily condemn a multitude of the Russian Federation's actions, the 2014 annexation of Crimea being one of them. Out of all the resolutions, it is Resolution 68/262 that is the standout - it reaffirmed Ukraine's territorial integrity, and called on all states to not recognize the

Crimean Peninsula as a part of Russia. It is important to note that resolutions formulated by the UNGA are non-binding; however, they still heavily contribute to establishing a pivotal legal and diplomatic framework.

2. Security Council Deliberations and Veto Challenges

The United Nations Security Council has exhaustively discussed and debated the conflict between Russia and Ukraine for many years, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 further intensified said talks. Unfortunately, the Russian Federation has repeatedly utilized its potent tool of veto power to time and again block any binding resolutions, thereby completely preventing the adoption of sanctions against Russia under the UN's mandate. This recurring blockage of productive resolutions being passed underscores the long-standing structural limitations within the Security Council - any of the P5 can effortlessly prevent the adoption of resolutions as per their best, often self-centric, interests, without any further debate. These limitations ultimately reduce reliance on the United Nations and increase reliance on other regional and multilateral actors, such as the European Union. The EU has therefore taken a much greater role that entails applying independent sanctions, crucially contributing to the continued, sustainable, international pressure, despite the deadlock in the Security Council.

3. UN Human Rights Council Monitoring

Several monitoring mechanisms, with Ukraine at the center of their focus, have been put in place by the UN Human Rights Council. These mechanisms serve the vital purposes of documenting any and all human rights violations pertaining to the ongoing conflict, and practically assessing humanitarian consequences while on the ground themselves. The reports that these missions have spawned have been extremely beneficial to informing EU decisions on targeted sanctions, by providing an influx of credible and detailed evidence. The findings are especially potent in their usefulness in deep

examination; they are relevant for identifying the very individuals responsible for orchestrating violations to begin with, and also guide the design of humanitarian exemptions. Both of these use cases help minimize, and hopefully eradicate, civilian harm.

4. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

The UN Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA) is responsible for the coordination of all international humanitarian assistance, such as delivery of aid, that flows into Ukraine. As mentioned previously, the sanctions set in place by the European Union include humanitarian exemptions, which exist for the purpose of allowing the uninterrupted flow of essential goods; it is the OCHA that helps ensure that all exemptions are truly effective in real-life practice, thereby reducing the risk of sanctions exacerbating civilian suffering. In any sanctions debates, humanitarian outcomes are always a central concern and focal point of deliberation, and that is why the OCHA's role is ever-relevant to discussions on sanction fatigue.

5. International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Requests and Cases

Time and again, Ukraine has initiated legal proceedings at the International Court of Justice against Russia. The cases, proceedings of which are ongoing and inconclusive, pertain to alleged violations of international law by Russia. Albeit the unfinished status of the proceedings, they still crucially contribute to establishing a legal basis for international accountability, even for future reference outside of this particular conflict. Actions taken by the ICJ in general strengthen arguments in favour of measures taken by governing bodies. For example, they reinforce the legitimacy of EU sanctions, and provide foundation to the view that sanctions support the rule of international law.

6. UN Security Council Sanctions Committees

As already detailed, the UN Security Council has not been able to pass binding resolutions that impose sanctions on Russia, due to the fact that Russia

possesses veto power. However, the UNSC does have sanctions committees that exist for the purpose of dealing with related territorial conflicts, including issues linked to Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. These committees are imperative to sanctions programs, as they provide technical guidance on sanctions design, outline best practice for implementation and enforcement of sanctions, and establish monitoring and reporting mechanisms. This is why the structures of sanctions regimes imposed by the EU are heavily informed by these sanctions committees.

7. UN Reports on Global Economic Impacts

Multiple United Nations agencies, such as the UNCTAD and UNDESA consistently publish reports detailing the impacts of sanctions impacts. These reports minutely analyze economic effects on developing and third world countries, specifically spillover consequences like disrupted supply chains, inflationary pressures, and economic vulnerabilities in non-EU states. This information aids the assessment of the broader, oftentimes unintended, global costs of sanctions, and is therefore greatly relevant to policymakers within the European Union - a fact made evident by the way that these findings feed into ongoing debates about sustainability and sanction fatigue.

Questions to Consider

- What are the primary causes and consequences of sanction fatigue within the European Union?
- How have EU sanctions on Russia evolved since 2014, and how effective have they been in achieving their objectives?

- Which sectors, populations, and member states are most affected by sanctions, and how does this influence political cohesion?
- How can the EU balance economic, political, and humanitarian considerations when designing or renewing sanctions?
- What role do international partners, third-party states, and global markets play in the effectiveness of EU sanctions?
- How can the EU ensure enforcement of sanctions while preventing circumvention by Russia or allied actors?
- What strategies could be used to maintain public support for sanctions despite economic and social pressures?
- How do energy dependence and energy security considerations influence sanction policy and EU unity?
- In what ways can sanctions be adapted to remain credible and effective over the long term without creating unintended humanitarian consequences?
- How does the EU's decision-making process (e.g., unanimity rule, political cohesion) affect its ability to respond to the Russia-Ukraine conflict?

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Agenda 2: Addressing the Disparity Across Member States in Supporting the Integration of Refugees in Europe

Vocabulary

- **Refugees:** People outside their country of origin who are in need of international protection due to feared persecution, armed conflict, a serious threat to their life, violence or serious public disorder.
- **Asylum:** A state granting protection on its territory to people outside their country of nationality due to them fleeing persecution, serious harm or other reasons
- **Asylum seekers:** A general term for any person who is seeking international protection and has applied for refugee status or a complementary international protection status and has not yet received a final decision on their claim.

- **Migrants:** People who choose to move across international borders, not because of a direct threat of harm but exclusively for other reasons, such as job opportunities, family or improving livelihood.
- **Disparity:** Unequal status, rights, and opportunities as a result of economic gaps, social exclusion and unequal access to essential services
- **Displacement:** The forced movement of people from their homes, usually due to conflict, natural disasters, or persecution.
- **Instrumentalisation of Migration:** The deliberate use of migration flows by states or actors to achieve political or strategic goals.
- **Integration:** The process of adapting refugees to the host society and equitably including them in the activities of the host society , while the host society welcomes and adapts to the cultural and traditional values of the refugees, fostering diversity and inclusion.
- **Secondary migration:** when asylum seekers or refugees of their first resettlement location move to another country prompted by better job prospects, asylum procedures, living standards, etc.
- **LEDCs (Less Economically Developed Countries):** Countries with a lower HDI score and GNI per capita and hence lower economic development, overall living standards as well as other factors including other factors including less industrialisation, poverty, high birth rate and death rate

Introduction to the Agenda

The share of forcibly displaced people in Europe has grown rapidly with more than 20 million refugees by the end of 2025, fleeing from violence and persecution in their own countries. The refugee crisis in 2015 led to more than 911,000 refugees and migrants arriving on European shores and this scale later increased after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, generating the largest humanitarian crisis the region has faced after World War II.

In the context of refugee displacement, a small number of countries bear a disproportionate share of the burden leading to disparities in how refugees are hosted and integrated into society. This is a result of differences in national laws, labour markets, economic capacities of countries and their geographics. The term 'disparity' refers to a wide gap between countries in the number of refugees hosted by nations, their access to rights including shelter, education, social protection and healthcare as well as inclusion in society. This undermines commitments established under United Nations frameworks such as the United Nations Refugee Convention (1951) which has set the global standards for the protection of refugees.

A small number of countries like Germany, France, Spain and Italy host a majority of refugees and asylum applicants while most LEDCs like Cyprus and Greece face the highest per capita pressures of the refugee influx. Germany, France, Spain and Italy have handled 82% of Europe's asylum applications, leading to disproportionate economic pressure and uneven opportunities for refugees. For example, refugees in states like Poland or Hungary face weak support and have inadequate reception, detention practices, and limited access to services such as limited labour access and housing shortages, preventing their fair inclusion in society. Whereas in other countries that are known to have a higher living standards, better access to labour markets and faster asylum processes are more likely to be favourable to refugees in terms of their future prospects and integration into society. An example is Germany, which has faced the highest level of secondary migration since it has one of the largest economies and labour markets in Europe.

Authorities in countries have failed to adapt their policies and amenities to the rising scale of refugees, leading to the minimum standards of living not constantly being upheld in accordance with the EU charter of fundamental rights as well as the European Convention of Human rights. In frontline states like Greece, this has led to overcrowding in detention centers, inefficient care and even illegal border pushbacks. Furthermore, this has resulted in secondary migration, where refugees

relocate to countries offering more favourable reception conditions and procedures. These secondary movements have led to increased pressure on the host countries that refugees migrate to, further straining their asylum systems, reception capacities, shortages in amenities and hindering national security. These movements are often irregular and hence lead to dangerous conditions for the refugees as well, making them prone to violence, exploitation by human trafficking and migrant smuggling networks, and delays in the assessment of their asylum claims.

Over the years, the disparities in hosting refugees has been further exacerbated by “instrumentalisation” of migration where states exploit the irregular flow of refugees to achieve political or strategic goals. Countries have justified the tightening of their asylum policies and strengthening of borders using claims that Russia and Belarus are deliberately using migrants to create political pressure. The strengthening of internal European borders and prioritising emergency responses rather than the long term integration has resulted in weak refugee protection measures and creates a conflict between countries protecting their own national interests at the expense of universal human equality.

The burden and responsibility sharing of refugees remains an international issue that is not the responsibility of one state alone. European states, along with the wider international community, have a shared duty to help conflicted countries that carry the heaviest burden of refugees which places pressure on housing, public services, and local communities. This must be done upholding international human right laws, ensuring the basic needs of these refugees are met, guaranteeing access to legal protection, abiding by non refoulement principles and providing the support they need to rebuild their lives.

Background of the Agenda

The height of the crisis dates back to 2015 during the Syrian war where Europe was overwhelmed by the unprecedented arrival of refugees. The flow of migrants increased from 153,000 in 2008 to more than 1 million in 2015 where more than 75% of the refugees arriving had fled conflict and violence in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. A record of 1.3 million migrants applied for asylum in the European Union, a fundamental human right legally guaranteed in the declaration of human rights.

This extensive number of migrants placed increased pressure on frontline arrival countries like Italy that faced an escalation of refugees due to its convenient geographical location. As a response, countries like Italy went into a state of emergency where its right wing government allocated close to \$50 million dollars to help tackle the influx of refugees. Yet the cost was more than just financial; the small proportion of countries on the forefront of this crisis burdened societal, political and human struggles. Countries like Greece faced over 850,000 arrivals yet lacked a sufficient amount of services like reception centres and medical aid with refugees having to endure exploitation, poor conditions and serious human right concerns.

This is a reflection of the lack of discrepancies in the refugee burden and support offered with countries like Italy, Greece, Hungary and Germany facing challenges that could reshape their societies. As a result of these consequences, European countries faced a rise in populist right wing movements that started demanding tighter immigration rules. Consequently this resulted in anti immigration campaigns leading to policy shifts with more aggressive deportation systems to tighten the control of arrivals and hence limiting the free movement of refugees. European countries were forced to adopt outsourced border control and externalization policies to protect their regional stability and international security. This involved agreements with other regions to prevent migrants from reaching Europe, further worsening disparities.

In 2016, the EU and Turkey entered an agreement to prevent the irregular flow of refugees and limit the number of asylum seekers in Europe. This agreement involved Turkey taking back those who illegally crossed its borders to enter Greece in exchange for 6 billion euros of aid for the facility of refugees in Turkey, helping reduce pressure at Europe's border however this did not consider the long term integration strategies and the livelihood of refugees.

Overall, historical factors such as the economic capacity of countries, differences in asylum policies, domestic politics and refugee migration patterns explain the reasons for the existing disparities in supporting the integration of refugees today.

Key Stakeholders

1. Frontline and Host Countries

a. Germany

Due to its geographical position as being the closest European entry point, Germany currently hosts the largest number of refugees in Europe. This has led to increased pressure on its borders and amenities with the country struggling to create fair and humane asylum policies resulting in overcrowded and unsafe asylum camps.

b. Italy

Asylum seekers crossing the Mediterranean view Italy as a transit or host country leading to an increased number of refugees and asylum claims resulting in public and political tension. This has contributed to a rise in far right movements, advocating for stricter immigration rules and border controls. In some instances, this hardline stance on migration has led to boats carrying refugees being turned away leaving people stranded at sea in dire conditions. Moreover, as a result of the

Dublin regulation, many migrants become stuck in Italy and are unable to move to other European states, creating unequal responsibility among European states.

c. **Greece**

Greece hosts as well as transits a majority of refugees and asylum seekers coming largely from countries like Afghanistan and Syria, yet lacks adequate funding and support. A key example of this is seen on the Aegean islands which has served as a primary hotspot for new refugee arrivals leading to overcrowding of reception facilities with sometimes little or no provision of food or water. With the absence of an adequate amount of facilities as well as alternatives, hundreds of refugees tend to sleep in unsanitary and cramped conditions hence prolonging integration efforts and leading to humanitarian concerns.

d. **Spain**

Spain hosted around 385,701 refugees by 2023, second to Germany and is under per capita strain with an overwhelming amount of refugees. As a result of this, many Asylum seekers have faced challenges involving long times to obtain an appointment and formalise appropriate documentation to express their need for asylum. The lack of amenities have also led to asylum rooms facing overcrowded and insanitary conditions. The Spanish Confederation of the National Police reported an increase of asylum applicants up to 350% since June 2024 making it essential that proper assistance is provided.

2. **Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

Recently, the greatest share of refugees in Europe have come from countries actively facing conflict such as Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan. Russia's full invasion of Ukraine in 2022 brought about one of the largest internal displacements in Europe with an estimated 3.7 million people. In 2023 Syrians

were the largest group granted protection in the EU with 209,000 asylum applications submitted. Afghans represent 21% of the over one million refugees who have entered Europe since 2015 fleeing from a war that has been causing political instability, poverty, violence and the lack of access to basic services for around 38 years. Under European union and international law, every individual regardless of nationality must be granted their right to a fair, thorough asylum procedure depending on their circumstances and access to international protection. However, as a result of factors such as racial bias, domestic policies and security concerns, European states have established a sort of refugee hierarchy, where refugees of different nationalities are given a higher status and better protection compared to others. Moreover, Varied integration support between countries with weaker frameworks expose refugees to difficulties in finding jobs, poor detention, xenophobia and even illegal border pushbacks. OECD research shows that refugees' employment rates can differ by more than 30 percentage points between EU states, largely due to differences in integration support and labor market access. These disparities also encourage secondary movements as refugees attempt to relocate to countries offering better opportunities sometimes through illegal ways like migrant smugglers, further putting their lives at risk, resulting in long asylum waiting periods and psychological stress.

Key Issues

1. Externalization and Strengthened Border Control Policies

As a result of the large uneven movement of refugees, member states have adopted policies to limit the number of refugees that arrive at Europe's borders and outsource this responsibility to other regions outside of Europe. As a result of this, the rhetoric of protecting borders becomes more fundamental than protecting the lives of vulnerable people. European

countries have made agreements with other member states to prevent migrants from arriving in the first place, leading to the deaths of thousands of people in the past decade as refugees are forced to take longer and more dangerous routes to find a safe haven. Between 2015 and September 2025, at least 27,000 refugees finding a transit path to Europe drowned in the Mediterranean. However, these policies are justified by the protection and stability of countries' borders with European countries having a sovereign right to control the entry of non nationals into their territory.

2. Restricted Asylum Rights

European member states have rolled back on asylum rights and agreed to a new framework that significantly tightens asylum policies. For example, many countries have restricted family reunification, making it harder for refugees to bring their family members to safety. Rejected asylum applicants can be sent to 'return hubs' that are detention centres outside the EU where asylum applicants are sent for quick deportation. These tend to bring refugees temporary protection instead of full refugee status, preventing their long term integration into society. Moreover, this results in higher rejection rates and could lead to refoulement violations, putting the lives of refugees at risk.

3. Failure to Implement Burden Sharing Measures

Countries have failed to implement policies that lead to the even distribution and responsibility of refugees to prevent further disparities. Regulations such as the Dublin regulation places responsibility of asylum processing on first European countries of arrival. As a result, this has forced countries like Greece and Italy to bear a disproportionately heavy burden on them compared to other member states. Moreover, many European initiatives to address the growing number of refugees have ignored this uneven distribution, undermining the goal of equalising member state contributions and support. An example is the European Refugee fund that was set up to help EU countries

handle refugees fairly by providing aid to countries hosting them. However, this aid was provided on the basis of the number of refugees, rather than the size or capacity of the country, leading to an uneven benefit and distribution.

4. Poor Living Conditions and Access to Essential Services for Refugees

There have been several occasions where UN member states have neglected or been unable to defend the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. In some countries, the overburdening of refugees and lack of support and funding has led to overcrowded detention centres where basic hygiene and safety are limited leading to poverty and social exclusion. In 2022, 42,676 people had arrived in Greece, doubling the population of asylum seekers causing reception centers to exceed their capacity and hence leading to a lack of food, shelter and electricity for refugees. After traumatic journeys and struggles faced when arriving in Europe, continued barriers to human rights have exacerbated the conditions of refugees causing psychological distress, trauma and making them prone to vulnerability. Most refugees arrive in these countries facing economic hardships and poverty, unable to rebuild a life and integrate into societies, facing an uncertain future. On top of this, the unfavourable outcomes regarding education, healthcare and housing access makes the possibility of integration and a self sufficient life almost unattainable. A UNHRC report showcases how 60,000 displaced Ukrainian children remain out of school, limiting their possibilities and long term stability.

5. Dangerous Transit Routes for Refugees

There have been many irregular refugee movements across dangerous transit routes that are provoked through regional instability, intense conflict and poverty in countries that the refugees are fleeing from. Many migrants attempt to flee and reach Europe in desperation through life strengthening journeys such as through the Mediterranean using overcrowded boats or as a last

resort use migrant smuggling. It has been reported by the IMO (international migration organisation) that in the first three months of 2025, at least 555 people had lost their lives trying to cross the Mediterranean sea to reach Europe with approximately 30,000 deaths on Mediterranean routes since 2014.

Past UN Actions

1. EU Pact on Migration and Asylum Reforms

The pact was agreed in May of 2024 and provides a common framework for migration and asylum laws, with the aim of strengthening and integrating European Union policies on migration. The pact advocates for solidarity mechanisms such as relocating quotas to alleviate pressures on countries that host a large number of refugees. This aims to ensure fairer responsibility sharing for asylum seekers.

2. 2015 Emergency Relocation Mechanism

During the Syrian war in 2015, European Union member states agreed to a two year plan involving the relocation of asylum seekers to ease pressure under the EU's emergency relocation scheme, particularly on frontline states facing disproportionate arrivals. Around 106,000 asylum seekers were relocated from Greece and Italy to other member states based on their economic capacity and population, improving the lives of many seeking protection and reducing immediate strain on national asylum systems. The mechanism enabled quicker access to integration opportunities in more supportive member states, particularly Germany, which accepted nearly 70% of all relocations while also reinforcing EU solidarity and collective responsibility to control disparities between member states. Although many member states such as Italy and Greece agreed to relocate their refugees, countries like Hungary and Slovakia demonstrated an alternating stance by

ruling against the decision in the Court of Justice and hence took no action to relocate any refugees or partake in the mechanism. This non-compliance by certain member states largely hindered the success of redistributing the burden of refugees by relocation to alleviate the pressure faced by member states and undermined the scheme's overall effectiveness.

3. The European Refugee Fund

The European refugee fund was an EU funding program designed to support member states in adequately rescuing and receiving refugees. The European refugee fund distributed over 6 billion euros across its phases, with 70% of funds allocated for integration efforts such as language courses, vocational training, and social services.

4. EU's Temporary Protection Mechanism

This was an emergency response activated first in March 2022, following Russia's war on Ukraine, providing immediate group based protection to those fleeing Ukraine. The mechanism aligns with the principles of The Global Compact of Refugees (2018) and ensures immediate access to essential services allowing for quick integration. It allowed for streamlined protection in groups rather than case to case reviews for Ukrainian refugees, enabling fast collective action to the situation.

5. The UN agenda for protection

A United Nations framework that comprises six goals, to improve the protection of refugees and Asylum seekers around the world that emerged from the Global Consultations Process which brought together various member states, UN agencies and NGOs to discuss evolving the protection strategies of refugees. The framework includes goals such as strengthening the implementation of the 1951 Refugee Convention, protecting refugees when migrating borders, sharing of refugee burdens between member states,

ensuring the legal protection and security of refugees and intensifying integration efforts.

Questions to Consider

- How to integrate refugees into society and get them to be an economic asset to the countries that provide them with security to provide a mutual benefit?
- How to prioritize the socio economic integration of refugees while preventing further crisis in right wing extremism that campaign on strong anti immigration and anti refugee policies?
- How could EU countries and other stakeholders better predict refugee flows and create strategies to distribute the burden of refugees equally amongst countries?
- What measures can be taken to increase the efficiency of standardized reporting mechanisms in order to better understand and compare refugee socio-economic conditions across European countries?
- What specific policy measures could be implemented to address the particular needs and vulnerability of children and other marginalized groups among migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers?
- What are ways countries could enhance responsibility and burden sharing mechanisms for the support of refugees while respecting national sovereignty?
- In what ways can member states ensure that national security concerns do not go against commitments to fulfill their human right obligations towards refugees and asylum seekers?
- Why have past actions to prevent disparities in refugee integration failed?

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