



Forum: UNHCR

Issue: Combating the persecution and discrimination of ethnic minority groups.

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Section One: Introduction Of The Issue

Introduction

Ethnic minority group persecution and prejudice are ongoing global humanitarian issues. Ethnic minorities are often routinely denied access to social services, healthcare, education, economic opportunity, and political engagement. Extreme instances of this kind of bigotry can lead to genocide, bloodshed, and forced relocation. The number of refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), and stateless people worldwide has increased as a result of ethnic persecution, which is one of the factors driving individuals to leave their homes and seek safety in other nations. As of mid-2025, around 122.6 million people were forcefully relocated as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and other disasters, according to UN reports.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, is tasked with working with states and partners to preserve international protection standards as well as providing protection and assistance to refugees and stateless persons. In order to safeguard vulnerable groups and promote world peace and human rights, it is still essential to address ethnic discrimination and persecution.



Definition of Key Terms

- **Refugee:** A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside their country of nationality and unable or unwilling to avail themselves of its protection.
- **Asylum Seeker:** An individual who seeks international protection in another country but whose status as a refugee has not yet been legally recognized.
- **Internally Displaced Person (IDP):** Someone forced to flee their home due to conflict, violence, or persecution but who remains within their country's borders.
- **Stateless Person:** A person who is not considered a national by any state under its laws. Over **75% of known stateless persons belong to ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority groups**, which exacerbates exclusion and marginalization.
- **Persecution:** Systematic mistreatment directed at individuals or groups based on identity factors (ethnicity, religion, etc.) that seriously deprive them of rights, security, and dignity.
- **Ethnic Minority:** A population distinct in cultural, linguistic, religious, or historical identity, making up a minority relative to the dominant community and often subjected to discrimination or marginalization



Background Information

Ethnic minority groups often experience institutional discrimination and structural injustices that limit their access to services, legal protection, and political engagement. This prejudice frequently occurs before relocation and intensifies during emergencies, making people more susceptible to injury, exploitation, and forced migration. For instance, the Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim minority in Rakhine State, Myanmar, have long faced discrimination in the form of brutal military crackdowns, denial of citizenship, and travel restrictions. In 2017, hundreds of thousands of people fled to Bangladesh and other nations as a result of these acts, which still cause displacement today.

Discriminatory policies that exclude minority populations frequently lead to statelessness, or the lack of a recognized nationality. Stateless people encounter obstacles to employment, healthcare, education, and legal rights, which exacerbates cycles of marginalization and instability. The Rohingya make up a sizable share of the estimated 4.4 million stateless persons. Beyond just causing personal misery, prejudice against ethnic minorities can lead to long-term displacement crises, strain host communities, impede sustainable development, and disturb stability both domestically and internationally.



Section Two: United Nations and International Involvement

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

UN Agencies & Bodies

- **UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees):**
 - The primary agency responsible for protecting refugees, stateless people, and displaced populations. UNHCR leads emergency response, protection monitoring, shelter, education, legal assistance, and resettlement. It produces the annual *Global Trends* report detailing displacement patterns worldwide.
Example: In 2023–2024, UNHCR coordinated protection and assistance for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, and supported internally displaced communities in Ethiopia's Tigray region.
- **OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights):**
 - Monitors human rights conditions affecting ethnic minorities and documents violations. OHCHR issues reports recommending changes to national laws and practices that discriminate against minorities.
- **UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund):**
 - Addresses the specific vulnerabilities of minority children, including access to education, child protection, and healthcare in displacement settings. UNICEF often partners with UNHCR to ensure schooling for displaced children.
- **IOM (International Organization for Migration):**
 - Works on migrant protection, voluntary return programs, and reintegration. IOM and UNHCR coordinate when displacement intersects with broader migration flows.

Key Member States and Regional Actors

- **Turkey:** Hosts one of the largest refugee populations globally, including groups fleeing ethnic persecution (e.g., Syrians, Yazidis).



- **Pakistan:** Historically hosts refugee populations including minorities fleeing persecution from neighboring countries.
- **Bangladesh:** Hosts over a million Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution in Myanmar.
- **Germany:** A major resettlement destination in Europe and influential in shaping EU refugee policy frameworks.

Non-Governmental & Civil Society Organizations

- **Amnesty International & Human Rights Watch:** Publish reports on human rights violations against ethnic minorities and displaced persons, providing evidence for debate and policy reform.
- **Minority Rights Group International:** Specializes in studying discrimination and exclusion of minority groups globally.
- **International Rescue Committee (IRC):** Provides humanitarian assistance, livelihood programs, and protection services in crisis zones.

Regional Bodies

- **African Union (AU):** Works on frameworks like the Kampala Convention to protect internally displaced persons in Africa.
- **European Union (EU):** Develops asylum policies affecting ethnic minorities seeking protection in Europe.



Section Three: Solving The Issue

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

International Protection and Resettlement Programs

- UNHCR and states operate refugee camps and centers where displaced persons receive basic aid.
- Resettlement programs allow a fraction of refugees to relocate to third countries for long-term protection.
Limitations: Only a small percentage of refugees are resettled annually due to capacity and political constraints.

Legal Frameworks and National Reforms

- Many countries have adopted anti-discrimination laws and reformed nationality laws to reduce statelessness.
- Some states have implemented legal protections for minority languages, cultures, and political participation.
Limitations: Implementation varies widely, and discriminatory legal practices persist in some regions.

Monitoring, Reporting, and Advocacy Efforts

- Human rights bodies document violations and submit recommendations to governments via reporting mechanisms.
- Civil society campaigns raise global awareness and pressure states to comply with international norms.

Humanitarian Assistance and Development Programs

- Aid organizations provide food security, health services, and education in displacement settings.
- Psychosocial support programs help restore dignity and facilitate community cohesion.



Possible Solutions:

Legal and Policy Solutions

- **Strengthen international enforcement of anti-discrimination treaties.**
Proposals may include enhancing compliance review processes or incentivizing adoption of non-discriminatory nationality laws.
- **Harmonize domestic laws with international refugee and human rights law.**
Encouraging states to ratify and implement ICERD, ICCPR, and Refugee Convention provisions.

Protection & Assistance Mechanisms

- **Expand safe and legal pathways for refugees and persecuted minorities.**
This includes humanitarian visas, family reunification schemes, and expanded resettlement quotas.
- **Invest in identification and documentation programs**
To reduce statelessness by ensuring affected persons receive legal identity documents, birth registration, and nationality documentation.

Monitoring, Data & Accountability

- **Strengthen data collection on ethnic discrimination and displacement.**
Better data helps target interventions and highlight gaps in protection.
- **Support independent monitoring bodies**
That regularly assesses compliance with anti-discrimination norms and refugee protection standards.

Community & Educational Approaches

- **Promote inclusion and anti-bias education** in host and origin countries to reduce societal discrimination.
- **Support local civil society and minority advocacy groups**
Empower grassroots voices and advance community-driven protection strategies.

Development & Economic Solutions

- Integrate displaced and minority populations into national education and employment programs to reduce marginalization and foster resilience.



International Coordination

- Enhance cooperation between UNHCR and regional bodies (AU, EU, ASEAN) to ensure consistent protection standards and resource sharing.

Guiding Questions for Debate

1. How can states balance national sovereignty with obligations to protect refugees and ethnic minorities?
2. What measures can be taken to eliminate discriminatory nationality laws that fuel statelessness?
3. Which resettlement or migration pathways are most effective in protecting those fleeing ethnic persecution?
4. How can international monitoring be made more effective and impartial?
5. Should economic incentives be tied to states' compliance with anti-discrimination standards?
6. How can international cooperation be structured to assist both host communities and displaced populations sustainably?

Timeline of events

Date	Event	Significance
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted	First universal affirmation of rights including non-discrimination and asylum rights.
1951	Refugee Convention signed	Legal definition of refugees and framework for international protection.
1965	ICERD adopted	Commits states to eliminate racial and ethnic discrimination.
1967	Refugee Protocol enacted	Removes geographic and temporal limits from refugee protections.
1994	Rwandan Genocide	Massive ethnic violence → highlighted need for early protection mechanisms.
2001	Durban Conference	Strengthened global commitment to fight racism and discrimination.



Date	Event	Significance
2014	#IBelong Campaign	UNHCR's global campaign aimed at ending statelessness by 2024.
2017	Rohingya Crisis escalates	Mass displacement due to ethnic persecution.
2020–2025	UNHCR <i>Global Trends</i> shows rising displacement	Emphasizes ongoing crisis scale and need for solutions.

Section Four: Resources

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