



Conflict Factsheet

## North Korea's Famine Refugees

Type of conflict Sub	Intensity 2
Conflict Locality Eastern Asia	Time 1990 –ongoing
Countries N. Korea, China	Resources Agricultural / Pastoral Land



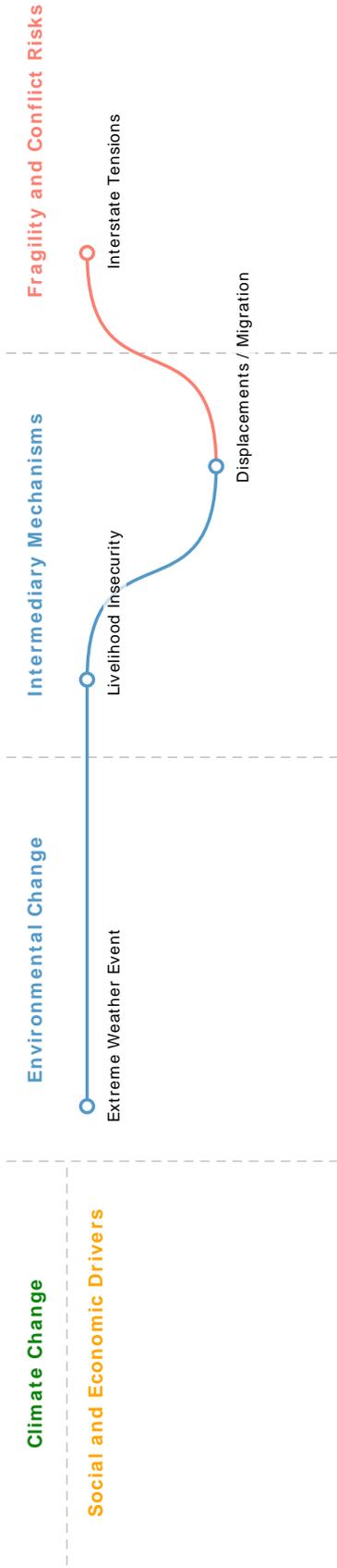
Livelihood  
insecurity  
and migration

### Conflict Summary

Famine in North Korea has caused refugees to migrate to China. This has been a point of contention between China and North Korea, and other international parties, such as the United Nations.



### Conceptual Model



### Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land



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## Resolution Efforts

No conflict resolution process.

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## Case Study

As a result of famine and human rights abuses perpetuated by the North Korean government, Korean asylum seekers have sought refuge in China. The question of China's international obligations to North Korean asylum seekers and the pressure placed on China by North Korea to repatriate them has created diplomatic tensions.

In 2007, it was estimated that 30,000 to 50,000 North Korean asylum seekers fleeing famine caused by drought and subsequent floods, along with human rights abuses, lived in China ([Bruno et al., 2007](#)). It is illegal for North Korean's to leave the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) without permission from the government. The Chinese government views North Korean border crossers as illegal migrants and they are exempt from seeking asylum ([Congressional Executive Commission of China, 2014](#)). Although China avoids direct confrontation with North Korea, the illegal status of North Koreans in China has been a point of tension and has led to the increased militarisation of the border in China in order to stop border crossings. In 1997, China allowed a North Korean defected politician to flee to South Korea, channelling harsh criticism from North Korea ([Dhawan, 2013](#)). South Korea has also criticised China's compliance with the DPRK's abuse of asylum seekers, also creating hostilities between these two states.

Following the 2014 UN report on human rights abuses in North Korea, China was found to be complicit in assisting human rights abuses towards refugees and negligent in fulfilling international obligations to refugees. China rejected these allegations and continues to comply with DPRK demands to repatriate North Korean citizens.

Future climate change impacts are predicted to further disrupt North Korea's agricultural sector and food security by way of decreasing crop yields, changing precipitation cycles, and increasing incidences of extreme weather events. Given that North Korea has suffered from a decade of famine and economic isolation, and relies on a crumbling infrastructure, the country is not well equipped to adapt to climate hazards. The vulnerability of the country's agricultural sector, coupled with its weakened institutions and political economy may threaten the stability of the totalitarian regime ([Habib, 2009](#)).

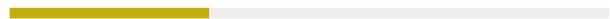


### Intensities & Influences

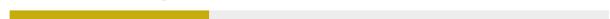


#### INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity

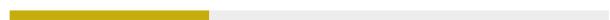


Human Suffering



#### INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Diplomatic Crisis

Note of diplomatic crisis in case history, conflict purely verbal



Violent Conflict

No



Mass displacement

None



Cross Border Mass Displacement

Less than 100.000 and less than 10% of the population are displaced across borders.



### Resolution Success

Resolve of displacement problems

Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.



Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.



Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future.



Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been mostly ignored.



Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

There has been no reduction in intensity



### Resources and Materials

References with URL

[Dhawan, R. K. \(2013\). China and its Peripheries: Contentious Relations with North Korea](#)

[Congressional Executive Commission of China \(2014\). UN Report Criticizes China for Treatment of North Korean Refugees Amid Worsening Situation](#)

[Bruno, A, Chanlett-Avery, E. & Margesson R. \(2007\). North Korean Refugees in China and Human Rights Issues: International Response and U.S. Policy Options. CRS Report for Congress](#)

Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/north-koreas-famine-refugees>



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