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Refugee and Forced
Displacement Initiative



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WORKING GROUP REPORT

US Leadership Matters in Addressing Forced Displacement Crisis

Six Major Issues with Recommendations for Refugee Policy and Programming

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Mission Statement

Chartered by Congress, the Wilson Center provides nonpartisan counsel and insights on global affairs to policymakers through deep research, impartial analysis, and independent scholarship.

The Refugee and Forced Displacement Initiative (RAFDI) provides evidence-based analyses that translate research findings into practice and policy impact. Established in 2022 as a response to an ever-increasing number of people forcibly displaced from their homes by protracted conflicts and persecution, RAFDI aims to expand the space for new perspectives, constructive dialogue, and sustainable solutions to inform policies that will improve the future for the displaced people. RAFDI is directed by John Thon Majok, a former refugee, with a Working Group co-chaired by James Hollifield, Ora Nixon Arnold Professor of International Political Economy and Director of Tower Center at Southern Methodist University, and Susan Martin, the Herzberg Professor Emerita of International Migration at Georgetown University.

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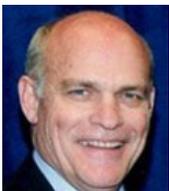
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Executive Summary

Forced displacement is a persistent global challenge that requires international cooperation and sustained leadership to address it. The US and other stakeholders must do more to ease pressure on host countries; enhance refugee self-reliance; expand access to resettlement, integration and complementary pathways for refugees; and address the root causes of forced displacement.

This Working Group Report identifies six major policy and programming issues that require consistent response and effective leadership by the United States and others:

1. **Prevention and Preparedness:** Need for innovative mechanisms to prevent and prepare for crises producing mass movements of people across and within borders.
2. **Protection of Displaced People:** Find better ways to protect refugees and other displaced people while addressing the root causes and consequences of their displacement.
3. **Solutions for Protracted Refugees:** Need for greater progress in finding sustainable solutions for protracted refugees and other displaced people who are stuck in limbo.
4. **Refugee Participation:** Continue to sustain and increase meaningful participation of refugees in decision-making on issues affecting them and to shape their narrative.
5. **International Cooperation:** Ensure consistent efforts to strengthen international cooperation and organizations that protect and assist refugees and displaced people.
6. **Implementation of Global Compacts:** Implement the Global Compact on Refugees and Global Compact on Migration while addressing their limitations.

The number of people forcibly displaced by conflicts, persecution, violence, and other human rights abuses has more than tripled from 33.9 million people in 1997 to at least 110 million people in 2023. As of mid-2023, there were 62.2 million internally displaced persons; 36.4 million refugees who live in host countries; 6.1 million asylum seekers who are applying for recognition as refugees; and 5.3 million other people in need of international protection.

The current forced displacement trend is likely to worsen in the years ahead unless the root causes are addressed. Current displacements from conflicts in Gaza, Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Venezuela, Sudan, Myanmar, and others receive media attention, while many protracted refugee situations in Kenya, Colombia, Uganda, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and other countries disappear from the headlines. Prevention of conflict with its recurring displacement lags far behind what is needed in a world too often at war. Neighboring countries, often with few resources, continue to disproportionately host most refugees, and solutions to displacement remain tied to three elusive options: return, local integration, and resettlement, which remain inadequate.

In addition to root causes, other key observations explain the worrying trends. First, global humanitarian architecture is strained to meet the challenges of 21st century forced displacement, which has increasingly become more permanent and a development issue. Program interventions and policies that do not align with the realities of this trend fail the host communities, donor countries, and the displaced. Second, the current forced migration flow is mixed, which means that refugees, asylum seekers, other displaced people, and victims of other disasters are moving along the same routes. Responding to this flow of people with diplomacy alone has proven ineffective and insufficient. Third, with many refugees staying in exile longer, protracted displacements severely limit their



opportunities and freedom in three main ways: displacing forces prevent them from returning home, marginalizing forces hamper their integration in host countries, and immobilizing forces block their forward mobility. Policies that neglect the interrelatedness of these structural forces in their responses and designs are unsustainable.

The United States is more likely to respond to global forced displacement challenges when four conditions come together. First, when there are strong foreign policy linkages to crises that produce refugees, and the refugees themselves are seen as part of US policy interests. Second, when there are clear and highly visible humanitarian needs. Third, when important domestic constituencies support action to address those pressing needs. Fourth, when there is a strong congressional backing of presidential decisions to exert leadership that facilitates action.

The US exerts its leadership on refugee issues as a donor and receiving country. In the former, the US provides assistance and protection for refugees and internally displaced persons in developing countries, while in the latter case, the focus is on admission and stay of those seeking protection within the US.

The convening power of the US government has played an enormous role historically and continues to be one of the principal reflections of American leadership within the field. There are reasons to be cautious about US leadership. Amid record numbers of asylum seekers attempting to cross a too porous southern border and the resulting economic, social, and political pressures, US leadership and refugee protection have suffered. The confluence of border dysfunction and a global displacement crisis has sapped US resources, resolve, and leadership within the international refugee regime. Nevertheless, by most measures, the US is still the dominant power, whether measured by influence, money, or refugee admission levels. While the US government has been supportive of other governments that wish to take the lead in important international initiatives to enhance refugee protection, there is little likelihood that major changes in global policies would succeed without US agreement to them.

Recommendations

Overall Recommendations

- The administration, Congress, and others should continue to strongly articulate the reasons that policies affirming refugee protection are in the foreign policy and national security interests of the United States.
- Congress should resuscitate the Bipartisan Congressional Refugee Caucus to keep focus on global refugee issues, which also have domestic implications.
- The White House should reestablish the position of US Coordinator for Refugee Affairs, who should chair a permanent Interagency Working Group to improve interagency coordination among the Department of State, US Agency for International Development, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice, National Security Council, Domestic Policy Council, and others.
- The US Refugee Resettlement Program should be strengthened by placing a floor, rather than a ceiling, on the number of refugees to be admitted. This will help ensure that the admission of refugees is not politicized as is currently the case with presidential determinations required annually. Mechanisms should be maintained to allow an increase in resettlement above the floor when needed to address specific crises.



Prevention and Preparedness for Forced Displacement

- Prioritize constructive dialogue and discussion of forced displacement in the National Security Agenda.
- Charge the National Security Council with coordinating displacement impact assessments when reviewing foreign policy and national security actions.
- Target financial support on efforts to improve early warning of displacement worldwide and increase funding for conflict mitigation and emergency preparedness.

Protection of Refugees and Other Displaced People

- Encourage and provide resources that allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to take meaningful steps to protect refugees and internally displaced persons from the threat of refoulement or forcible return, physical and sexual abuse, and other actions that may harm their lives and well-being. The US government can provide funding to augment its protection activities and use its own diplomacy to buttress protection worldwide.
- Support implementation of provisions regarding protection in the United Nations Secretary General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, buttressing the UN's commitment "to advocate for unimpeded humanitarian access, and continue to provide neutral, impartial, and independent protection and assistance."
- Enact legislation to fix weaknesses in asylum adjudication without undermining the ability of people who need protection in the United States, by providing the financial and human resources needed to reduce the growing backlogs in processing.
- Utilize the provisions in the Refugee Act of 1980 for increasing the ceiling on refugee admissions when emergency resettlement is needed to protect refugees. This should reduce the future use of humanitarian parole.
- Also, utilize the provisions in the Refugee Act to increase use of in-country processing, which allows internally displaced persons still in their home countries to be processed for resettlement if they otherwise meet the definition of a refugee in US law.
- Provide additional funds and needed resources to help border communities and states that are receiving and hosting large numbers of asylum seekers in the US as well as those needed to help refugees and asylees integrate into the communities in which they resettle.
- With migrant flows to the US southern border increasing, it is important to redirect some of those numbers to more regular pathways by expanding access to student visas and work visas across the board. There must be a more permanent change to how the US accepts migrant workers, who may otherwise seek irregular pathways. By providing greater access to regular, documented routes, the caseload of US Customs and Border Protection officers and the backlog of asylum cases would be reduced.



Finding Sustainable Solutions for Protracted Refugees

- Continue to prioritize finding solutions for those in protracted situations, including the integration of refugees in host countries, third-country resettlement, complementary pathways, and where possible, voluntary repatriation with dignity. Governments should also provide funding for programs that improve the wellbeing of refugees who are unable to avail themselves of the traditional durable solutions.
- Encourage the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to update its metrics, data collection, and analytics for measuring when protracted refugees and internally displaced persons have found durable solutions.
- Support efforts within the United Nations and member states to strengthen assistance, protection, and solutions for displaced people. Much more needs to be done to address the needs of this population, including increases in financial resources dedicated to them.
- Enact legislation to provide legal permanent residence for people at risk in their own countries who were admitted to the United States under humanitarian parole. The Afghan Adjustment Act of 2023 is a model for attaining this goal.
- Modify the statutes authorizing Temporary Protected Status to permit adjustment of status to legal permanent resident for those still unable to return home after a reasonable period while providing assistance to help beneficiaries repatriate when it is safe.
- Implement new strategies that provide pathways to safe, orderly, and legal migration.

Sustaining Refugee Participation and Lived Experience

- Continue efforts to engage refugee-led organizations in policymaking on refugee and asylum issues. Continue to invest resources in building refugee leadership and refugee-led organizations to ensure that current positive trend in meaningful participation of refugees is sustained.
- Support the Localization Agenda, a process by which the local and refugee-led organizations have the opportunity to take on leadership roles.
- Invest in refugee and displaced women and youth organizations to ensure that they are meaningfully involved in decisions about their lives.
- Institutionalize refugee participation at the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other venues for policy making.
- Encourage other member states to use the model of the US Refugee Advisory Board to formalize refugee participation.
- Engage people with lived experience and thematic expertise in an organized and equitable manner to continue to shape refugee narrative in public discourse.



Strengthening Global Cooperation and Refugee Institutions

- Strengthen global cooperation to give assistance, protection, and solutions for displaced people. A process like the Global Refugee Forum should be established that brings together states to discuss and make commitments for responsibility-sharing for internally displaced persons.
- Provide adequate funding for the international organizations that protect and assist refugees. There is chronic under-funding of appeals from UN agencies for support. US leadership is needed to encourage other countries to increase their funding levels.
- Require strict accountability measures as a condition of funding in global institutions to better protect, provide for, and serve the refugees and other displaced peoples. Ensure that these organizations monitor their expatriate and local staff to make sure they are adhering to the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

Implementing the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration

- Give high priority to enhancing responsibility-sharing, an essential feature of the Global Compact on Refugees in which progress requires sustained and active leadership.
- Forced displacement issues should be mainstreamed in multilateral processes and fora, including the Sustainable Development Goals, Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention of Climate Change, Summit of the Future, New Agenda for Peace, Group of Seven, and Group of Twenty, among others.
- Implement the commitments made at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, which include provisions to enhance economic inclusion and social protection; prioritize gender-based violence prevention, mitigation, and response; commit to increase resettlement opportunities in the US and elsewhere; increase complementary pathways for those in need of protection; and advocate for inclusion of refugees in national education systems and multilateral education processes.
- Implement the provisions of Global Compact on Migration to support global cooperation on the governance and management of international migration.



Glossary I: Acronyms

BHA: Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance

CBP: Customs and Border Protection

COP: Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention of Climate Change

CRCP: Consultants on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways

DHS: Department of Homeland Security

ECOSOC: Economic and Social Council

EU: European Union

ExCom: Executive Committee of UNHCR

GCFF: Global Concessional Financing Facility

G7: Group of Seven

G20: Group of 20

GCM: Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration

GCR: Global Compact on Refugees

GRF: Global Refugee Forum

IASC: Inter-Agency Standing Committee

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross

IDA: International Development Association

IDP: Internally Displaced Person

IGO: Intergovernmental Organization

IOM: International Organization for Migration

MSMEs: Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

NACARA: Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act

NGO: Nongovernmental Organization

NSC: National Security Council

ORR: Office of Refugee Resettlement

PRM: Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

PS4R: Private Sector for Refugees

RAFDI: Refugee and Forced Displacement Initiative

RLO: Refugee Led Organization

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

TPS: Temporary Protected Status

UN: United Nations

UNCCP: UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNOCHA: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UNRRA: United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

UNRWA: UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees

USCIS: US Citizenship and Immigration Services

USRAB: United States Refugee Advisory Board

USRAP: United States Refugee Admissions Program

WBG: World Bank Group

WFP: World Food Program

WHR: Window for Host Communities



Glossary II: Simplified Definitions

Asylum Seeker: Someone who has fled their country of origin due to persecution, instability, violence, disaster, conflict, or other threats to their safety. Asylum seekers flee to another country for safety and stability but have not yet been granted refugee status or other forms of legal protection and are awaiting processing.

Forced Displacement: A situation in which groups, individuals, or communities are involuntarily compelled to leave their region or country of origin due to factors such as conflict, persecution, natural disasters, or instability.

Host Country: A nation or state which hosts displaced individuals, refugees, asylum seekers, or other migrants. Oftentimes, host countries and communities will provide humanitarian assistance or opportunities for integration for the displaced groups in their borders.

Immigrant: Someone who makes a conscious decision to leave a home country and moves to a foreign country with the intention of settling there, usually, permanently.

Internally Displaced Person: A person who flees violence, persecution, instability, conflict, or other threats to safety but remains in their country of origin.

Migrant: A person who moves from place to place, either within home country or across the borders, usually to seek better opportunities.

Protracted Displacement: When displaced groups are removed from their home for extended periods of time, from 5 years to decades. Those in protracted situations are unable to return to their places of origins but are also often waiting to be locally integrated or resettled elsewhere.

Refugee: A person who has been forced to flee and is unable to return to their home country due to persecution, conflict, violence, or other threats to their safety. A refugee typically flees to another country and is recognized under specific provisions of international law.

Refugee-Led Organization: An organization or group in which persons with direct lived experience of forced displacement play a primary leadership role and whose stated objectives and activities are focused on responding to the needs of refugees and/or related communities.

Stateless: An individual who is not considered a citizen by any country or has legal status in any nation. Statelessness can occur due to displacement and slow legal proceedings while waiting to gain any type of status.

Temporary Protected Status: A temporary immigration protective status granted to individuals of a certain country in active conflict, instability, or natural disaster. Governments of host countries offer TPS to immigrants of countries in emergency or urgent situations to allow for quicker integration, resettlement, and temporary legal status until permanent status can be made.



Introduction

This Working Group Report seeks to provide guidance and recommendations for the US government and other actors on ways to protect, assist, and find sustainable solutions for refugees and other displaced people.

The report begins with a historical overview of forced movements of people in search of safety and security. It then focuses on the factors that have affected US governmental responses to forced displacement. Next are sections on six main policy challenges: 1) preparing for and addressing the causes of displacement, 2) protecting those who must seek safety, 3) providing solutions for those who are in protracted situations, 4) ensuring the active participation of the displaced people in finding solutions, 5) strengthening international cooperation and organizations that protect and assist refugees and other displaced people, and 6) implementing the two global compacts on refugees and migration. The final section provides actionable recommendations for improving US and international responses to forced migration.

As of mid-2023, there were more than 110 million people displaced globally from conflict and human rights abuses. Internally displaced persons constituted the largest proportion, at 62.2 million; another 36.4 million are refugees including 5.9 million Palestinian refugees under the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Administration (UNRWA); 5.3 million are other people in need of international protection, including those leaving Venezuela; and 6.1 million are asylum seekers, who are applying for recognition as refugees. The trend is towards increasing displacement over time, as seen in Figure 1.

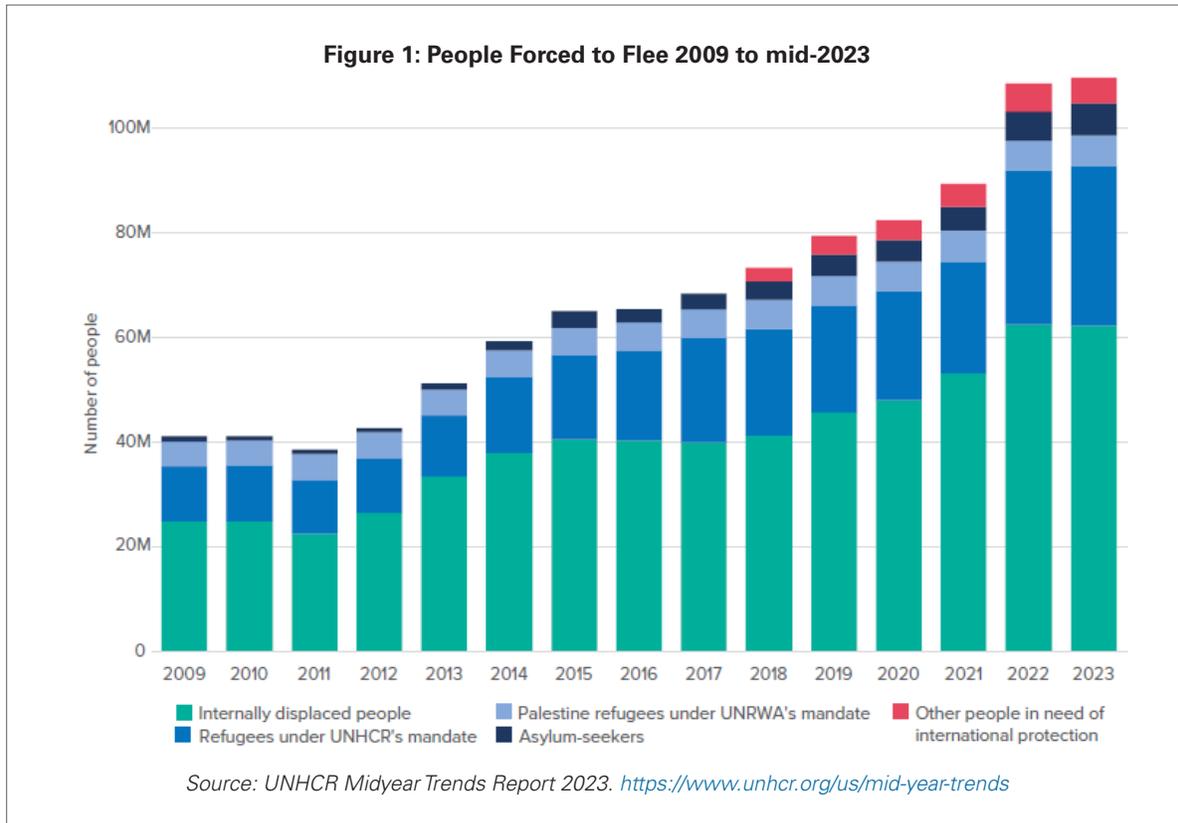
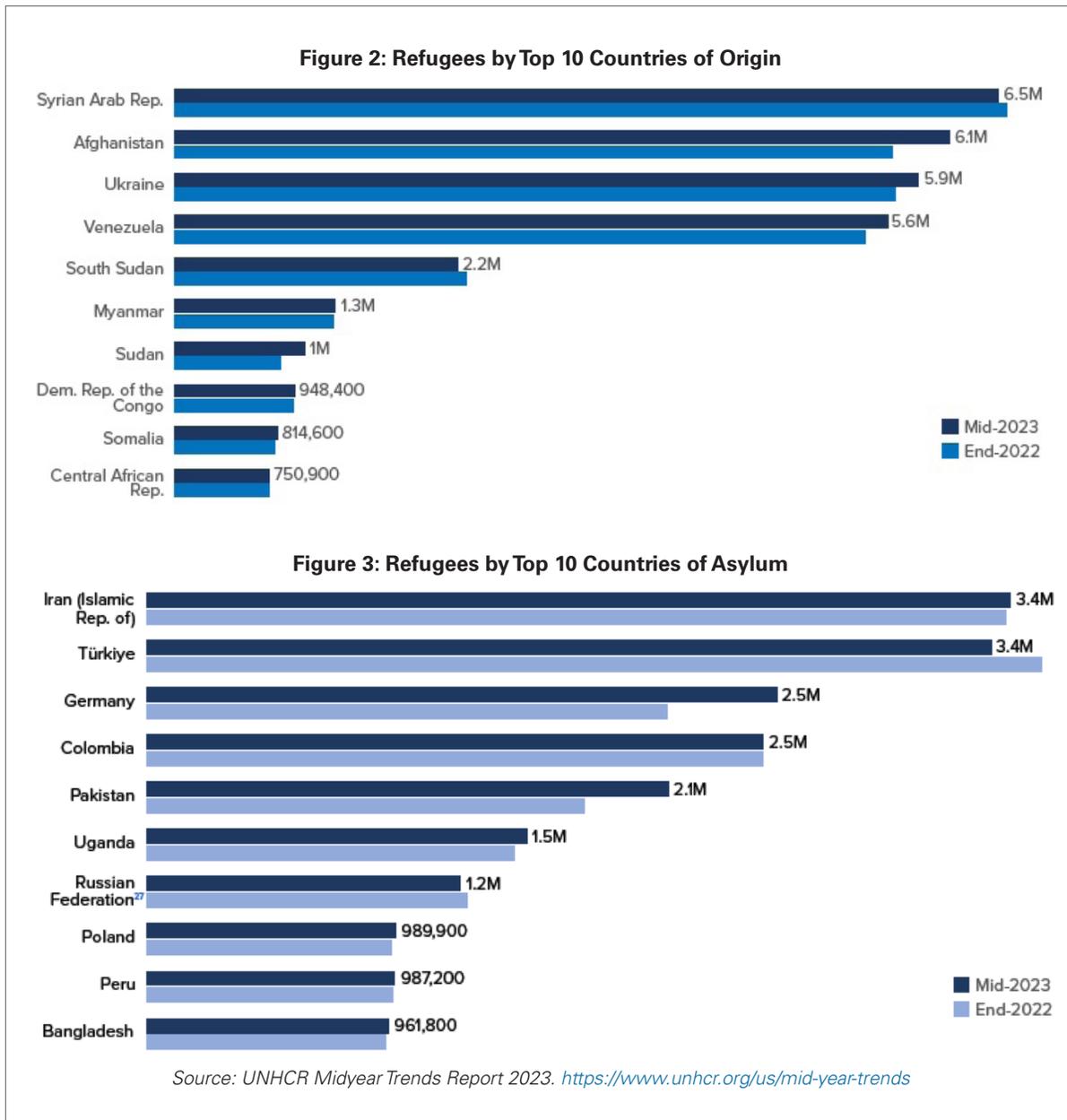


Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the top 10 source countries of refugees and countries of asylum.



More than 40% of all refugees are children under the age of 18.¹ Women and girls represent just over half of all refugees² although these proportions are likely to change because of the disproportionately large number of women and children among Ukrainian refugees in Europe. This results largely from Ukraine’s prohibition on the departure of men ages 18 to 60 during the conflict with the Russian Federation.³ Unfortunately, less demographic data are available on internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are assisted and protected by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Among situations where disaggregated data on IDPs is available, women and girls accounted for 52% of the population. This differs by country, however, ranging from 46% in Sudan to 57% in Ukraine.⁴



Most funding for refugee programs has come from five sources. In 2023, the US, Germany, European Union, Japan, and Sweden provided almost \$3 billion of the \$4.8 billion committed by governments and others to UNHCR. This amount covered only half of UNHCR's requested budget of more than \$10 billion, leaving a significant shortfall.⁵ This raises questions as to whether there is adequate responsibility-sharing, as recently addressed in the context of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). Responsibility-sharing involves international cooperation in the sharing of financial responsibilities to assist and protect refugees and displaced persons; addressing the underlying causes of displacement; hosting refugees and others in need of protection; finding sustainable solutions for refugees and IDPs; and helping host and transit countries as well as other organizations to fulfill their responsibilities to refugees and displaced persons.⁶ All of these efforts require the active cooperation of all countries.

The current forced displacement trend is likely to worsen in the years ahead. Recent displacements from conflict and insecurity in Syria, Ukraine, Gaza, Afghanistan, and Venezuela receive considerable media attention, although often not enough resources, while protracted displacement continues in and from many other countries, sometimes for decades. Prevention of conflict with its recurring displacement lags far behind what is needed in a world too often at war. Solutions to displacement remain tied to three elusive options: return to one's previous home, local integration to where one sought safety within the borders of one's own country or a neighboring country, and resettlement to a third country.

Recent statistics on these three options demonstrate the inadequacy of the current approach. As of mid-2023, only 404,000 refugees voluntarily returned to 38 countries of origin, with about half returning to South Sudan.⁷ About 2.7 million internally displaced persons are known to have returned to their place of origin⁸. Almost 60,000 refugees were resettled in the first half of 2023, up from the numbers seen during the height of the pandemic but still a very small share of the refugee population. The resettled refugees also constituted a very small percentage of the 1.5 million people that UNHCR estimated needed resettlement.⁹ During the first half of 2023, an estimated 20,500 refugees were naturalized in their country of asylum.¹⁰ UNHCR uses this metric to measure integration in a country of asylum although the agency is planning to collect information on permanent visas as well.

The Global Compact on Refugees was designed to address the absence of viable solutions for refugees, as was the UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. Both processes aim to help refugees and IDPs find a durable solution to their displacement; to identify better ways to avert new displacement; and to ensure those facing internal or external displacement receive effective protection and assistance.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) also addresses forced migration in its commitments for improving early warning and preparedness, finding safe and legal pathways for people forced to leave their homes, and providing mechanisms to enhance international cooperation in managing migration. As of now, too little progress has been made in implementing policies and programs to accomplish the aims of the compacts, but as discussed in the core section of this report, some new ideas hold promise, particularly regarding solutions for protracted displacement. The active engagement of development agencies, such as the World Bank, is a welcome trend.

Even less promising are the efforts to ensure that displaced people receive effective protection, particularly when they are seeking asylum. Governments around the world have put in place deterrence measures that make it



highly unlikely for asylum seekers to find safe havens, regardless of the validity of their claims of refugee status. These measures include outright bans on admission, as seen in the United States and other countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, interdiction of asylum seekers en route, externalization of border control, immediate return to home countries or redirection to third countries, mandatory detention, and tightened standards for assessing eligibility for asylum, among others.

Another challenge is the protection of people who were not originally included in the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees but who have a compelling reason to seek safety elsewhere. As discussed below, the Refugee Convention defines refugees as people with a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. These are individuals who cannot rely on the protection of their own countries. Protection for internally displaced persons has been defined by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, a non-binding instrument, except in certain regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, which adopted a binding convention specifically on IDPs. Those fleeing conflict have been included within the mandate of the UNHCR for many years but some countries, including the United States, do not consider such persons to be refugees for the purpose of protection unless they have a well-founded fear of persecution on the specified grounds. They may be protected on a discretionary basis by statuses such as complementary or temporary protection.

A further challenge is the lack of effective mechanisms to avert displacement while still protecting those facing serious risk to their lives and livelihoods. When governments implement policies, such as economic sanctions or military intervention, they seldom consider the potential risk of mass displacement. Even when they move ahead knowing large-scale displacement is imminent, they do not necessarily take steps to prepare for what then becomes humanitarian crises. This lack of preparedness only makes the situation worse for refugees and the displaced. Since the causes of displacement are multi-faceted, it is important to understand all the underlying factors influencing these movements. In that regard, the impact of climate change on displacement is pertinent: Refugees and internally displaced persons live in areas that are affected by climate change and experience secondary displacement from drought and floods. Moreover, armed conflicts over resources made scarcer by climate change can provoke large-scale displacement if governments are unprepared and solutions to scarcity are not available.

All these gaps in protection present human, national and international security problems for the displaced as well as the communities and countries to which they flee. The human dimension is most visible. Displacement is by no means a safe and secure option for those fleeing even more dangerous situations. Asylum seekers often face life-threatening conditions on the route to what they hope is safety. Movements through the Darién Gap between Colombia and Panama is only one example. Multiple displacements, as conflicts move from one part of a country to another, are common for the internally displaced and people who are stuck in border areas of their country of refuge as conflicts spill over into the host country. An example is the transient trend that has emerged in the border areas of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Host communities also experience dangers from such cross-border violence. These, of course, lead to national security problems and international security concerns, particularly when other countries become involved in a conflict to protect civilian populations, including displaced people. For example, after UN peacekeepers in Bosnia



and Rwanda were unable to protect civilians because of a limited mandate during those respective crises, the terms of engagement were expanded to include protection of non-combatants. Large-scale displacement can also complicate efforts to negotiate an end to conflicts. Ignoring the situation of refugees and displaced people in peace negotiations comes at considerable risk, particularly if they are the families of combatants.

While most refugees and IDPs are in less developed countries, wealthier countries are often even more vocal about the security risks they see coming from asylum seekers crossing their borders. This is not a new phenomenon, as discussed in the next section. Empires and individual states have long been suspicious, sometimes for good reasons, that asylum seekers have ulterior motives for entering their territory, including to work illegally or cause physical harm to their citizens. Protecting borders is an essential function of governments. When they are unable to control their borders as effectively as they would like, they seek solutions that may be harmful to refugees as well as those not fitting the definition but still in need of protection.

The next section is a historical overview of forced movements of people in search of safety and security. The report then focuses on the factors that have affected the US governmental response to forced displacement. Next are sections on the major challenges to effective policies and practices in addressing the plight of displaced people. The final section provides concrete recommendations for improving US and international responses.

Historical Background

Forced migration took on many of its contemporary meanings and formulations in the transition from a world of empires to one of nation-states, an uncertain and tortuous process that began to unfold in the late 19th century. Refugees, in the modern sense of the word, were people who had been simultaneously displaced and stripped of their nationality, rendering them not just physically homeless but also politically unprotected.

The First World War, with its bloody transformation of the old empires into Balkan, Eastern European, and Middle Eastern nation-states, produced millions more displaced people, including large numbers of Russians fleeing the Bolsheviks and Armenian survivors of the wartime genocide. The same historical processes that were dismembering the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires into ethnically conscious nation-state were also unfolding in Western Europe and the United States, whose previously more or less open-door policies were now replaced with ever stricter immigration laws. What, then, is to do with the displaced, whom the Allied peace negotiators considered hazardous to political and economic stability in this fragile postwar world?

The new League of Nations established an office for refugee affairs in 1920 that provided a few different answers to this question. The office was headed up by a Norwegian diplomat named Fridtjof Nansen who had made a name for himself in his youth as a polar explorer. Over the League's first years, Nansen's mandate expanded from an initial responsibility for the two million Russians displaced by the country's civil war to include homeless Armenians, Assyrians, and Anatolian Greeks. This weighty charge came with almost no money and not much political clout; Nansen's office spent much of its time fundraising and depended heavily on the work of private aid organizations. Over the course of the early 1920s, Nansen built an international refugee regime around a single core principle: that refugees deployed as workers could serve as a crucial resource for their new host states.



Nansen invented a new legal document for Russian refugees, an identity card that came to be known as the “Nansen Passport.” These papers, valid for a year at a time, gave the bearer an ability, though not a guaranteed right, to move across international borders in search of work and to reside in the countries acknowledging its validity. In the mid-1920s, the League began to run a kind of global employment matching system that fielded corporate requests for cheap labor and provided medical and security clearances, visa assistance, and sometimes initial settlement funds to refugees who could be compelled to go. It settled many thousands of refugees in this way, but it faced continual resistance: from refugees themselves, who generally did not want to travel thousands of miles to become menial laborers, but also from host states that were increasingly skeptical of taking in large numbers of displaced people who might undermine domestic labor markets.

As fascism grew in Europe, the nascent refugee system faced even greater threats. The high-profile meeting of more than thirty countries at Évian in 1938—which was designed to bypass the failing League in favor of more directly negotiated “solutions” to the burgeoning European Jewish refugee crisis—had no outcome except to clarify that Europe was handing off responsibility for international refugee policy to the United States. The US government, however, was no more willing to rescue refugees than its counterparts in other countries. The US delegates made it clear they were not asking any country, including their own, to change its refugee policy. Subsequently, no government pledged to resettle significant numbers of refugees. In a speech to the Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg in September 1938, Adolf Hitler pointed to the hypocrisy of the countries that condemned Germany’s policies but would not admit Jewish refugees.¹¹ The recognition that other countries would do little to save the Jews and other refugees paved the way for the Holocaust.



German displaced persons wait in Berlin's Anhalter Station in 1945. (Everett Collection / Shutterstock)



Domestic policymaking also demonstrated the US government's unwillingness to admit refugees. The *St. Louis* debacle is an example. The MS *St. Louis* sailed from Hamburg, Germany on May 13, 1939, with more than 900 German Jews aboard, bound for Cuba. At least one passenger had been in the Dachau concentration camp, imprisoned on *Kristallnacht*. To the misfortune of the *St. Louis* passengers, a generally positive view of refugees was shifting in Cuba. The economy had declined, and refugees were criticized for competing with Cubans for limited jobs. When the *St. Louis* arrived in Cuban territorial waters, the ship could not dock. The captain headed for US territorial waters in the hope that the United States would accept the refugees on a humanitarian basis. The US government refused, stating that the passengers should apply for admission through normal visa processing. The *St. Louis* then headed back to Hamburg. On the way, Great Britain (288), the Netherlands (181), Belgium (214), and France (224) agreed to receive the refugees. Only about half of those on board the *St. Louis* survived the Holocaust.

The failure of the United States to respond more generously and effectively to the plight of the Jewish refugees was one of the darkest moments in American history. A combination of anti-Semitism, fear of economic competition, diplomatic pressures, and a general lack of political will by Franklin Roosevelt and most of his administration resulted in an exclusionary policy that could not be modified even in the face of persecution.

During and just after the war, the mostly American-run United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) sought to control the problem of displacement by enforcing mass repatriation, not infrequently against the will of the displaced. But at the new UN, the idea of putting refugees to work became a cornerstone of post-1945 refugee policy and practice. The International Refugee Organization, which succeeded UNRRA, modeled itself after the League's office in its emphasis on employment-based resettlement far from Allied shores—eventually proudly broadcasting that it had managed to remove “four out of five” of its charges to destinations outside Western Europe.

US refugee policy on admission of displaced persons began to change, largely in response to the beginning of the Cold War. Internationally, the US blocked plans to designate the International Labor Organization (ILO) the principal UN agency responsible for refugees because communist countries were on its governing council. Domestically, changes could be seen as well in refugee admissions. In 1947, with the support of the Truman administration, new legislation was introduced to permit the entry of 220,000 displaced people. They were to be admitted within existing quotas, so as not to raise questions about the underlying restrictive immigration law in place, but provisions were made to borrow visas from future years. Several subsequent bills were adopted that increased the number of displaced people to be admitted. The Refugee Relief Act of 1951 defined those to be admitted as refugees as those individuals who had fled a Communist country.

It was at this point that the newly established United Nations decided to codify a formal international legal definition of refugees, who would henceforth be eligible for specific rights and guarantees, most notably *non-refoulement*: the right not to be returned to a persecuting country. The Convention had both temporal and geographic restrictions, applying only to those displaced prior to 1951 who were in Europe. This followed the tendency of the League of Nations (LON) and post-World War II international organizations to treat each refugee crisis independently. The UNHCR overcame these constraints in certain situations, as discussed below in greater detail.



The Convention explicitly left out refugees who were already being assisted by other UN agencies. The UN had established the UN Korean Rehabilitation Administration (UNKRA) as a special authority with broad powers to plan and supervise rehabilitation and relief during the conflict in Korea. It also established the UN Relief and Works Administration for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), which was mandated to assist those who were displaced, and the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), which was mandated to seek an end to conflict and protect Palestinian refugees.

The Convention limitations did not fully impede the UNHCR, established shortly before adoption of the Convention, in its ability to aid refugees outside of Europe. In the mid-1950s, the UNHCR used what it called its “good offices” to work outside Europe as well as in countries such as Hungary with refugee crises emerging post 1951. In 1967, governments adopted a protocol that removed the geographic and temporal restrictions in the 1951 Convention. The definition remained the same, however, in focusing on persecution as the principal cause of refugee movements. Too often, the result was the immobilization of what the UN now called “non-Convention” refugees, confined to camps, without authorization of employment in the larger economy of the countries in which they resided. It was to prove a longstanding pattern.

In recognition of the harmful effects of such camps, UNHCR adopted a new policy in 2014 that promoted alternatives, noting that most refugees were, by then, living in urban areas. The policy was built on the UNHCR notion that enabling refugees to reside in communities lawfully, peacefully and without harassment, whether in urban or in rural areas, supports their ability to take responsibility for their lives, families, and communities.

In the 1980s and beyond, the United States and other countries started to embrace the concepts of complementary, subsidiary, and temporary protection. They sought new ways to recognize the need for some level of protection for those leaving or unable to return to dangerous situations, without offering the full array of rights accorded under the UN Refugee Convention. In the United Kingdom this was known as “temporary leave to remain” and in Germany the *Duldung*, or toleration status. These provided temporary suspension of deportation of those who would otherwise be subject to return. The European Union codified the concept in its Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), which was triggered for the first time in response to the flight of Ukrainians following the Russian invasion of their country.

The United States adopted similar legislation in 1990. Temporary Protected Status (TPS) permits undocumented migrants already in the country to remain temporarily if they come from designated countries that are experiencing conflict or natural disasters. Although they technically remain deportable, the tendency has been to continue to renew TPS, sometimes for decades. With these quasi-legal statuses, those fleeing crises receive work authorization but are generally not allowed to bring family members to join them. Humanitarian parole, as recently used in admitting Afghans, Ukrainians, and others, provides similar protection but it is used to bring affected people into the US from abroad. In this sense, these statuses mirror policies that have deep historic roots, such as the Nansen Passports.

The end of the Cold War had profound effects on the overall refugee system as did the growing threat of terrorism in the early 21st century. During the Cold War, Western governments, led by the United States, argued that refugees ‘voted with their feet’ to escape the communist tyranny of the Soviet Union and its proxy states. None of the Eastern Bloc countries ratified the Refugee Convention nor joined the executive committee of



the UNHCR. Indeed, the first sign that the communist system might collapse was the decision by Hungary to recognize ethnic Hungarian citizens of Romania as refugees, join the UNHCR and then expand its notion of refugees to include East Germans. The latter decision presaged the fall of the Berlin Wall, buttressed by decisions in the Soviet Union itself regarding glasnost (transparency) and perestroika (restructuring), and the decision not to intervene militarily in Germany. With an end to the Cold War, the rationale for generous policies related to refugee admissions and assistance were undermined. Most refugee crises thereafter resulted from internal conflicts, many of which had little or no global strategic interest to the great powers.

At the same time, there were new opportunities emanating from the end of the Cold War. Several proxy conflicts between the US and the Soviet Union came to an end without support from the superpowers. Millions of refugees were able to return home during the 1990s, some to remain safely there and others to be displaced again as new conflicts arose. The UNHCR shifted much of its focus to addressing the “decade of repatriation” as Sadako Ogata, head of UNHCR, described the possibilities that return could present for refugees and the countries to which they returned. UNHCR collaborated with nonprofit development agencies to help reintegrate the refugees who were repatriated. There were successes and failures in these programs but, importantly, they began what was to become a continuing theme: the need for humanitarian and development actors to work together to address the needs of refugees.

A further opportunity opened with the end of the Cold War: the capacity of international actors to reach internally displaced persons in countries previously off limits because they had been client states of the United States or the Soviet Union. It is likely that the number of IDPs always exceeded the number of refugees, but little data could be collected until the 1990s. As the dimensions of the problem of internal displacement became apparent



Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky with IDPs in June 2022. (President of Ukraine / Wikipedia)



in places like Afghanistan, the UN, with the aid of some member states and nonprofits, took steps to establish guiding principles that set out the rights of IDPs under international law and ways to address their needs. The resulting Guiding Principles on International Displacement was not binding on States but being based on binding human rights treaties and humanitarian law of conflict, was recognized by a growing number of countries as useful doctrine. The African Union adopted its own binding treaty on the rights of IDPs based on the guiding principles. Barriers still exist, however, to IDPs who are displaced by actions of their own governments and by non-state actors who control the territory in which they reside.

As the 21st century opened, terrorism took center stage as an issue affecting refugee policy. The 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in 2001 were not new; an earlier attack on the World Trade Center had already raised questions about the capacity of the United States to block the entry of terrorists into its territory. And clearly the US was not the only country fearing the entry of terrorists through immigration and refugee admissions processes. Attacks in London and Madrid reinforced the issue. After 9/11, laws were passed worldwide to deter the admission of terrorists. US immigration law in the late 19th and early 20th century had focused on barring anarchists and others who were seen as threats to the country's security. Immediately following September 11, 2001, the US Refugee Resettlement Program was suspended while steps were taken to ensure the integrity of the admission process. In the United States, for example, the USA PATRIOT Act barred admission of those who provided material support to terrorist organizations. Initially, there were no exceptions for those who were coerced to provide such support, a Catch-22 for refugees who fled because they feared being coerced again.

The concern with homeland security raises serious questions about how liberal democracies balance the need for security with their commitment to protecting the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants.¹² How can states coordinate refugee policy governance while navigating asymmetries in interests and power? Decisions that address national security can seemingly come at the cost of protecting the rights of those most affected by the absence of rights in their home countries. At the same time, liberal democracies must also consider the costs and benefits of unilateral action versus multilateral cooperation in their quest to effectively manage the challenges of human displacement.

In summation, the international refugee regime developed across the course of the twentieth century not only as a humanitarian enterprise but as a way for states to control, limit, and channel the phenomenon of mass human displacement. This does not mean that humanitarian reasons to help refugees were totally absent. Rather, it means that other forces also intervened to determine whether states, including the United States, provided effective solutions to refugees and IDPs, as discussed in the next section.

US Leadership on Forced Migration and Human Displacement

The US heightens its role as an active and influential member of the global refugee regime when several conditions come together. First, when there are strong foreign policy linkages to crises that produce refugees, and the refugees themselves are seen as a manifestation of US policy interests, the US is more willing to act and influence the decisions of others. Second, clear and highly visible humanitarian needs help mobilize US leadership and public support. Third, when important domestic constituencies support action to address those needs, the US is more



likely to respond and encourage other governments to do so. Fourth, strong Congressional backing of Presidential decisions to exert US leadership facilitates those actions, especially when new resources must be appropriated in support of proactive policies and programs.¹³ The use of humanitarian parole to admit Afghans and Ukrainians into the United States is a good example of policies where all these factors came into play. On the other hand, the US response to forced displacements from conflict in Sudan shows some limitations.

Box 1: Comparing US Response to Ukrainian and Sudanese Displacements

Factors	Ukrainian Displacements	Sudanese Displacements
Strong foreign policy linkages	The US and Ukraine share a bilateral investment treaty . However, a more salient foreign policy linkage is Ukraine’s ascension to NATO and its positioning against Russia. Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, US has sent a clear message of support by supplying arms, aid, and sanctions against Russia.	The US relationship with Sudan has largely been one of humanitarian aid and support for democratic transition . Though Sudan exists at a crossroads between vital US geopolitical interests in the Horn of Africa, there has been criticism from within the US government and foreign service of a lack of clear strategy for the country and the region.
Clear and highly visible humanitarian needs	Ukrainian casualties as a result of Russia’s invasion have been highly visible and documented widely . 10.2 million have been forcibly displaced, of which 6.5 million are refugees, per UNHCR . Ukrainian refugee resettlement has also garnered significant US media attention: the New York Times published 6,708 articles referencing Ukraine from March 2023 to March 2024.	In January 2024, IOM reported that 10.7 million Sudanese had been forcibly displaced, including 9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). However, reporting by US media has lagged far behind coverage of the crisis in Ukraine. From March 2023 to March 2024, the <i>New York Times</i> published only 468 articles referencing Sudan .
Support from domestic constituencies	In 2020, the US Census Bureau counted over 1 million Americans of Ukrainian ancestry . According to Pew Research Center, 74% of Americans view the war between Russia and Ukraine to be important to US national security interests, with 43% considering it very important. This is a similar rate to how Americans view the Israel-Hamas war, and the tensions between China and Taiwan.	According to the World Population Review, there are over 71,000 Sudanese Americans as of 2024. No reliable polls have been published regarding the US public’s support for US engagement with Sudan.
Strong congressional backing of Presidential decisions	The administration has been clear in its support for Ukraine and its citizens, and Congress has been largely supportive. Despite rising partisanship on the issue of providing additional aid, Congress has acted in bipartisan ways to continue supporting Ukraine. On March 14, Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) told POLITICO that “he expects to pass a future Ukraine assistance bill with Democratic votes,” despite growing resistance from members of his own party. The US has admitted more than 271,000 Ukrainian refugees since 2022.	In December 2023, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee members announced a joint, bipartisan resolution “calling for a high-level special envoy to work towards ending the conflict in Sudan.” In the resolution, they urge the President to name a high-level United States Special Envoy for Sudan and call on the administration to “revise its Sudan policy, both in terms of personnel and strategy.” The administration has been criticized for lacking a clear strategy on Sudan, particularly in its approach to working with two rival generals after the 2021 military coup.



The US exerts leadership on refugee issues in two principal ways: as a donor and as a receiving country. In the former case, the US generally provides assistance and protection for the millions of refugees and IDPs who live in developing countries. In the latter case, the focus is on policies regarding admission and stay of those seeking protection within the US. These policies are often seen as positive models for other countries although there are cases—such as US policy of interdicting Haitians¹⁴ and, more recently, the use of US public health legislation to prevent asylum seekers from crossing the US southern border¹⁵ that have served as models for deterrence policies taken by governments in other parts of the world.

US and the International Refugee System

The US has been the largest single contributor to international protection and assistance programs for refugees and IDPs through support for UNHCR, International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), World Food Program (WFP), other UN bodies, and principal nongovernmental organizations assisting displaced populations. The US is the largest donor to UNHCR in absolute terms, contributing \$2.2 billion in 2022, up from \$1.04 billion in 2013, and ranked 10th on a per capita basis.

The US provides general support as well as earmarked funds for specific programs. This funding comes from two principal US government agencies: the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) in the State Department and the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) in the US Agency for International Development. The primary responsibility for refugees lies with PRM while BHA has primary responsibility for IDPs.

PRM's budget request for FY 2024 is \$3.9 billion. PRM's goals are to "save lives, ease suffering, and promote human dignity through efficient and effective humanitarian assistance...promote and provide durable and interim solutions for populations of concern through US assistance, resettlement, and collaboration with the international community...and advocate for the protection of vulnerable populations and exert leadership in the international community," as stated in its budget justification.

BHA's total FY2024 request is \$6,499,362. Most of this funding goes towards natural disasters, with a smaller portion addressed to conflict displacement. In its budget justification, BHA notes that its "implementing partners will continue working in the most dangerous and volatile contexts, delivering lifesaving assistance in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Haiti, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, where people are experiencing acute conflict driven needs and many have exhausted their ability to withstand shocks after living through years of violent conflict."

Beyond its funding, the US also exerts leadership via its membership in the Executive Committee (ExCom) of the UNHCR and the governing Council of IOM in addition to its important role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. ExCom is composed of UN member states who are elected by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). ExCom's reports are submitted directly to the General Assembly; they do not substitute for policy guidance from ECOSOC and the General Assembly but play an important function in advising the High Commissioner, reviewing funds and programs, authorizing the High Commissioner to make appeals for funds, and approving proposed budget targets. Since its founding, ExCom membership has grown from 25 when it was established to more than 100 members today.



The US plays an outsized role in ExCom. While it cannot always persuade other governments to follow its lead, the US can block resolutions that it opposes. As the largest donor, the US has tremendous influence on UNHCR's finances and thus holds sway on issues that directly or indirectly involve funding. More often, though, the United States attempts to influence UNHCR practice through a positive use of its resources and ideas. For example, at the 2022 ExCom meeting, Julieta Valls Noyes, Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration of the US State Department, turned the microphone over to Basma Alawee, a former refugee from Iraq and now a US citizen, "as proof of our dedication to elevating refugee voices." During her remarks, Alawee emphasized her hope that "my participation today inspires the collective will of this body, to create similar opportunities for meaningful engagement and partnership for refugee leaders across the world."

Leading by Setting a Good Example

The United States exerts leadership through its own policies for the admission of refugees and displaced persons. In some cases, it has been a model for positive policies that promote protection and solutions whereas in others, it has been a model for policies that impede protection.

US international leadership has also been exerted through direct action. For example, President Barack Obama convened a US Leaders' Summit during the 2016 General Assembly meetings to mobilize new commitments to the global refugee crisis. The announcement of this Summit came immediately after the UN General Assembly decided to convene a high-level plenary on Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants on September 19, 2016. While the UN meeting sought to improve multilateral responses to both refugees and migrants, the US initiative focused on three specific objectives with respect to refugees: 1) to increase humanitarian funding from \$10 billion in 2015 to \$13 billion in 2016 by identifying new donors and increasing donations among existing ones; 2) to double the number of refugees to be resettled by identifying new resettlement countries, expanding the resettlement commitments of existing resettlement countries, and providing other legal channels for humanitarian admission when resettlement does not provide sufficient access; and 3) to facilitate refugee inclusion and self-reliance to enable refugees to meet their own needs and contribute to communities that host them. In this regard, the US sought and received commitments for more educational and work opportunities for refugees worldwide.

Refugees and others who need international protection come to the United States in multiple ways. The United States has resettled refugees and displaced persons since the end of World War II, granting them permanent admissions, and a pathway towards citizenship. Between 1982 and 2016, the US admitted 70% of all refugees who were resettled globally.¹⁶ This record took a substantial hit during the Trump administration and COVID-19 era and has not fully recovered more than three years into the Biden administration. In FY 2022 and FY 2023, the US, respectively, admitted more than 25,000 and 60,000 refugees, despite a ceiling of 125,000.

Each year, the President, in consultation with Congress, determines how many refugees will be admitted and how that number will be allocated by region. The administration has retained the 125,000 ceiling for FY 2024 for four priority categories: 1) individual cases referred by designated entities to the program by virtue of their circumstances and apparent need for resettlement; 2) groups of special concern designated by the Department of State as having access to the program by virtue of their circumstances and apparent need for resettlement; 3) individual cases



granted access for purposes of reunification with family members already in the United States; and 4) individual cases from all nationalities who have been referred by private sponsors in the United States, and who receive post-arrival support and services from those sponsors. Private sponsorship is new for the United States. The program is loosely modeled on the Canadian private sponsorship program. In launching the program, the administration described it as a way to empower everyday Americans to play a leading role in welcoming refugees arriving through the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and supporting their resettlement and integration as they build new lives in the United States.

In recent years, the Biden administration has responded to two major refugee crises outside of the regular resettlement program. With the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, thousands of Afghans with close ties to the United States would have faced considerable danger due to their association with the US government and occupation forces. Those granted parole are not entitled to permanent residency and are encouraged to apply for asylum or follow another pathway to permanent status as their temporary parole status only lasts two years, although it is renewable.

Under the Uniting for Ukraine parole program, a person lawfully residing in the United States can sponsor a Ukrainian to be paroled into the United States. The sponsors must demonstrate an ability to support parolees financially and a commitment to assist the Ukrainians in finding shelter, enroll children in school, apply for work authorization, and provide other assistance. Afghans and Ukrainians who are admitted under parole are eligible for certain refugee resettlement services and may benefit from assistance from public and private initiatives to facilitate integration.

The most problematic refugee protection issue in the United States today pertains to asylum for those who spontaneously arrive in the country. How the US handles asylum applications affects its influence on refugee protection worldwide. Some of the policies intended to avert the arrival of asylum claimants are ones designed to deter asylum seekers from seeking entry, including interdiction, mandatory detention, and direct return to home countries without having access to asylum. Other asylum policies aim to shift asylum seekers into alternative pathways. For example, in partial response to a surge in applications for asylum, and recognition of the dangers to transiting asylum seekers, the United States has put in place in-country processing systems. Another example is establishment of regional processing centers in Latin American countries to process refugees through the resettlement system as well as to handle asylum claims.

The United States can be credited with taking leadership regarding other aspects of asylum adjudications. For example, it has been a leader in establishing that fear of persecution by non-state actors can be a basis for asylum if the government of the country of origin is unwilling or unable to protect the applicant. The United States was also among the first countries to provide guidance to asylum adjudicators regarding gender-based persecution, issuing guidelines in 1995. Because these are guidelines, not laws, however, government authorities have not been consistent in application. During the Trump administration, for example, the Attorney General used his authority to overturn decisions made in immigration court that had the effect of undermining protections based on gender and non-state actor violence.



Assessing US Leadership and Refugee Policy

In general, the United States plays an active leadership role with regards to assistance and protection of refugees and displaced persons. The country remains the largest donor to the array of international organizations with responsibilities in this area. Generally, there has been bipartisan support for these contributions to humanitarian programs. These levels of funding for UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies, effectively give the United States great power when setting the priorities of these organizations.

US funding provides both multilateral and bilateral assistance, giving some discretion to the international organizations to determine how to best meet the needs of refugees and IDPs. At the same time, it has earmarked funds to encourage these agencies to address what the US perceives as unmet needs, as evidenced by US advocacy for many years for the protection of refugee women and girls.

The United States has pushed initiatives to expand protection for other populations at risk, such as migrants caught in crises in their countries of residence. Only a handful of UN member States have taken on initiatives of this sort—the leadership of Norway and Switzerland on the Nansen Initiative Global Protection Agenda for those who cross borders in the context of natural disasters and the effects of climate change comes to mind. In this case, the US government has taken a keen interest, and issued a White House report on climate change, migration, and displacement. However, it supported, but did not lead, these initiatives.

The convening power of the US government has played an important role historically and continues to be one of the principal reflections of its leadership within the field. This power does not appear to have diminished. For example, President Biden initiated work on the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, which was signed at the Summit of the Americas in June 2022. The Los Angeles Declaration commits signatories to expand legal migration pathways, support immigrant integration, invest in migration management, and coordinate responses to mass migration movements and displacement crises.

Nevertheless, there are reasons to be cautious about US leadership. Amid record numbers of asylum seekers attempting to cross a too porous southern border and the resulting economic, social, and political pressures, US leadership and refugee protection have suffered. The confluence of US border dysfunction and a global displacement crisis has sapped US resources, political resolve, and leadership within the international refugee regime.

What does all this mean for US leadership in the refugee regime? By most measures, the US is still the dominant power, whether measured by influence, money, or admission levels. Unlike in many other policy spheres, it has often preferred to operate through multilateral approaches in supporting protection and assistance for refugees and other displaced people. The US government has been supportive of other governments that wish to take the lead in important international initiatives to enhance protection, as discussed above in reference to the Nansen Initiative. That said, however, there is little likelihood that major changes in global policies would succeed without US agreement to these practices.



Pressing Policy and Programming Issues

Six major issues affecting refugees and displaced people require consistent and effective leadership. First, better mechanisms are needed to prevent and prepare for crises that produce mass movements of people across and within borders. Second is how to better protect the displaced people while addressing the root causes and consequences of their displacement. Third, greater progress is needed in identifying sustainable solutions for protracted refugees and IDPs. Fourth is the call to increase the meaningful participation of refugees on issues affecting them. Fifth is the need to strengthen international cooperation and organizations that protect and assist refugees. Sixth is the need to implement and address the limitations of global compacts.

1. Prevention and Preparedness for Forced Displacement

Ensuring effective prevention and protection requires the active participation of peace, security, and human rights organizations in addressing root and proximate causes of forced displacement as well as protection during and after human displacement. Most refugees and IDPs are the victims of conflict and repression by governments and non-state actors.

In many cases, the United States, if not a party to the conflict, as was the case in Afghanistan and Iraq, has national security concerns about the outcome of the war and may well be arming some of the combatants. This is currently the case in the Ukraine-Russia and Israel-Hamas conflicts. In other cases, the United States has imposed economic and other sanctions on countries that have repressive policies towards their own population. These sanctions can lead to mass movements when people who are already living in countries with failed economies and poor governance are unable to feed themselves or their families, as in the cases of Cuba and Venezuela.

Box 2: US Sanctions on Venezuela and Subsequent Outflow of Migrants and Refugees

The United States has imposed sanctions on Venezuela since 2005. When Nicolás Maduro came to power in 2013, the US [expanded sanctions](#) in response to criminal, antidemocratic, and corrupt actions by his government. However, these sanctions have failed to remove Maduro from power and have exacerbated the effects of the economic and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. In August 2017, President Trump issued [E.O. 13808](#), which prohibited the Venezuelan government, including state-run gas company PdVSA, from accessing US financial markets. Sanctions on the oil industry, along with Venezuelan government mismanagement and corruption, have contributed to the financial crippling of an economy that is [almost entirely dependent](#) on oil exports.

In 2020, Venezuela's annual [GDP growth](#) dropped a staggering -30%. [GDP per capita](#) bottomed out at \$5,770—a far cry from the 2013 GDP per capita of \$18,860. This economic collapse has been a major factor in the displacement of more than 7.7 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees. Despite the issuance of some licenses by the Biden administration to temporarily reduce the severity of some sanctions, the root causes of government corruption and economic mismanagement remain in place. The US Congress broadly supports a negotiated solution to the crisis predicated on a demand for free and fair elections in Venezuela. However, Maduro continues to oppose democratic reform and has called the opposition primaries held in October 2023 [a fraud](#). Meanwhile, over 262,000 Venezuelan migrants crossed the US-Mexico border in 2023.



Governments, including the United States, seldom consider displacement as they prepare to engage in conflict, impose sanctions, and take other steps to address global tensions. The prospect of mass displacement would, in and of itself, not convince governments to forego these actions. Nevertheless, greater attention to the impacts of these policy decisions on displacement in bodies such as the National Security Council may help governments address the humanitarian needs of people affected by their decisions in a more sustained, timely and effective way. Governments may think twice about moving too quickly towards conflict and sanctions that have deleterious effects on people and the communities that receive unexpectedly large numbers of refugees and displaced people.

Improvements in technology hold promises for better early warning of conflict and resulting displacement. Studies have shown that using social media, mobile phone records, satellite images and other forms of ‘big data’ can help pinpoint triggers of conflict and displacement in ways unavailable previously.¹⁷ More timely and accurate early warning could, in turn, encourage governments to analyze the impact of various policy choices on displacement and help them determine when, where, how and why people move or remain in place. Displacement impact studies—similar in concept to environmental impact ones—could then help governments weigh the risks of displacement relative to any gains from among the options before them. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction could be a useful model for developing a conflict risk reduction strategy to reduce the impact of conflict on people.¹⁸

Box 3: Use of Social Media to Predict Forced Displacement

Advancements in online technology can allow organizations to prepare infrastructure and systems to provide immediate relief and long-term solutions for displaced populations. However, it is difficult to access useful predictive data in the midst of displacement-causing events. To account for this, [a 2019 study conducted by Singh, et al](#), sought to understand how social media signals could be used in tandem with traditional signifiers of conflict to inform predictions of forced displacement. Focusing on displacement in Iraq, the study collected around 1.3 billion tweets in English and Arabic. After determining the geographic location of each tweet, the study analyzed them to track the occurrence of conflict, buzz (interest) surrounding it, and public perceptions such as tone, stance, and emotion regarding the Islamic State (ISIS). In all, the study constructed over 400 buzz, sentiment, and event monitorable variables spanning factors that are recognized as important drivers of displacement. They discovered that, when used to predict forced displacement events, big data variables performed very well, but not as well as traditional variables.

However, when blending accessible traditional variables with social media variables, the predictive ability improved across nearly all conditions. Utilizing social media to track hashtags, keywords in tweets, and local headlines provides distinct advantages to traditional methods of tracking the likelihood of displacement in locations where people have access to social media. Data is instantly available and will remain live and up to date at all stages of conflict and displacement. Social media data may also be some of the only information accessible during conflict, during which large scale surveys or investigations may be limited or impossible. By combining this data with traditional variables of forced displacement, observers can improve the accuracy and precision of predictions of forced displacement events.

Early warning and risk reduction are not panaceas. Displacement will occur even when early warnings are in place, and much has been done to try to avert conflict. As a result, emergency preparedness is essential to ensure that displacements do not become humanitarian disasters. The UNHCR commissioned a report in 2021 outlining preparedness options. It set out four pillars of preparedness, consisting of: 1) analysis and prediction; 2) planning



and coordination; 3) financial preparedness, and 4) response and delivery mechanisms. UNHCR and other UN and non-governmental organizations have also issued guidelines for emergency preparedness.¹⁹ It is equally important, however, that destination and transit countries plan for future displacement as they are the ones that bear the responsibility for ensuring the safety of the displaced people, whether they are refugees or IDPs. Since most refugees and IDPs are in less developed countries, financial resources from donor countries need to also focus on preparedness at the local level.

2. Protection of Refugees and Other Displaced People

Forcibly displaced people from violent conflict and repression fit into several categories with different legal frameworks. Refugees, under the 1951 UN Convention and its 1967 Protocol, are only one category of forced migration. In US and international laws, refugees are defined as people with a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular group, and political opinion. They must also be unwilling or unable to return to their home country because of this fear of persecution. This is a difficult standard to meet because it is incumbent on those applying for asylum to prove that 1) their fear of persecution is well-founded by concrete evidence of threat, 2) this fear is based on one of the five grounds listed above, and 3) they are unable to find protection in their own country. Many asylum seekers are fleeing from equally life-threatening situations but do not meet all three criteria. This is particularly the case in showing persecution. Flight from conflict does not necessarily rise to the level of persecution and, if it does, it may not be because of one of the grounds listed in the convention.

Because of the narrow legal definition of a refugee, actions have been taken to stretch the original definition, for example to include gender-based persecution. In many developing countries, UNHCR uses its offices to provide de facto rather than de jure refugee status to people who flee conflicts. Governments have adopted complementary statuses, such as Temporary Protected Status, to allow people fleeing conflict to remain in their countries until conditions change. The United States has also used humanitarian parole to admit people from certain countries, such as Afghanistan and Ukraine, outside of the asylum system.²⁰ The parolees do not have a pathway to permanent residence or an ability to sponsor their relatives, unlike those admitted through the refugee resettlement system.

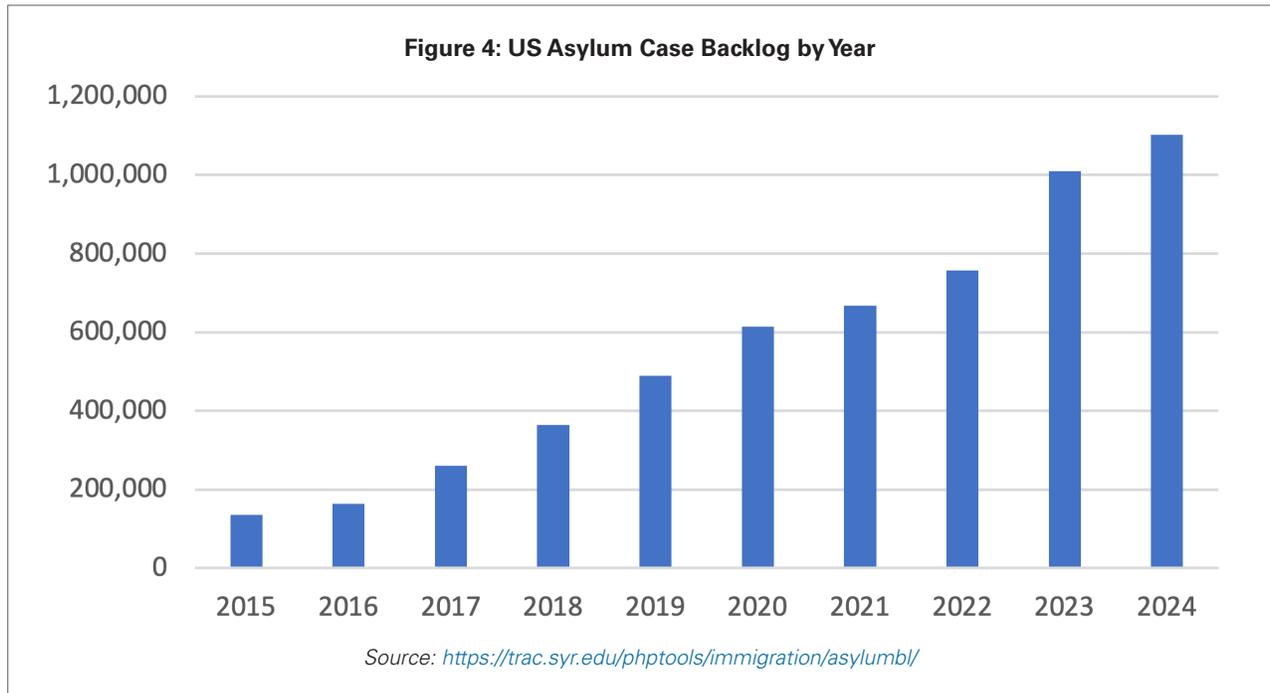
Asylum Protection Issues in the United States

American leadership in addressing forced movements of people worldwide is enhanced when the US practices what it preaches to other governments about protecting refugees and abiding fully by international and US refugee laws. Even when there are asylum induced crises at the borders, as is the case today at the US southern border, it is incumbent on the authorities to abide by human rights principles that are codified in international and domestic law. This is not to say that everyone seeking asylum will be granted refugee status or that reforms in the asylum process are not needed to improve US refugee policy. Rather, it is a call for reforms that address flaws in the system without degrading the country's ability to protect those seeking entry because they fear for their well-being.

The credibility of asylum systems is dependent upon having the administrative capacity to adjudicate applications in a fair and expeditious manner. That is now lacking in the United States. As of January 2024, 3.4 million cases were pending in immigration court, in contrast with 2014, when there were fewer than 400,000 cases pending in



immigration court.²¹ Of the current total caseload pending, 1.1 million are asylum cases²² as shown in Figure 4. In August 2023, more than 970,000 applications were pending in the asylum office in US Citizenship and Immigration Services, which adjudicates affirmative cases from those already in the country.²³ There are only 682 immigration judges²⁴ and, as of the end of FY 2023, 760 asylum officers²⁵ available to adjudicate cases. The government agencies are trying to fill vacant positions, but more resources will be needed to make a dent in the backlog.



Unless the backlog is reduced significantly, those who meet the refugee definition will not be recognized as such in a timely way. At the same time, steps to deter those who apply for asylum because it is the only route to work authorization will fail. At present, work authorization is granted if an asylum seeker's case is not adjudicated within six months of the application; given the lengthy wait for a hearing, many of those who apply for asylum qualify for work permits.

With migrant flows to the US southern border increasing, it is important to redirect some of those numbers to more regular pathways by expanding access to student visas and work visas across the board. There must be a more permanent change to how the US accepts migrant workers, who may otherwise seek irregular pathways. By providing greater access to regular, documented routes, the caseload and the backlog of asylum cases would be reduced.

A similar situation arose in the 1990s, when the asylum backlog had grown significantly. In 1995 alone, 150,000 new cases were filed atop a backlog of 500,000. At that time, the government shifted to a 'first-in, last-out' system, freezing the existing backlog and only adjudicating new cases. Five years later, the number of new asylum applications were 75% lower, and the number of approvals were 50% higher.²⁶

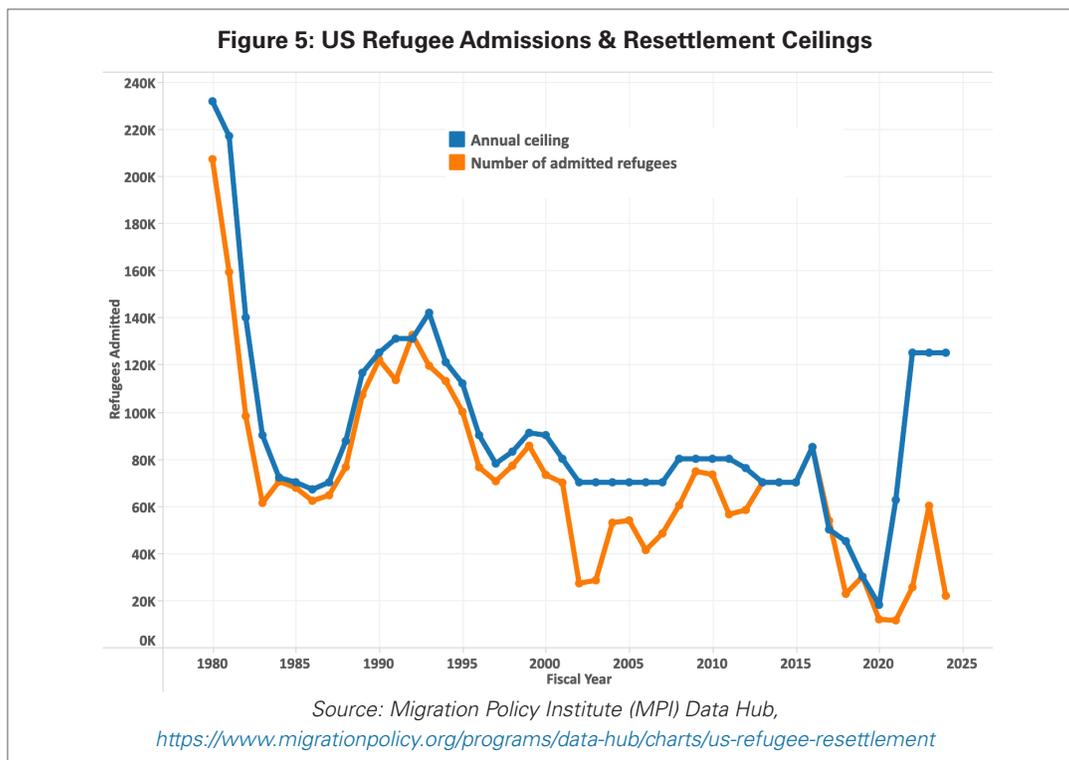


Box 4: Reducing the Backlog in the US Asylum Adjudications

The current backlog in asylum adjudications is not a new phenomenon. In the 1990s, the asylum backlog grew significantly. In 1995 alone, 150,000 new cases were filed atop a backlog of 500,000. At that time, the government shifted to a “first-in, last-out” system, freezing the existing backlog and only adjudicating new cases. Five years later, the number of new asylum applications were 75% lower, and the number of approvals were 50% higher. The Clinton administration and Congressional leaders agreed to provide alternative ways that those in the backlog could become permanent residents, adopting the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA), as well as similar legislation for Haitians and others. Under the legislation, asylum seekers who could demonstrate that deportation or removal would result in extreme hardship for the applicants, or their spouses, children, or parents were granted residency. They also needed to have been in the country for a set period and had no criminal history, among other requirements. Asylum cases were expedited to adjudicate the most recent arrivals, last in, first out.

US Refugee Admissions Reforms

Weaknesses in the refugee admissions system must also be addressed if the US is to regain its leadership role in securing protection for refugees through resettlement.²⁷ Since the end of World War II, the US has resettled more than 3 million refugees who were at risk. Promises that the US would resettle large numbers of refugees also encouraged other countries to open their borders to refugees since they were assured that some of the responsibility would be shared. The refugee resettlement process was not codified, however, until the Refugee Act of 1980 provided a universal definition of a refugee and a flexible system through which the President, in consultation with Congress, would set annual admission levels. It also established an assistance program that provided funds to private voluntary agencies and state governments in support of programs to help refugees integrate after arrival.



The drafters of the Refugee Act hoped that a permanent program for refugee admissions and assistance would replace the ad hoc use of parole, which had been the main way that refugees from Hungary, Cuba, the Soviet Union, and Southeast Asian countries had entered the US. Almost immediately after the Act enactment, however, the Mariel Boatlift of 1980 tested the new legislation. Rather than use the nascent asylum process spelled out in the Refugee Act, the government resorted to parole to admit the Cubans and Haitians who came by boat, although the term used to characterize them was “Cuban-Haitian Entrants Status Pending.”²⁸

More recently, humanitarian parole has been used in lieu of refugee resettlement to admit people from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Venezuela, and elsewhere, in part, because the resettlement system had been eroded and the infrastructure could not support the admission of large numbers of people needing immediate protection. It also reflected problems in using an individualized determination of persecution as the basis for refugee protection as some of those paroled into the country had a well-founded fear of death but not necessarily of persecution because of their individual characteristics. Many of those admitted through parole are now in the asylum backlog awaiting the adjudication of their claims. While admission levels through the refugee resettlement program have risen in recent years, they are still not at the levels that were seen during previous periods of great need. As an example, the US admitted more than 200,000 refugees in FY 1980, compared with 60,000 refugees in FY 2023.²⁹

Unlike the 1951 Refugee Convention, which only applies to those outside of their home country, the Refugee Act includes people still within their country of origin if they meet the other qualifications for refugee status. This means that the US can resettle people living in their home communities or those who are internally displaced if they have a well-founded fear of persecution. This provision has been used to establish in-country processing centers in Vietnam, Haiti, Cuba, the former Soviet Union, designated Central American countries, and other locations. In-country processing has generally been used to provide for orderly departure and alleviated the need for refugees to flee through dangerous transit routes. It requires cooperation with state authorities in these countries, otherwise refugees may be at even great risk. This is a little-known area of refugee law that could be useful in averting large scale irregular departures.

Reforms are also needed in Temporary Protected Status and other mechanisms to address the situation of people whose countries are in conflict.³⁰ TPS applies to individuals already in the United States, providing them a quasi-legal status that allows them to remain temporarily in the country with little threat of deportation and receive work authorization. They are not on a path to permanent residence or citizenship, as are those who enter as refugees or receive asylum. The recipients are usually unable to petition for admission of their close family members.

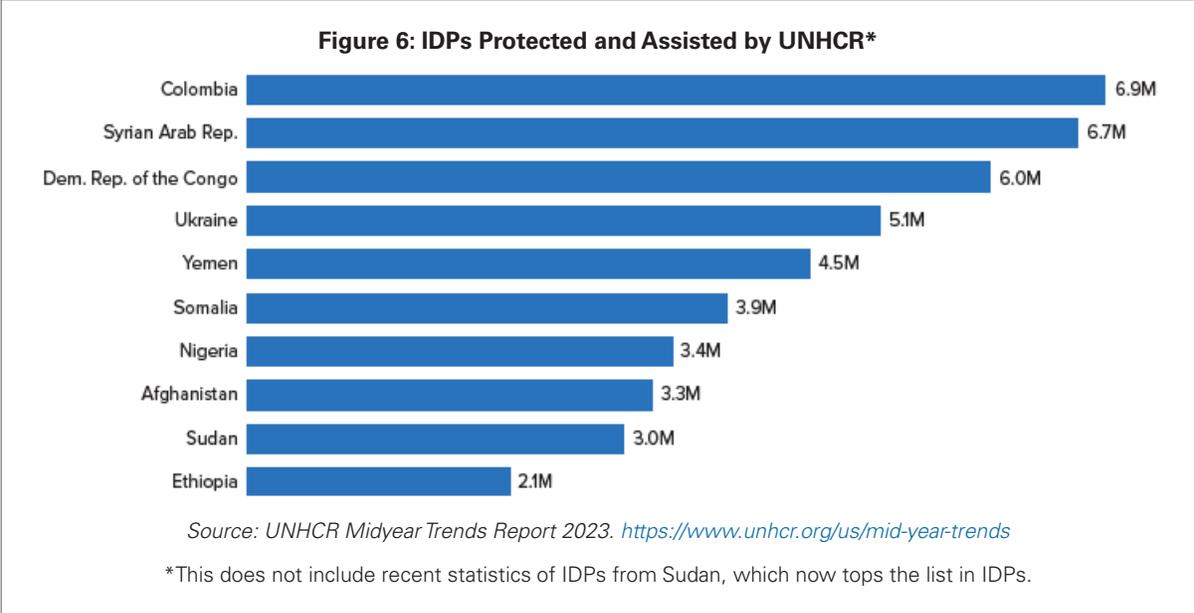
The government has considerable discretion in determining which groups are eligible for TPS. The decision often reflects US foreign policy concerns, leaving people from some countries with desperate conditions without access to its protections. TPS is also problematic because it seldom is truly temporary. For example, TPS was designated for Somali nationals in 1991 and has been extended through September 2024 at least.³¹ There are no mechanisms to provide permanent status even if the conditions that triggered TPS persist for decades. Nor are there mechanisms that facilitate the return of TPS beneficiaries if the conditions in their home country improve enough to permit return. If those granted TPS were refugees under UNHCR’s mandate, they would be given assistance to repatriate and upon arrival in their home country, they would be provided with aid to help them reintegrate.



Finding an appropriate balance between humanitarian interests and border security is never easy. Failure to find this balance, however, raises serious issues of moral hazard³²—the danger of inadvertently encouraging migrants to leave their countries and take long journeys at great risk to themselves in hopes of gaining asylum and being allowed to stay and to settle. All governments, especially the US, which is a favored destination for migrants from around the world, must guard against moral hazard, walking a fine line between legal obligations to protect the displaced people, the imperative of border control, and ensuring that migration is safe, orderly, and legal.

International Protection Issues

US global leadership, as discussed above, is essential to ensuring protection of refugees and displaced people worldwide. In addition to leading by example, the United States can do more to ensure that the organizations with primary responsibility for protecting these populations and their own staff 1) have adequate funding for protection; 2) are supported by US diplomacy in their efforts to protect themselves and the people they serve; and 3) have the information and tools they need to identify protection threats and take actions to repel them. These include intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), like UNHCR, government agencies in countries hosting refugees and displaced persons, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Protection is often defined in legal terms, including steps to ensure countries abide by the norm of *non-refoulement* of refugees. It can also involve steps to protect refugees and IDPs from bodily harm, sexual abuse and other forms of violence, food and water insecurity, discrimination, and protection from other threats to life and well-being, such as the effects of climate change.



Protection of IDPs is particularly difficult since they remain inside their countries of origin amid conflict and repression. Secondary displacement when conflicts spread to areas in which IDPs originally took refuge is common. Relying on governments to protect IDPs can be dangerous and naive. In many IDP situations, governments themselves are hostile to those seeking safety, especially when insurgencies have taken over territories thought to be safe.



While treatment of refugees is set out in binding treaties, the same does not apply to IDPs in many regions. Only the African Union has adopted a binding regional convention setting out the rights of IDPs and the responsibilities of states.³³

Promulgation of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in the 1990s has been useful in furthering the protection of IDPs but it is based on human rights conventions and not itself binding on states to implement its provisions. The security arms of the United Nations can play a role in enhancing protection for IDPs, particularly in providing clear mandates, financial resources, and training to peacekeeping operations to protect IDPs. The Security Council regularly receives briefings about refugees and IDPs and can play an important role in increasing security in the face of life-threatening conditions. Humanitarian corridors can be effective in not only assisting but also protecting IDPs. The US has often led these efforts although it is likely to intervene only when its strategic interests favor action.

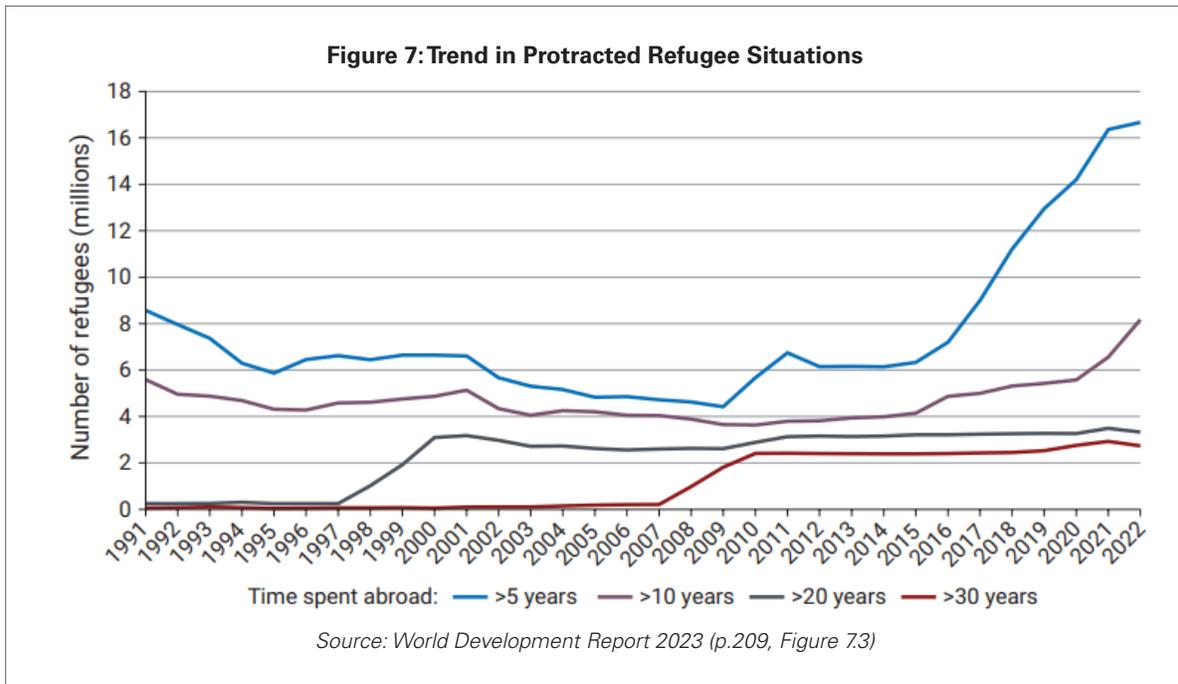
3. Protracted Refugees and IDPs: Out of Sight, Out of Mind?

Despite the global efforts to find durable solutions to the plight of forcibly displaced people, many refugees still live in protracted situations. At the end of 2022, more than 23 million refugees were living in 57 protracted situations in 37 host countries.³⁴ Yet, funding and programming continue to reflect the same approach, which rarely leads to sustainable solutions of return, local integration, or resettlement. Instead, it leads to increased tensions in host communities, fatigued donors, and lost opportunities for refugees to support themselves and contribute to their local economies. This prolonged exile shows a crisis within a catastrophe that demands a comprehensive response beyond humanitarian assistance. Failure to address the root causes or mitigate the risks could lead to irregular secondary movement, waste of human potential, and radicalization of jobless youth who are stuck in limbo without a future.³⁵

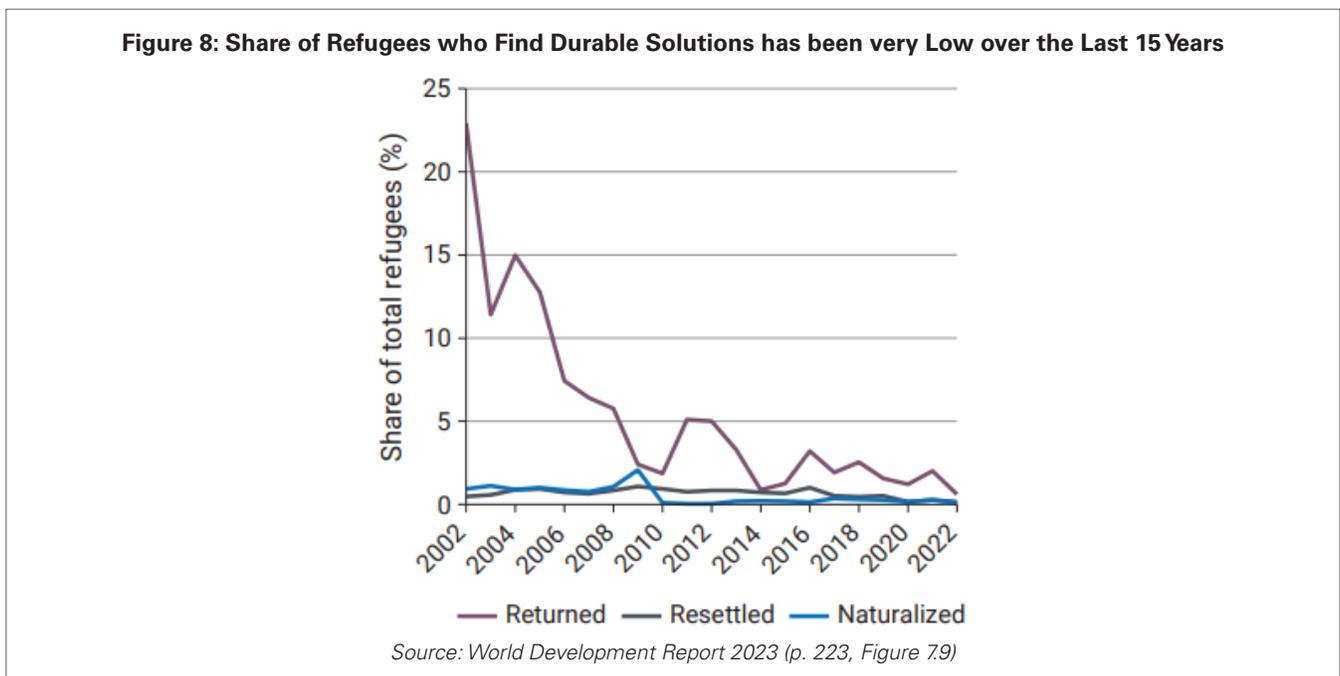
Although international attention is often focused on new crises, particularly those with large numbers of affected people and geopolitical importance, most protracted refugees see little hope of solutions to their plight. Protracted refugee situations are ones in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for at least five consecutive years in a given asylum country.³⁶ In an early report on protracted situations, UNHCR described them as “one in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social, and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile.”³⁷

Out of the two-thirds of the 36.4 million refugees and other people in need of international protection under UNHCR’s mandate that are in protracted situations, approximately 75% are living in mid to low-income countries with scarce resources to provide shelter and integrate them into their economic, educational, health and other systems.³⁸ This figure does not include IDPs. The number of refugees in protracted situations has more than doubled in the last decade and the trend continues upwards, as shown in Figure 7.





Protracted displacement is both a cause and result of fragility, which causes conflict that displaces too many people for far too long. It is rooted in modern conflict and warfare, often involving civil wars. Such wars can drag on for years, which subsequently means displacement often does, too. Indeed, the targeting of civilians and lack of stability makes it difficult for many refugees and others to return home once fighting has started.³⁹ This means that the three traditional durable solutions are difficult to achieve, as shown in Figure 8.



Repatriation, often considered the “preferred” durable solution among practitioners, is challenging to achieve for refugees who have fled ongoing conflict. Return also needs to be voluntary according to international standards, and it may take years before refugees feel it is safe for their return. Conditions working against return may also be exacerbated by poor governance, repression and persecution that drove refugees out of their home countries in the first place. Even when conflicts end, peace may not be stable, economies take years to recover, shelter has been destroyed or occupied by others, and infrastructures for transport, education and healthcare are lacking.

The second durable solution, local integration, is also problematic, especially in countries that are themselves poor and unstable. Governments may fear backlash from citizens who often see the refugees as potential competitors for scarce resources. They may also be willing to allow them to stay in camps or settlements that are funded by the international community—thus fulfilling their obligation not to forcibly return refugees. However, other governments may have no interest in allowing freedom of movement and the right to work, two important markers in becoming self-reliant and integrating into a host country. Moreover, a host state may hold the view that if the international community is responsible for the refugees, locals are more likely to accept their presence and governments need not pay for the services rendered to refugees. This sentiment may also carry over to IDPs, as well, who may be citizens of the state, but also seen as a burden to the communities in which they hope to settle. Tanzania is an example of a host country that has successfully integrated refugees through naturalization. In 2015, it naturalized more than 170,000 Burundian refugees, thereby ending 40 years of living in limbo.

Box 5: Local Integration of Burundian Refugees in Tanzania

In 2014, the government of Tanzania enacted a program to [grant citizenship](#) to at least 162,000 refugees from Burundi who have been living in protracted displacement since 1972. This initiative was the first time in which the solution of naturalization was implemented for such a large group. Decades prior, over 162,000 refugees fled Burundi to escape violence and conflict. Seeking refuge in Tanzania, this refugee population began to establish their communities in the refugee settlements of Katumba, Mishamo, and Ulyankulu. Over the decades, as return to Burundi remained dangerous, these settlements developed into towns. They were heavily and formally integrated into Tanzanian society, [paying taxes and contributing to agricultural exports](#).

In 2007, the Tanzanian government began negotiating a policy solution, resulting in the Tanzania Comprehensive Solution Strategy (TANCOSS), which was adopted by both Tanzania and Burundi in partnership with the UNHCR. Upwards of [\\$103 million](#) were allocated for integration efforts from the United Nations Development Assistance Plan (UNDAP). As to be expected, the policy rollout faced hurdles including the fact that the initial plan required refugees to move away from the settlements following their naturalization, leading to resistance to the concept of naturalization. There were also delays in the distribution of citizenship certificates as well as the distribution of international funding which caused newly naturalized refugees to fall into a [responsibility gap](#).

While this case study points to several flaws that future naturalization efforts will need to address, such as prioritizing binding documents, detailed logistical plans following naturalization, and tenets on infrastructure and land ownership, this effort proved successful and important. More than 170,000 found durable solutions. The granting of citizenship status provided communities with a sense of security and safety, allowing them to continue to establish their families and communities, while contributing to the social and material capital of Tanzania, without fear of deportation.



For its part, the third durable solution of refugee resettlement can help those it reaches, but the number of refugees who are resettled is very small, relative to the size of the population in need. During the first half of calendar year 2023, fewer than 60,000 refugees of the 2 million refugees that UNHCR estimated needed resettlement worldwide benefited from this solution.⁴⁰ Resettlement to the United States was picking up during this period, after several years at historic lows, but was still well below 125,000, which is what the administration had set as the admissions ceiling. Previously, resettlement to the US represented about 70% of admissions to all countries. The US, Canada, and Australia accounted for 90% of resettled refugees worldwide.

Resettlement is often considered to be the least desirable solution for refugees. It is more expensive than repatriation or local integration; refugees face higher hurdles after resettling because of language, cultural and other differences with host country nationals; and refugees often wish to stay closer to home in case repatriation becomes possible. Nevertheless, it is also an important option for many refugees with families abroad or who have skills that they cannot readily use where they are residing. It has also been used to reassure countries of first asylum that other countries are willing to share some of the responsibilities of assisting refugees. At the same time, if access to resettlement becomes a magnet for asylum seekers, it can backfire and render host countries more hostile to the presence of refugees.⁴¹

A critical issue in protracted refugee situations is considering that refugees do not live static lives, but have agency, with needs and preferences that change over time. The initial emergency response that may have characterized their needs in the first instance may look very different after a decade of displacement. As years pass, refugee needs often become more focused on livelihoods and self-reliance. Accessing the labor market so they can support themselves and their families, especially as donor fatigue may set in as initial emergencies drop from the news headlines and assistance provided wanes, becomes a top priority for many refugees.

In addition to employment, other key challenges facing protracted refugees include financial inclusion, and access to health services and education. Refugees in protracted situations may also face the psychological stress of long-term isolation and “othering”—the act of treating someone as separate from the in-group—especially if they have been in prolonged encampment. Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, for example, was established in 1992 and now hosts more than 200,000 refugees. Stigmatization and a sense of limbo over years—in some cases even generations of families that have lived in exile—can create frustrations and it stymies the potential of entire communities who could otherwise be contributing to the economy of the host societies.

The scarcity of traditional durable solutions has also prompted the international community to seek ways to buttress these options while exploring new ways to improve the lives of those in protracted situations. Complementary pathways and alternative solutions have generated new initiatives and scholarship. In addition, the Global Compact on Refugees is the most recent initiative to address the need for more and better solutions for refugees. Facilitating pathways to safe, orderly, and regular labor migration is another strategy in finding solutions for refugees, as elaborated in the GCM.

In addition to protracted refugee situations, many IDPs are in protracted situations. They find themselves unable to return to their communities of origin, integrate into their host communities, or move to third locations within or outside of their



countries. Unlike refugees, however, IDPs are citizens of the country in which they have been displaced and have rights based on their citizenship. This means that they may theoretically face fewer of the barriers that refugees do, such as accessing the labor market. However, in some cases, IDPs caught in protracted displacement may face other obstacles.

While many states are simply unable to protect and assist their IDP populations, other states are the direct cause of their displacement and may systematically violate IDP rights. IDPs may face long-term discrimination and persecution by their own states or other groups within the state, and the international community's response is ad hoc at best, lacking the norms and institutions that are dedicated to refugee response. In 2022, the Secretary-General issued an Action Agenda that puts solutions at the top of the initiative.⁴²

The action plan builds on criteria adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons, which set out eight criteria for determining if a durable solution is at hand. These include long-term safety, security and freedom of movement; adequate standard of living; access to livelihoods and employment; family reunification; access to replacement personal and other documentation; access to remedies and justice; accessible mechanism for restoration of housing, land and property; and participation in public affairs. These are relevant whether IDPs return home, remain where they initially found safety, or move to a third location.

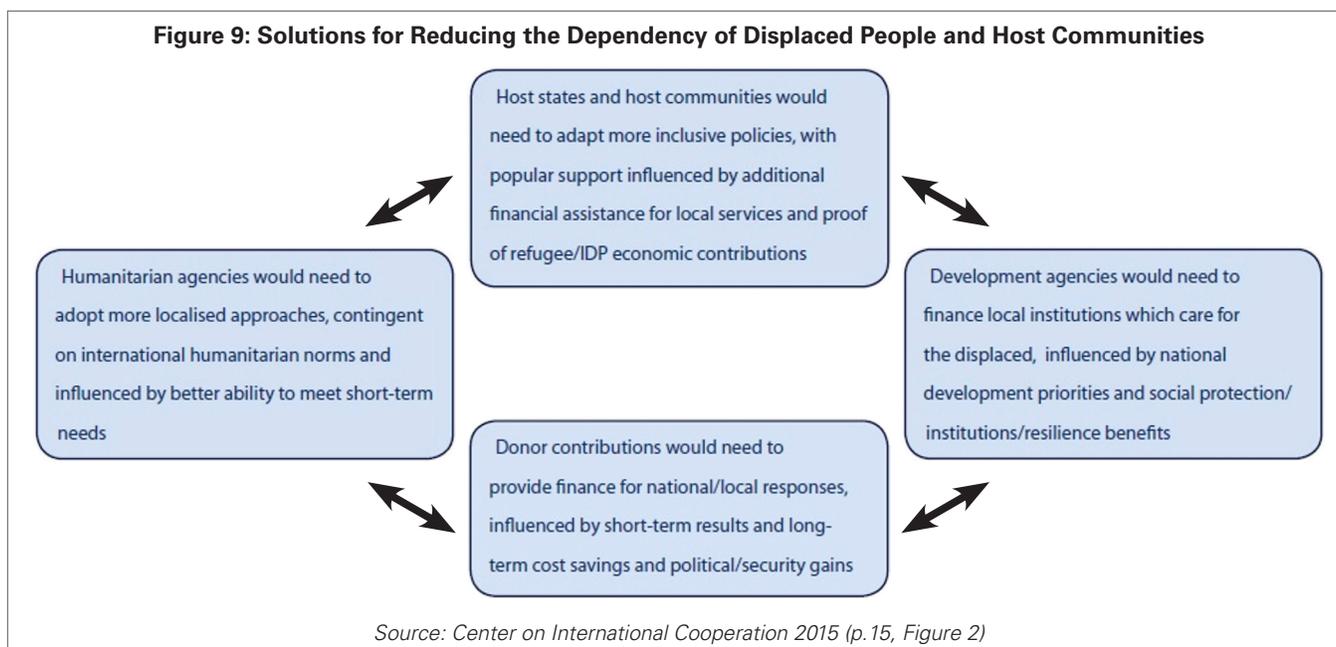
While these initiatives are good steps in finding solutions for refugees, the statistics highlight the difficult road ahead. States are increasingly restrictionist in their policies, and tendencies to try to contain refugees and avoid their integration hamper progress toward solutions. However, there are promising trends that go beyond commitments to action. The need to involve development actors and financing institutions in helping refugees is more recognized than it was only a decade ago. In the 1990s, for example, as many Cold War conflicts ended, UNHCR worked with development actors to help the repatriated refugees and the communities to which they were returning. The programs were not sustainable. The development agencies continued to see UNHCR bearing responsibility for refugees and did not step up to continue programs they had helped start.⁴³

Today, development agencies, such as the World Bank and the UN Development Program, appear to have more sustained interest and are investing accordingly. For example, through the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank Group (WBG) programmed resources of more than \$3.1 billion for refugee programs in low-income countries. The Bank's Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF) committed \$6.2 billion in concessional finance for loans to mid-income countries hosting refugees. Moreover, targets applicable to refugees and displaced people are included in the Sustainable Development Goals.

The World Bank programs are particularly innovative in that they provide resources for mid-income countries that host large numbers of refugees in addition to its support for low-income states. The Window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR) provides predictable resources over multiple years by supporting sound hosting policies. A few of the programs aim to address the needs not only of refugees but of host communities in a coordinated way. The Private Sector for Refugees (PS4R) program sees growth in strategically targeted micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in host communities, yielding jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities for the forcibly displaced. The World Bank is also conducting impact evaluations of different programs to build the evidence base for determining the best ways to enhance the ability of refugees to live normal lives while in exile or on return.



Figure 9: Solutions for Reducing the Dependency of Displaced People and Host Communities



In addressing protracted displacement challenges, four shifts in thinking and practice are critical. First, from perceiving refugees and IDPs as separate challenge from development to including them in national planning as core part of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda of leaving no one behind. Second, from the care and maintenance approach to the localization framework that benefits both the displaced people and host communities. Third, from practices that marginalize refugees and IDPs to the ones where they are integrated legally, socially, financially, and culturally as productive members of society. Finally, a shift from treating protracted displacement as a country specific, short-term issue to supporting host countries that are providing global public good by hosting refugees is imperative to avoid aid dependency.⁴⁴

4. Meaningful Participation of Refugees and IDPs

Calls for greater participation of refugees in decisions about their own future have been present since at least the 1980s. Until recently, however, there was a significant gap between the rhetoric in favor of refugee participation and actual action to incorporate refugees in all decision-making processes. Too often, refugees are consulted but do not necessarily have the political or financial clout needed to shape the decisions that are made.

Several factors have coalesced in recent years to bring greater attention to refugee participation, mostly related to the actions of refugee-led organizations (RLOs).⁴⁵ With RLOs increasingly bringing attention to the importance of their work, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic,⁴⁶ more attention has been paid to the development of meaningful refugee participation as a normative approach. The affirmation of the Global Compact on Refugees specifically was a watershed moment, including within it Paragraph 34 that reads:

“Responses are most effective when they actively and meaningfully engage those they are intended to protect and assist. Relevant actors will, wherever possible, continue to develop and support consultative processes that enable refugees and host community members to assist in designing appropriate, accessible, and inclusive responses...”⁴⁷



As discussed in a white paper for the GCR, “RLOs have added new services based on their communities’ expressed needs, improved gender parity within their organizations, solidified their missions and strategic plans, and enhanced their sustainability through funded donor proposals,” enabling them to participate more effectively in local, regional, and international settings.⁴⁸

Yet, the gap between recognizing the value of RLOs and following the leadership of refugees is still large. International institutions have explored ways to engage the insights of lived experience in a substantive way, including developing the Advisory Board to the UNHCR and the Refugee Advisory Group to the Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (CRCP). Building these forums, creating equitable partnerships, and relaxing stringent funding requirements are specific means to develop the necessary conditions for the meaningful participation of refugees and IDPs.⁴⁹

Box 6: UNHCR Definition of Refugee-led Organization (RLO)

DEFINITION: Refugee-led Organization (RLO)

“An organization or group in which persons with direct lived experience of forced displacement play a primary leadership role and whose stated objectives and activities are focused on responding to the needs of refugees and/or related communities.”

- 1. **ORGANIZATION OR GROUP:** refers to individuals that work together through collective action as either formal or informal, registered or unregistered, or virtual or physical entities, initiatives or networks.
- 2. **PERSONS WITH A DIRECT LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT:** includes asylum seekers, refugees and former refugees.

Asylum-seeker: A general term for any person who is seeking international protection. In some countries, it is used as a legal term referring to a person who has applied for refugee status or a complementary international protection status and has not yet received a final decision on their claim. It can also refer to a person who has not yet submitted an application but intends to do so, or may be in need of international protection.

Refugees: Any person who meets the eligibility criteria under an applicable refugee definition, as provided for in international or regional refugee instruments, under UNHCR’s mandate, or in national legislation. Under international law and UNHCR’s mandate, refugees are persons outside their countries of origin who are in need of international protection because of feared persecution, or a serious threat to their life, physical integrity or freedom in their country of origin as a result of persecution, armed conflict, violence or serious public disorder.

- 3. **PRIMARY LEADERSHIP:** refugees play a primary leadership role in an organization when they have the sustained ability to make a substantive contribution to the organization’s decision-making. Where national policies allow, refugees hold the majority of the senior leadership roles, governing boards, and as senior executive management. However, refugees may not be able to play these formal roles if national policies do not allow, but still be substantively involved in all decisions of the organization in a manner that is accessible, informed, safe, and free.
- 4. **RESPONDING TO:** refers to the motivation of RLO action being needs and priorities expressed by refugees and related communities, reflecting the dynamic relationship between RLOs and the communities they serve.
- 5. **NEEDS OF:** RLOs engage in advocacy, protection, assistance, and service provision to advance rights-based and people-centred responses for persons who are forcibly displaced and related communities.
- 6. **RELATED COMMUNITIES:** refers to communities that are proximate to persons who are forcibly displaced, including host communities, and communities whose well-being is connected to the well-being of persons who are forcibly displaced.



The recently defined obligation for the meaningful participation of forcibly displaced people under the GCR has led to numerous approaches, shifting discourse from the “why” meaningful refugee participation is important, to the “how” it can feasibly be implemented. There are still significant barriers to be addressed, such as travel visas, but the trend in refugee participation is encouraging. In 2023, for example, the number of refugee delegates who attended the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) was 300, which is an increase of 228 from the previous GRF 2019 where only 72 refugee delegates attended.

While many models exist, those which prioritize both lived experience and thematic expertise of the displaced people make substantive and meaningful contributions. Below are some ways to increase and sustain meaningful participation of refugees.

Engaging People with Lived Experience in a Regularized, Ongoing, and Equitable Manner

Refugee participation is meaningful when “refugees—regardless of location, legal recognition, gender, identity and demographics—are prepared for and participating in fora and processes where strategies are being developed and/or decisions are being made (including at local, national, regional, and global levels, and especially when they facilitate interactions with host states, donors, or other influential bodies), in a manner that is ethical, sustained, safe, and supported financially.”⁵⁰ A nascent example within the US policy landscape is the United States Refugee Advisory Board (USRAB). Further developing the relationship between the State Department’s PRM Bureau by expanding upon the opportunities for dialogue between these entities and leveraging its members’ specific networks are ways in which meaningful refugee participation can be enhanced.

Developing New Funding Opportunities and Removing Funding Barriers for RLOs

Significant barriers exist for refugee-led organizations looking to access funding for their often lifesaving work. Private philanthropy has led the way in reducing constraints to access programmatic and core funding for organizations led by individuals with lived experience of forced displacement, and UNHCR has followed suit with the development of the Refugee-Led Innovation Fund.⁵¹ The significant bureaucratic barriers (e.g. country registrations and fees, organizational bank accounts, official documentation) that stand between RLOs making an impact and the necessary funds can be reduced or reworked to best represent the work being undertaken. Additionally, the development of new streams of funding to be made available to those with lived experience and based on key deliverables can have a far-reaching impact. Consultation with these groups as key interlocutors between the state and the affected population can also be gained through these forms of partnership, seeking a learning, equitable relationship rather than a traditional funding arrangement.

Shifting International Discourse by Setting a Good Example Publicly and Loudly

Since 2022, the US has regularly included an advisor with lived experience of forced displacement in their state delegations to meetings of the global refugee system, such as the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (now renamed CRCP) and ExCom. As discussed in the earlier example where PRM Assistant Secretary Julieta Valls Noyes shared her speaking time with refugee advisor Basma Alawee, this power-shifting practice has since become



more widespread. Since then, US officials have allocated some of their speaking time to the refugee advisor, marking an important symbolic shift which recognizes the importance of the advisor's insights. This practice has spread to other states too, with Australia, Canada, Germany, Brazil, and New Zealand all engaging in this practice across different meetings of the global refugee system. Leading by example in a manner which is both public and significant can encourage other states to follow.

5. Strengthening Key Refugee Institutions at Home and Abroad

Domestic Institutions

Responsibilities for policy making and programs for refugees and displaced people are scattered across numerous federal departments, with the assistance of UN and other intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations. Besides its funding role discussed earlier, PRM also plays an important diplomatic role with host countries and others, including ones to ensure that refugees are not forcibly returned. PRM is also instrumental in determining which refugees to admit to the US. It also provides grants for initial reception and placement of those who enter. Longer term assistance for resettled refugees rests with the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which works with state governments, NGOs, and others to fund cash and medical assistance and other services to refugees. ORR is also responsible for protection of unaccompanied minors entering the country, many of whom are seeking asylum.

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has refugee and asylum corps that, respectively, adjudicate applications for resettlement and asylum. Two other DHS agencies have a role in the apprehension of asylum seekers: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), which includes the Border Patrol. The Executive Office for Immigration Review, which includes the immigration courts and Board of Immigration Appeals, as well as the Office for Immigration Litigation are in the Justice Department. Other agencies, such as the National Security Council (NSC) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), address displacement issues as they arise in specific countries or globally when these issues may pose national security threats. The Domestic Policy Council does the same to asylum seekers and refugees within the United States.

This complex set of institutional interests in refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced people makes it essential to have effective coordination mechanisms. The drafters of the Refugee Act of 1980 recognized this fact and put into the legislation that the position of a US Coordinator for Refugee Policy should be established within the Executive Branch. This position was created but neither its scope of responsibility, nor its authority over other department agencies and bureaus, was well defined. In 1983, the US General Accounting Office reported to Congress that the placement of the Coordinator's office in the State Department was problematic: "the Office receives some of its staff and all of its funding, administrative, communication, and legal support from the Department."⁵² Over time, the Coordinator's role diminished and eventually was eliminated. The need for coordination did not diminish, however, particularly in light of the challenges to asylum, refugee resettlement, and overseas assistance and protection.

Similarly, Congress is not as well situated to consider issues related to refugees and displaced people as it once was. There have long been staunch proponents of refugee resettlement and generous allocation of funds internationally



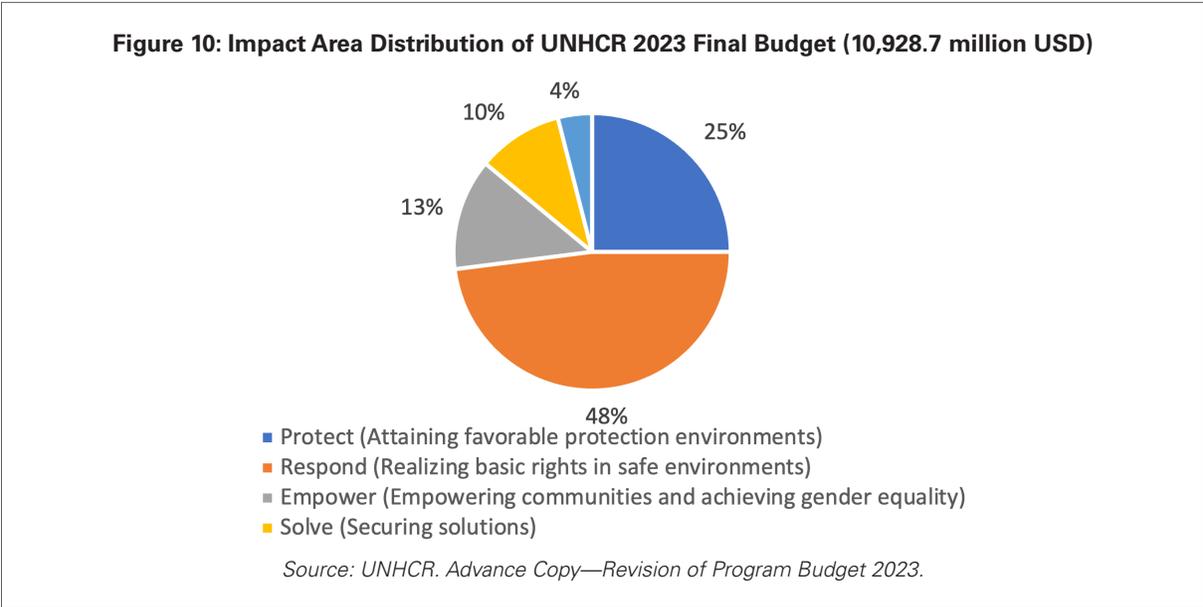
on both sides of the aisle. The Bipartisan Congressional Refugee Caucus in the House of Representatives allowed for discussions by members of both parties on difficult issues that needed Congressional attention. By the 116th Congress, however, only the co-chair of the caucus came from the Republican party. By the 117th Congress, the caucus ceased to exist and has not been resuscitated, despite its importance and the growing importance of the issue it addresses.

International Institutions

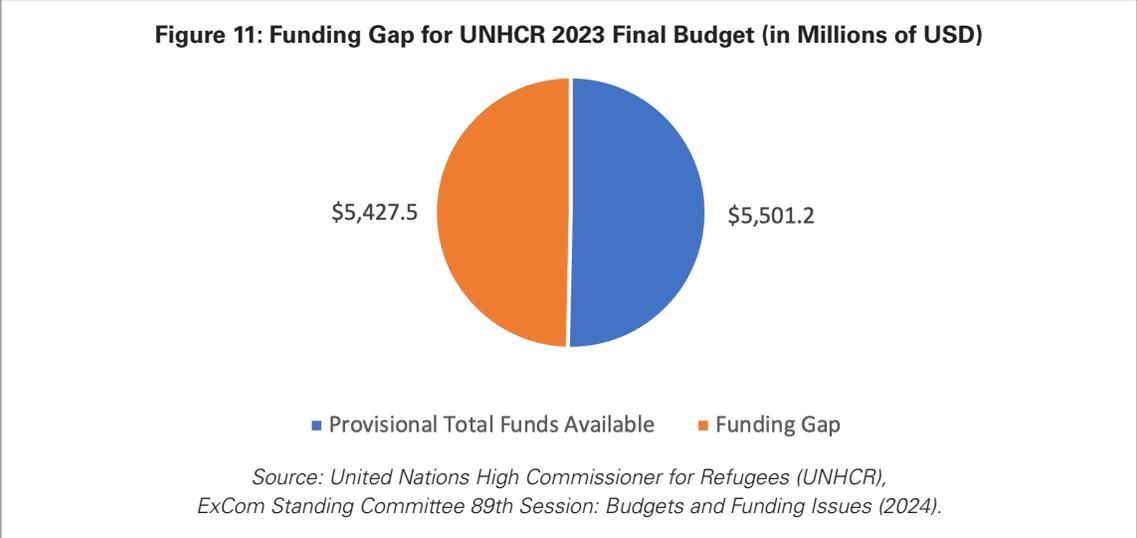
UNHCR is the principal international organization that responds to the needs of refugees and displaced people worldwide.⁵³ Its work is supplemented by IOM, the WFP, the Red Cross movement, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNDP, World Bank and other international development agencies within the UN system, and numerous nongovernmental organizations, to mention just a few of the relevant agencies.

These organizations are often overwhelmed when responding to new crises, and also have to address the needs of those in protracted situations. UNHCR has the clearest mandate, but it goes back to the 1950s. At the time of its founding, the expectation was that it would be needed for only a few years and would focus its efforts on refugees in Europe. Over time, UNHCR’s activities have expanded significantly but some of these—particularly related to internal displacement—are not clearly defined. Nor are they embedded in UNHCR’s financing. Although IDPs represent the largest segment of UNHCR’s population of concern, programs for refugees and asylum seekers still receive the bulk of funding. In 2023, programs for IDPs represented only 20% of the budget, with programs for refugees representing 69%.⁵⁴

UNHCR receives only a fraction of its budget from the UN, with the vast majority coming from contributions from states and other sources. In almost every year, UNHCR receives fewer financial resources than requested, and in some cases, the gap between need and funding is so great that they are unable to provide even basic services. For example, UNHCR’s approved budget for 2023 was almost \$11 billion. About 25% was allocated to protection; 48% to response; 13% to empowerment; and 10% to securing solutions. The remainder was for operational reserves.



By the end of the year, however, only \$5.5 billion had been raised, even though the number of people in need of services was the largest in UNHCR history. This led to a funding gap of 47% as shown in Figure 11.



UNHCR’s sources of funding are broad but not deep. As discussed above, most funds come from the United States, EU countries, and Japan. The private sector provides aid as well. For example, \$95 million came from private donations from the United States. Most donors provide relatively small amounts of money. After years of trying to entice wealthy countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council to increase their funding, only Saudi Arabia ranked among the 25 most generous donors, with a contribution of \$25 million.⁵⁵ During the same period, the Russian Federation contributed a mere \$2 million to UNHCR. The People’s Republic of China, the second largest economy in the world, provided just under \$2 million.

Funding is a constant struggle for other agencies serving refugees and displaced people. Most of IOM’s funding, for example, is project based, with a high proportion of its funds earmarked to respond to conflict and environmental emergencies. As with UNHCR, IOM experiences budget uncertainty, since it is not always clear if sufficient resources will be forthcoming to cover all the needed activities. Also, IOM has the same level of dependence on a few donors, especially the United States and EU countries, although its work is global. Institutional responsibility for IDPs is still a challenge although some progress has been made, with the development of the cluster system that assigns lead agencies for various sectors, such as protection, camp management, health, and other services.

Tackling these problems means moving away from siloed approaches to humanitarian and development cooperation, bringing in solutions-thinking from the start of an emergency. It also requires mainstreaming displacement considerations in all multilateral processes and financing instruments that could assist refugee-hosting countries. These processes and instruments include Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention of Climate Change (COP), Summit of the Future, New Agenda for Peace, Group of Seven (G7), and Group of Twenty (G20), among others.



International Cooperation

Development cooperation is currently hampered by policy environments that do not enable inclusion of refugees due to limitations on freedom of movement, encampment policies, and lack of identity and travel documentation. Comprehensive approaches require whole-of-government engagement, aligning different sectoral departments and ministries around common policy approaches, both to humanitarian and development funding by donors and to sectoral responses by hosts. Similarly, whole-of-society approaches need to support comprehensive refugee responses and be broadly aligned around common policy objectives and targets. While there was some progress with the multi-stakeholder pledges at the GRF, particularly in the areas of climate, inclusion, and peacebuilding, more work is needed to focus the pledges further around ambitious targets and common policy goals.

Ensuring effective prevention and protection requires the active participation of peace, security, and human rights organizations in addressing root and proximate causes of displacement as well as protection during and after displacement. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Director General of IOM regularly brief the Security Council, providing an overview of the situation of displaced people and refugees globally, as well as challenges facing their agencies. For example, during a briefing in 2023, the High Commissioner drew attention to a growing number of emergencies causing large-scale displacement and warned that “prospects for 2024 are dismal as big donors are cutting aid and others not engaging in multilateral support.”⁵⁶

Effective cooperation with peacekeeping and human rights bodies within the United Nations and elsewhere must be maintained if there is to be progress in ensuring prevention of future displacement and protection of refugees and displaced people worldwide. UNHCR recognizes that it is “essential to know the protection architecture and the roles and capacities of UN missions, peacekeepers, UN civil-military coordination platforms, the ICRC, as well as affected communities and local actors, among other relevant actors.”⁵⁷

UNHCR and IOM also focus on protection at the field level with the assistance of other agencies. IOM, for example, has a Humanitarian, Peace and Security Unit that monitors developments at the Security Council and supports the organization’s protection activities around the world, with particular attention to land; property and reparations supports; mitigation and response to gender-based violence; humanitarian evacuations; and counter human trafficking, among other efforts. Even with these efforts, however, more is needed to ensure that the humanitarian considerations that these agencies highlight receive proper attention and action from UN member States and other UN agencies.

6. Implementing and Addressing the Limitations of Global Compacts

Sustainable solutions are achievable with broad and intensive global cooperation. The impetus for the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration came out of the 2016 Secretary-General’s report, “In Safety and Dignity: Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants”, in which he argued for the need to find new ways to share responsibility for refugees. This led to the 2016 New York Declaration Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants, adopted by acclamation at a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly. The declaration called for the development of two compacts, one focused on refugees and the other on regular migration.



UNHCR drafted the Global Compact on Refugees in close consultation with its member States and other interested parties. The GCR objectives are to ease pressures on host countries; enhance refugee self-reliance; expand access to third country solutions; and support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.⁵⁸ To accomplish its goals, the GCR includes the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which facilitates “a comprehensive response in support of refugees and countries particularly affected by a large refugee movement, or a protracted refugee situation, through effective arrangements for burden- and responsibility-sharing ...and areas for timely contributions in support of host countries and, where appropriate, countries of origin.”⁵⁹

The GCR envisions that a multistakeholder and partnership approach can help to complement the humanitarian work of UNHCR with development and other forms of engagement in refugee situations. Through this approach, the base of support for refugee situations has been expanded to explicitly include refugees and host community representatives, local authorities, cities and other local actors, international organizations within and outside the United Nations system, regional organizations, humanitarian and development actors, international and regional financial institutions, parliaments, civil society organizations, faith-based actors, the private sector, media, academics, and sport and cultural organizations, with UNHCR playing a facilitative role in engaging these actors in refugee responses. Supporting this process at the global level is the Global Refugee Forum, a ministerial level gathering that brings together UN Member States and these stakeholder groups, to announce concrete pledges and contributions towards these aims. At the regional level, support platforms and other mechanisms function as a form of “minilateralism” bringing political attention, engagement, and support to specific refugee situations.

In a report in preparation for the GRF 2023, UNHCR found there was progress on most of the objectives, although it noted that efforts towards more equitable burden and responsibility-sharing were not keeping pace with growing need. At the GRF 2023, a unique moment of unity was seen in an otherwise politically divided global context. GRF was attended by some 4,000 in-person and 10,000 online and 1,700 new pledges were announced, the majority of which were in support of 43 multistakeholder pledges,⁶⁰ co-led by governments and partners, around specific themes or refugee situations. The number of non-State actors pledging tripled in comparison to the GRF in 2019. Financial, material, and technical pledges valued at about \$2.2 billion were announced, paving the way to address many of the gaps found in the report.⁶¹ However, much more remains to be done to develop the architecture of refugee responses that enable truly equitable burden and responsibility sharing with countries hosting the largest numbers of refugees.

Among the GCR challenges and limitations are the lack of political will to address root causes and enhance conditions in countries of origin to support voluntary return; barriers to resettlement as a durable solution, including heavily individualized processes for Refugee Status Determination; the growing numbers of refugees worldwide that continues to outpace financial support; and donor focus spread thinly, with low-income countries receiving less official development assistance as numbers of refugees in middle-income countries grew.



Conclusion

Since the end of World War II, the United States has taken strong leadership to protect and assist refugees and promote sound policies at home and abroad. The country remains the largest donor to the array of international organizations with responsibilities in this area. There has been a bipartisan support for refugee policy and contributions to humanitarian programs. The levels of funding, not only for UNHCR but also for other relief agencies, effectively give the United States great power when setting global priorities that also have domestic implications.

The convening power of the US government has played an important role historically and continues to be one of the principal reflections of its leadership within the field of forced displacement. This power does not appear to have diminished, though there are reasons to be cautious about US leadership. The confluence of US border dysfunction and a global displacement crisis has sapped US resources, political resolve, and leadership within the international refugee regime.

Nevertheless, by most measures, the US is still the dominant power, whether measured by influence, money, or refugee admission levels. Unlike in many other policy spheres, it has often preferred to operate through multilateral approaches in supporting protection and assistance for refugees and other displaced people. While the US government has been supportive of other governments that wish to take the lead in important international initiatives to enhance refugee protection, there is little likelihood that major changes in global policies would succeed without US agreement to them.



Recommendations

Overall Recommendations

- The administration, Congress, and others should continue to strongly articulate the reasons that policies affirming refugee protection are in the foreign policy and national security interests of the United States.
- Congress should resuscitate the Bipartisan Congressional Refugee Caucus to keep focus on global refugee issues, which also have domestic implications.
- The White House should reestablish the position of US Coordinator for Refugee Affairs, who should chair a permanent Interagency Working Group to improve interagency coordination among the Department of State, US Agency for International Development, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice, National Security Council, Domestic Policy Council, and others.
- Strengthen the US Refugee Resettlement Program by placing a floor, rather than a ceiling, on the number of refugees to be admitted. This will help ensure that the admission of refugees is not politicized as is currently the case with presidential determinations required annually. Mechanisms should be maintained to allow an increase in resettlement above the floor when needed to address specific crises.

Prevention and Preparedness for Forced Displacement

- Prioritize constructive dialogue and discussion of forced displacement in the National Security Agenda.
- Charge the National Security Council with coordinating displacement impact assessments when reviewing foreign policy and national security actions.
- Target financial support on efforts to improve early warning of displacement worldwide and increase funding for conflict mitigation and emergency preparedness.

Protection of Refugees and Other Displaced People

- Encourage and provide resources that allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to take meaningful steps to protect refugees and internally displaced persons from the threat of refoulement or forcible return, physical and sexual abuse, and other actions that may harm their lives and well-being. The US government can provide funding to augment its protection activities and use its own diplomacy to buttress protection worldwide.
- Support implementation of provisions regarding protection in the United Nations Secretary General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, buttressing the UN's commitment "to advocate for unimpeded humanitarian access, and continue to provide neutral, impartial, and independent protection and assistance."
- Enact legislation to fix weaknesses in asylum adjudication without undermining the ability of people who need protection in the United States, by providing the financial and human resources needed to reduce the growing backlogs in processing.



- Utilize the provisions in the Refugee Act of 1980 for increasing the ceiling on refugee admissions when emergency resettlement is needed to protect refugees. This should reduce the future use of humanitarian parole.
- Also, utilize the provisions in the Refugee Act to increase use of in-country processing, which allows internally displaced persons still in their home countries to be processed for resettlement if they otherwise meet the definition of a refugee in US law.
- Provide additional funds and needed resources to help border communities and states that are receiving and hosting large numbers of asylum seekers in the US as well as those needed to help refugees and asylees integrate into the communities in which they resettle.
- With migrant flows to the US southern border increasing, it is important to redirect some of those numbers to more regular pathways by expanding access to student visas and work visas across the board. There must be a more permanent change to how the US accepts migrant workers, who may otherwise seek irregular pathways. By providing greater access to regular, documented routes, the caseload of US Customs and Border Protection officers and the backlog of asylum cases would be reduced.

Finding Sustainable Solutions for Protracted Refugees

- Continue to prioritize finding solutions for those in protracted situations, including the integration of refugees in host countries, third-country resettlement, complementary pathways, and where possible, voluntary repatriation with dignity. Governments should also provide funding for programs that improve the wellbeing of refugees who are unable to avail themselves of the traditional durable solutions.
- Encourage the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to update its metrics, data collection, and analytics for measuring when protracted refugees and internally displaced persons have found durable solutions.
- Support efforts within the United Nations and member States to strengthen assistance, protection, and solutions for displaced people. Much more needs to be done to address the needs of this population, including increases in financial resources dedicated to them.
- Enact legislation to provide legal permanent residence for people at risk in their own countries who were admitted to the United States under humanitarian parole. The Afghan Adjustment Act of 2023 is a model for attaining this goal.
- Modify the statutes authorizing Temporary Protected Status to permit adjustment of status to legal permanent resident for those still unable to return home after a reasonable period while providing assistance to help beneficiaries repatriate when it is safe.
- Implement new strategies that provide pathways to safe, orderly, and legal migration.



Sustaining Refugee Participation and Lived Experience

- Continue efforts to engage refugee-led organizations in policymaking on refugee and asylum issues. Continue to invest resources in building refugee leadership and refugee-led organizations to ensure that current positive trend in meaningful participation of refugees is sustained.
- Support the Localization Agenda, a process by which the local and refugee-led organizations have the opportunity to take on leadership roles.
- Invest in refugee and displaced women and youth organizations to ensure that they are meaningfully involved in decisions about their lives.
- Institutionalize refugee participation at the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other venues for policy making.
- Encourage other member States to use the model of the US Refugee Advisory Board to formalize refugee participation.
- Engage people with lived experience and thematic expertise in an organized and equitable manner to continue to shape refugee narrative in public discourse.

Strengthening Global Cooperation and Refugee Institutions

- Strengthen global cooperation to give assistance, protection, and solutions for displaced people. A process like the Global Refugee Forum should be established that brings together states to discuss and make commitments for responsibility-sharing for internally displaced persons.
- Provide adequate funding for the international organizations that protect and assist refugees. There is chronic under-funding of appeals from UN agencies for support. US leadership is needed to encourage other countries to increase their funding levels.
- Require strict accountability measures as a condition of funding in global institutions to better protect, provide for, and serve the refugees and other displaced peoples. Ensure that these organizations monitor their expatriate and local staff to make sure they are adhering to the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

Implementing the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration

- Give high priority to enhancing responsibility-sharing, an essential feature of the Global Compact on Refugees in which progress requires sustained and active leadership.
- Forced displacement issues should be mainstreamed in multilateral processes and fora, including the Sustainable Development Goals, Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention of Climate Change, Summit of the Future, New Agenda for Peace, Group of Seven, and Group of Twenty, among others.



- Implement the commitments made at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, which include provisions to enhance economic inclusion and social protection; prioritize gender-based violence prevention, mitigation, and response; commit to increase resettlement opportunities in the US and elsewhere; increase complementary pathways for those in need of protection; and advocate for inclusion of refugees in national education systems and multilateral education processes.
- Implement the provisions of Global Compact on Migration to support global cooperation on the governance and management of international migration.



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 - Build equitable partnerships that meaningfully shift power.
 - Provide adequate, accessible, unrestricted and sustainable funding.
 - Re-design funding requirements around impact and people rather than compliance.
 - Reconsider the definition of a refugee-led organization (to emphasize forced displacement, not refugee status)
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