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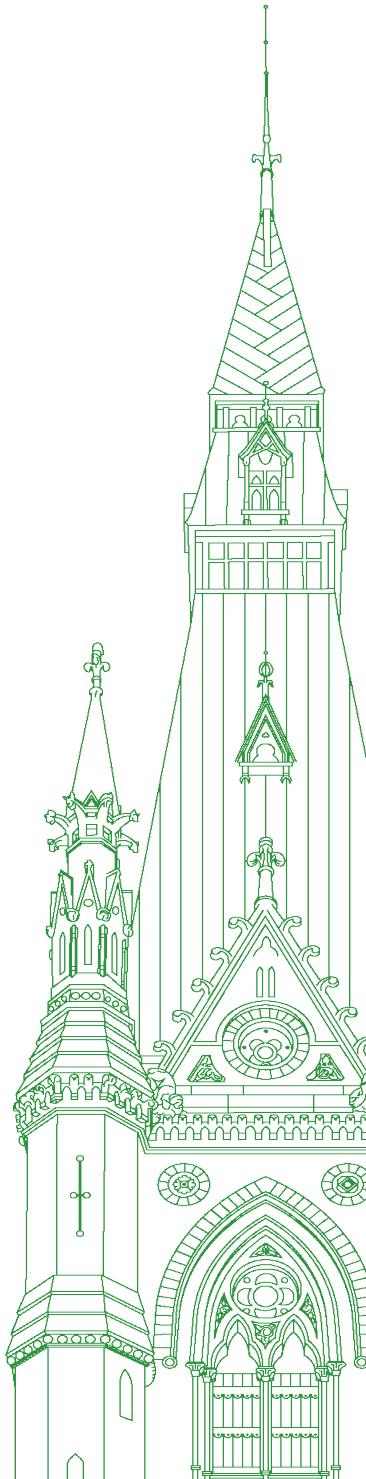

Chair: Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, October 22, 2024

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)): I now call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 58 of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is in hybrid format.

I would like to remind participants of the following instructions: Please wait until I call your name before speaking. To indicate that you wish to speak, please raise your hand if you are present in person, or use the "raise your hand" function if you are participating in the meeting via the Zoom application. The committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain speaking order. All comments should be addressed to the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the subcommittee on September 24, 2024, the subcommittee is beginning its study of forced migration patterns in different regions of the world.

I would like to welcome our witness, Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak, professor at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa.

Welcome, Professor. You will be given a maximum of five minutes for your remarks, after which members of the committee will ask you a series of questions.

You have the floor.

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak (Professor, Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa, As an Individual) Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the members of the committee for this invitation.

I will make my remarks in English, but if you ask questions in French, I can answer them.

[*English*]

I will start with a brief overview of the context and then highlight two human rights issues that require urgent attention: the right to seek asylum and the issue of ageism.

I understand that UNHCR colleagues will brief you more fully on the global statistics and demographics of forced migration, so I'll not repeat those now. Instead, I wish to highlight three global trends.

First, internal displacement makes up the majority of forced migration but is too often overlooked. Because internally displaced persons are citizens, they should benefit from the same legal rights and protections as other citizens. The guiding principles on internal displacement point to applicable human rights and humanitarian law.

However, country visits by the UN special rapporteur regularly highlight human rights concerns. For example, Sudan has over 10 million internally displaced persons who face severe risk of famine and grave human rights violations, including reports of gang rape as a weapon of war.

Second, the vast majority of forced migration occurs in low- and middle-income countries of the global south, where scarce financial resources already jeopardize the realization of basic human rights to housing, food, education, health, etc.

Third, forced displacement situations are often protracted, lasting years and in some cases decades. For example, the sprawling Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya have existed since 1991. Babies are born and people get married, grow old and die in refugee and displacement camps around the world, in temporary structures that become permanent homes.

Forced migration is too often treated as a short-term humanitarian emergency. We need longer-term, rights-based planning. A case in point is the temporary protection accorded to Ukrainians in both Europe and Canada that was limited to just three years. Of course, the conflict goes on.

The universality of human rights applies to all people everywhere, but forced migration contexts create human rights gaps. I'd like to draw the committee's attention to two worrying global trends.

First, the right to seek asylum is under threat. This right is enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and domestic law, including Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. However, countries are increasingly closing their borders to people seeking refugee protection. The March 2023 amendment to the Canada-U.S. Safe Third Country Agreement is one such example. The expansion of this agreement to the entire land border, including internal waterways, severely limits the ability of people to make a refugee claim in Canada. Another example is the Pakistan government's plan to forcibly repatriate Afghan refugees, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement. Some of these Afghan refugees are awaiting resettlement in Canada, which requires them to cross into Pakistan.

Second, generalized responses to forced migration overlook the specific lived experiences of displacement. A person's ability to exercise their rights is impacted by their positionality in relation to gender, social age, disability, race, religion and class. My research focuses on age discrimination, so I'll highlight two worrying human rights issues that demonstrate widespread ageism in forced migration policy and programming.

First, the lack of systematic birth registration in situations of displacement is a serious human rights issue. Under article 22 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have the right to birth registration. Birth certificates provide proof of legal identity, which is necessary to secure other rights. However, many children born in displacement contexts are denied the right to birth registration. Some countries only allow fathers to register births, do not recognize children from same-sex relationships or require marriage certificates. For example, many Syrian refugees in Jordan cannot legally register their children's birth because the Jordanian state does not recognize traditional Islamic marriage. Their children are deemed to be born out of wedlock.

At the other end of the life-course, older people are under-represented in forced migration policy, programming and research. They are more likely to remain behind in their country of origin due to physical barriers to movement or emotional attachment to their lands, homes and communities.

● (1550)

Those who cross international borders face particular linguistic, physical and social barriers to accessing services and exercising their rights. For example, Ukraine has been called “the oldest humanitarian crisis in the world” because of the large number of older people affected by violence, human rights abuses and displacement.

In conclusion, people in situations of forced migration are human beings with human rights. I urge the Government of Canada to uphold its international and domestic obligations to the right to asylum.

I also recommend social age analysis of all forced migration policies and programming to ensure rights-based approaches to displacement across the life-course.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much. I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Clark-Kazak. That was an excellent speech.

[*English*]

Thank you.

Now I would like to open the debate for questions.

I would like to start the first round of questions with Ms. Anita Vandenbeld.

You have the floor for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Didn't we have other witnesses online?

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: We had one witness. Okay.

I appreciate very much that you're here. Of course, being a local MP and recognizing that you're from the University of Ottawa, I'm quite proud as well to have you here.

I would like to delve a bit more into what you said about positionality.

I know, of course, that your research is on age, but we know that the reality for women who are in these situations of forced migration is very different from what it is for others.

You touched upon the sexual violence, but I wonder if you could elaborate a bit about the particular violence and the particular barriers that women and women's rights face when women are being displaced and some ways in which that can be overcome.

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Thank you for the question.

As you highlight, gender-based violence is a major issue in displacement contexts because it's often happening in the context of widespread human rights abuses and violence. This is a context in which many rights are being violated, including women's rights.

Again, I focus on age. One of the aspects that's really interesting and problematic is that when women are displaced and are pregnant, there is the issue of giving birth, of access to those kinds of services, and also of the care for the newborn. This is one issue that I think requires immediate attention.

I would also highlight that, as you mentioned, it's sexual violence not just against women but also against gender-diverse individuals. This is a problem that's rooted in human rights violations, in disproportionate power relations and the fact that there are spaces in which protections, generally speaking, are not being provided.

This is where there needs to be more specific funding and programming, but there also needs to be more attention to gender when we're planning latrines, for example, or the way in which spaces of displacement are organized, especially for activities like collecting water or fetching firewood, which tend to be quite based on gender. Women and girls need to be systematically asked about these kinds of issues so that their needs and rights can be taken into account when that programming is happening.

● (1555)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much.

I also wanted to talk about the rights of children—that's obviously a particularly vulnerable age group—but especially the rights of unaccompanied minors or minors who are, in the course of the migration journey, forcibly separated from whatever parental figure they may have. We've seen that in our own hemisphere.

This is a human rights committee, so we're looking particularly at what Canada can do further on human rights internationally in order to ensure that the rights of children are being respected when they are in these situations.

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: The Convention on the Rights of the Child is, as you know, the most widely ratified human rights instrument. Only the U.S. has not signed it. Because of that, it actually has enormous power. I think we can use that, because it's not just Canada saying that people should uphold children's rights; it's actually everyone in the world that has agreed to these rights.

In terms of separated children, as you mentioned, there is a distinction between separated children who have maybe been temporarily displaced and are without their families—for example, they were at school when a displacement happened, and then they were displaced from their families—and unaccompanied minors who are actually crossing borders by themselves, sometimes in the company of other young people. They're not necessarily always alone. There are siblings or cousins who sometimes cross borders.

There are specific protection concerns because.... They're under 18, so they're protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The reason they need protection is that there are these power relations with adults who are, in some cases, going to exploit them.

You mentioned gender earlier. It's particularly the women or girls and gender-diverse young people who are at risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation.

In Canada, for example, trafficking is primarily a domestic issue. It primarily happens within and between provinces. It's been shown that in fact women and gender-diverse individuals are much more likely to be trafficked. If they have come into Canada—for example, Ukrainians came to Canada with temporary visas—there is a distinction between the airlines, which designate unaccompanied minors as under 16, and the international legal realm, which designates unaccompanied minors as under the age of 18. We have this protection gap when young Ukrainians arrive in Canada with visas. The airline didn't turn them away, but once they arrived here, there was no systematic programming for them.

The situation of Ukrainians was helpful in the sense that it shed light on the issue. A study was commissioned by the Government of Canada. In fact, all unaccompanied minors face very similar issues. Because of the differences between the provinces, we don't have a systematic way of addressing unaccompanied minors in Canada.

As you mentioned, in the southern hemisphere even more unaccompanied minors are moving to flee violence. Also, in some cases, it's because of economic reasons. If we think of Venezuela, for example, in some cases people are moving to other countries for economic opportunities that are not available to them elsewhere.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Mr. Chair, do I have time?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: On that, because our committee is more focused on international situations than on the domestic ones, what other specific tools or policies does Canada have, other than the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to ensure the rights of these minors, whatever the reason that they're travelling unaccompanied? Are there specific tools or policies that we would be able to pursue that would protect these very vulnerable children?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: I think that our colleagues at UNHCR have developed very helpful guidelines on unaccompanied minors. Perhaps Michael can speak to that later. There's also Save the Children.

I would say also that Europe is much more advanced in terms of tools and policies for unaccompanied minors because it receives many more unaccompanied minors at its borders. They are coming through the Middle East. There has been much more work done in the European Union and in the U.K. on this issue.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I would like to go to Mr. Lake, please.

You have the floor for seven minutes.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witness.

The first question I have is regarding your comment about the lack of systematic birth registration.

You clearly identified the problem, but what suggestions do you have to resolve that problem in some of the really difficult situations that you're talking about? What can Canada do in terms of policy to help facilitate a solution to that problem?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: The first thing I would say is diplomacy. In some cases, it's another state that is not recognizing the birth because of the gender and other issues that I mentioned.

The second thing is practicality. It's funding through development assistance. As I mentioned, the majority of displacement happens in low- and middle-income countries. Some of these countries don't even have the resources to register their own citizens, let alone people who are coming in the displacement context. That could be another practical way.

The third thing is advocacy around this issue. I think that in some cultures and countries, it's not a regular thing to register children. It's not recognized as being important, but it is fundamental for them to be able to exercise all of their other rights. In some cases it leads to children being stateless.

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, for example, are systematically stateless because they're not recognized by either Bangladesh or Burma. In this case, it means using advocacy and diplomacy to convince those states to actually register the children.

Hon. Mike Lake: You mentioned seniors and the unique challenges faced by seniors. Have you done any work looking at people with disabilities, including intellectual developmental disabilities in particular?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Yes, there is some really great work that's done by Rachel McNally at Carleton on people with disabilities in displacement contexts. UNHCR also has policies particularly on disabled people in displacement contexts.

In some cases, as you mentioned, there's an intersection between age and disability. Older people might also be disabled, and there are some policies on that in terms of the older people. HelpAge and UNHCR have specific guidelines on older people that also include issues around disability.

Hon. Mike Lake: I imagine there's an intersection around the registration component or information component related to identifying people who might be vulnerable because they have autism.

I have a son with autism. It would be really easy to lose Jaden in a system where he can't identify himself. Someone would have to make the effort to identify that there's somebody with autism who wouldn't be able to put up their hand or apply for some type of status or for paperwork to relocate in the first place.

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Yes, exactly. As you mentioned, there's often this intersection between disability and age, depending on the age of the individual and other factors. This is where, as you mentioned, there needs to be the diagnosis, and this really happens on the ground, mostly with non-governmental organizations and UN agencies. It happens mostly with children.

I think the gap that you're identifying here is with adults and older people who might have disabilities, because they're more likely to fall through the cracks. For children, there are specific child protection components that are used to assess them, especially for education and other reasons.

Hon. Mike Lake: We're studying forced migration. It's a term we use, “forced migration”. We talk as if we all know exactly what forced migration is. I don't know what the definition would be for forced migration. Are all refugees who are moving considered to be forced into migration, or is there a specific category that forced migration refers to?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Generally speaking, forced migration is a broader conceptual category. It would include refugees, including internally displaced people who do not cross an international border, including refugee claimants or asylum seekers who don't yet have their refugee claim, and also including people who are displaced for environmental or economic reasons, who would not be considered refugees under the UN convention but are clearly displaced involuntarily because of natural disasters or human rights abuses.

It's a very broad term, and refugees would be a subcategory of that. Refugees have a specific legal status under the UN refugee convention and under domestic law. In Canada, that would be IRPA.

● (1605)

Hon. Mike Lake: An important clarification would be that it's not necessarily people who are moving because of force; they might be forced by an environmental situation, an earthquake or something like that, as opposed to civil unrest or war.

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Yes. I think the main issue here is that it's involuntary. People wouldn't be choosing to move, but they have to because of environmental disaster, human rights abuses or those kinds of things.

Hon. Mike Lake: I have one last question.

You were talking about situations in which internal displacement has led to protracted situations. If there is a refugee camp in a country that's at war, and the country eventually is no longer at war, could the refugees wind up staying in the situation they're in?

Maybe it's not a refugee situation anymore. Maybe it's just a poverty situation, because the thing that forced them into that camp in the first place is no longer happening. Is there a point at which someone who is an internally displaced refugee becomes not a refugee, but is still living in the same circumstance they were in as a refugee?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Generally speaking, refugees in the global south do not get citizenship. Unlike in Canada, they're always going to be a foreign national in that country—

Hon. Mike Lake: What if you're internally displaced?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: If they're internally displaced, they're then not refugees. They're internally displaced persons.

Hon. Mike Lake: They're forced migrants, I guess, in a sense, but not....

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Exactly, and because they're citizens, sometimes they'll just make their home in a new place, and as you say, they're no longer considered to be internally displaced.

Hon. Mike Lake: Okay, but it's still a refugee camp. It's still considered a refugee camp within the country they're from, right?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: It would be considered to be an internal displacement camp—

Hon. Mike Lake: Okay.

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: —not a refugee camp, but generally speaking, they're not going to continue to be in a camp. They'll move into longer-term housing and other kinds of permanent solutions.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Clark-Kazak, for being with us today for this important study.

First of all, according to all your studies and expertise, which human rights are most violated when migrants move or end up in refugee camps?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: It depends on the legal status of the migrants. If they are internally displaced citizens, we tend to talk about rights such as the right to housing. However, if people are displaced at an international border, they are refugees and no longer citizens. In this case, all rights are violated, including the right to asylum, because there are countries, including Canada, that try to prevent people from availing themselves of this right.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: How does Canada do this? Do you have an example to give us?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: The Safe Third Country Agreement is an example of a measure being used to prevent people from coming to Canada and then making an asylum claim.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: This has been your field of expertise for a few years now. You've covered different conflicts, as well as different waves of migration, I imagine. Canada is neither a military power nor an economic power on a planetary scale. However, it does have a tradition of defending international human rights and promoting peace in the world. You're hearing this from a Quebec sovereignist, by the way.

Do you agree with me that Canada's image may have faded a little in recent years? Do you feel that Canada has less influence than it used to?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: In terms of refugee resettlement, we've always done a good job. However, when it comes to asylum, I think our contribution is diminishing.

That said, I must still highlight the work Canada is doing to educate other countries about the asylum process, because we have to recognize that we have a good system here. We're in the process of educating other countries, particularly in Latin America, on this issue.

● (1610)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm going to ask you a question that's going to seem off-topic, since it deals with a situation that's taking place in the country, while we're talking about international human rights, but it also touches on international conventions.

Recently, there was a debate in Canada between certain politicians who were saying that we should move people who have already applied for asylum here and force them to settle in other Canadian provinces.

Wouldn't this contradict the international conventions Canada has signed?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: This could violate some rights. We saw an example of this just before the Roxham Road closure. People had been turned back to the Maritimes, where there are very few lawyers to help them apply for asylum—

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So there's a question of access to justice.

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: It's a possibility. It depends. However, what is clear is that everyone has freedom of movement. You can't stop someone from moving from one part of Canada to another. So even if you send people to Newfoundland and Labrador, for example, you can't stop them from coming back to Montreal or Ottawa.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Indeed.

We can encourage people to settle in certain places by taking positive measures, such as facilitating access to housing or employment, but we can't force them to do so. That's what I understand from your intervention.

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Yes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: All right.

You talked a lot about Ukraine in your opening remarks. Several migrant organizations have told me that the Ukrainian conflict may have overshadowed certain migratory crises. It got a lot of media attention, and a lot of aid and money was given to the Ukrainians, which was the right thing to do. Everyone agrees that we should help the Ukrainians in times of war, but some organizations have told me that this has obscured certain problematic situations, such as the camps for displaced people in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, which have existed for decades, as you said.

I almost have the impression that we're acting as if there are good and bad migrants. Some organizations have told me that, because of the Ukrainian conflict, there is less media attention given to other conflicts or to other displaced people on the planet.

Do you feel the same?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Yes. I must stress that all human beings have the same human rights. We have responded in very different ways to various displacement crises, whether in Ukraine, Congo, Sudan, Gaza or elsewhere. This is because immigration policies are influenced by domestic politics. In the case of Ukraine, there was still a political consensus that something had to be done.

I encourage you to have such a political consensus for other displacement crises, because we need to respond to those in Sudan and Congo too.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Right now, there's a fairly important migration route, at least in the news. It's the one that goes from Latin America or South America, and sometimes Brazil, up the Central American isthmus to Mexico, and then on to the United States.

Are you able to tell us what dangers migrants face when taking this route?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: They're mostly undocumented migrants, they're migrants who shouldn't be in these countries and that makes these people vulnerable.

As you said, it's a context where human rights can easily be trampled on, such as the right to security of the person, the right to work and the right to education. Children don't go to school in transit countries, for example.

This is a situation that requires a hemisphere-wide response. We need to work together to find a solution, because this is happening in our backyard. Canada is doing very little to try and solve this problem.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In your opinion, are there any countries with which it is currently easier to collaborate in terms of protecting migrants' rights? I'm actually talking about this route from South America up north.

In your opinion, is it easier to collaborate with Colombia or Costa Rica?

● (1615)

The Chair: Please give a brief answer, because we have exceeded the time allotted to the member.

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: There are leaders, like Colombia, which has been working on internal displacement for a long time, but also receives people from Venezuela.

I think these are good examples from which we can learn.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Johns, you have the floor for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witness for her wonderful testimony so far and the work she's doing.

Ms. Clark-Kazak, an education report in 2024 from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that almost half of the world's 14.8 million school-aged refugee children are not in school, which is obviously deeply alarming.

We know education is a fundamental human right and that quality education is a powerful tool in shaping positive outcomes for children. What can the international community do to speed up progress in increasing enrolment in education for child refugees? Specifically, how can Canada help lead?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: It's really important to recognize, as I mentioned earlier, that when we're talking about the right to education, more than 70% of the world's displacement is in countries of the global south, which are already very poor. One way in which Canada can contribute is by financing primary, secondary and tertiary education in those contexts.

In cases that I've been in—in Uganda, for example—education is provided for both locals and refugees in the same schools. This is a good way of helping bring together the development and the humanitarian sides so that both nationals and refugees are benefiting. This is because in some cases, if you provide better education to refugees, it causes problems with local populations, who are also poor and don't have access to education. Resources are one thing.

I would also clarify for the committee that in many contexts, as you probably already know, secondary school is not free. Even local children are not able to access secondary education, so financial support would be one thing.

The second thing I would say is that when we look at the stats on children in school in displacement contexts, we see a disparity between boys and girls. Girls are not going to school because they're expected to have domestic and caregiving responsibilities, but also because there's widespread sexual violence in schools, including by educators. This is an area where there needs to be more advocacy and more sensitization around the rights of women and girls in these contexts.

I would say those are two practical ways in which Canada could encourage more education within these contexts.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

At the last meeting of this subcommittee, we received an update on the situation in Sudan. One of the witnesses spoke about the difference in Canada's response to the conflicts in Sudan and Ukraine in terms of how we accept people who are being displaced.

Mr. Diamond from the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights noted that not a single Sudanese displaced person had been resettled since the launch of a financially burdensome program, capped at 3,250 people, that was released in February by the government. He compared that with the approval of nearly one million people under an emergency family reunification program for Ukraine that had no eligibility or financial requirements. Mr. Diamond stated, “This widely disparate response to the war in Ukraine and to Sudan is a scandal of the first order and can only be explained by a discriminatory and, frankly, racist implementation of policy towards communities fleeing conflict.”

Do you believe there is systemic racism in Canada's refugee intake policies? If so, what can be done to ensure that Canada implements inclusive policies in this area?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Yes, there is definitely systemic discrimination within the context. The previous speaker also referred to this in terms of the disparities in the responses.

I think we also need to recognize, however, that the program for Ukrainians was a temporary visa program. It was not a permanent resettlement program. The Sudanese program is a resettlement program. It's a program that's bringing people here permanently.

That said, I agree with you that it's unfair to place the burden on families who already are working, in many cases, lower-wage jobs in Canada and then need to find the funds in order to rescue their families to come over from Sudan. We should also be opening up a government-assisted refugee program. We should also be considering temporary visas, as we did for Ukrainians, for other displacement contexts. Currently, the only other context where we're considering this is Gaza.

We can think about other protracted conflicts in other places and we could be thinking about a humanitarian visa, which would allow more people to come to Canada temporarily, as we did with the Ukrainians.

● (1620)

Mr. Gord Johns: Can you comment on the relationship between climate change, economic inequality, migration and the gaps in existing international instruments? What should the international community do to fill these gaps in the years ahead, especially as we see a change when it comes to climate and we see the increase of undocumented migrants and displaced peoples? Can you comment on that?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Climate change is definitely a huge gap in the current human rights legislation.

As I mentioned earlier, the refugee convention does not recognize climate refugees. It doesn't recognize people being displaced for climate reasons. The guidelines on internal displacement do, but again, those are for citizens who would already have the right to be in those countries anyway, so this is a huge gap.

I believe we had a missed opportunity in the global compact on refugees. This was a time when the international community could have come together and could have decided to include climate as part of the issues, but it was not addressed. I think the reason was that countries are worried about the number of people who will then have claims to come to Canada and other places on the basis of widening a definition of protection in this context.

But climate change is here. It's real. I mean, you're in B.C.; we just saw the scenes happening there. We're affected in Canada, especially in indigenous communities, but we also will be affected by people who are fleeing this displacement elsewhere. I think we need to seriously come up with some kind of plan, globally but also nationally, to address it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

I invite Mr. Ali Ehsassi to take the floor for two minutes, please.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Allow me to start off by thanking you, Professor Clark-Kazak, for your testimony today.

I want to follow up, if I may, on the questions that concern children.

We all appreciate full well that 50% of the world's refugees are children. You touched on and highlighted the challenge of the lack of birth registries. Just so we can grapple with this challenge of when there is no birth registry and a child refugee has no papers, could you share with us both the short-term and long-term challenges and implications? You did touch on statelessness, which is very important, but could you give us a better sense of how that impacts individuals who are refugees?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Birth registration basically provides documentation of you as a legal person, so it has implications not only in the early stages but also for the rest of your life. For example, it prevents people from registering for school, getting access to health care and registering to vote, so civil and political rights as well as economic and social rights are all implicated in this.

I would also say that in the resettlement context, if a child does not have a birth certificate, then UNHCR basically has to try to approximate a birth date. While this is helpful because it gives people the ability to be resettled, the problem is that often these birth dates can be off, because you have to rely on people remembering some kind of significant political or natural event, for example. This can have consequences for children being placed in the wrong grade.

At the other end of the spectrum, it has consequences for when people are eligible to retire because, in our society, everything is based on chronological age. If that chronological age is off by a few years, it can have repercussions across the life-course.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Ehsassi.

Mr. Majumdar, you have the floor for two minutes, please.

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Thank you very much for your insightful perspectives, especially when it comes to perhaps uneven assistance for various refugee crises or forced displaced crises around the world.

When you think about the scale of internal displacement we're seeing in Sudan, which is arguably the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world today, you wonder why—I would wonder why—Canada has not distinguished itself in terms of how we assist those people who are dealing with forced migration issues.

Why do you think there's less attention on how we lead on issues as significant as Sudan than there is on other issues?

● (1625)

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: I think there's a constellation of factors. First of all, it's domestic politics.

In the case of Ukraine, we have a large Ukrainian-Canadian constituency, the largest diaspora outside of Russia and Ukraine, so this means that there are people here who advocate and who talk to you as MPs and to other people to try to get action on the issue.

I think the second thing is foreign policy objectives. Canada will have different foreign policy objectives, and immigration is one of a suite of foreign policy objectives. Development assistance in cases of internal displacement, for example, will also be part of that package.

Third, I would say that there's a kind of fatigue, a compassion fatigue. Generally around the world, after people hear again and again of different crises, there are varying levels of public support. This is imbued, I think, with racism and with expectations of certain areas of the world. We saw this even in the news reports: People were shocked that white Ukrainians were being displaced because they looked like us, whereas in other parts of the world, there's an expectation that there will be crises.

I think this is a huge problem in terms of public education and also in terms of the media portrayals of what's happening around the world.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You said earlier that the United States had not signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Do you know why they didn't?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: It's because of family rights. They think that parents' rights will be diminished if children have them.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Has Canada signed this convention?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: Yes. Every country has, except the United States.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You specialize in forced migration and age discrimination.

In your opinion, why did Canada sign a safe third country agreement, i.e., an agreement on migrants, with a country that is the only one not to have signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: In the agreement with the United States, there's an exception for unaccompanied children. I think Canada could explain that it's because of this exception.

That said, this exception does not apply to other children, such as those who are with their parents. Also, one of the problems with the U.S. is that detention of migrants is much more frequent and much more severe than here.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: There are children imprisoned in the United States right now.

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: That's right. Children are also detained, either with their parents or separately from them.

It should also be said that it's the same here in Canada.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In any case, unaccompanied children must still be able to present themselves at the border crossing, in order to be exempted and apply in Canada.

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: They have to know that they are exempt, and that they have the right to make this request.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Johns, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mr. Gord Johns: How do you think rising anti-immigration sentiment is impacting refugee policy globally?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: There's definitely rising anti-immigration sentiment here in Canada and around the world. This has had an impact on all immigration categories, particularly refugees. The problem is that the public opinion of refugees is that they're a drain on the public purse. This is not empirically true, but it is the public perception.

When you have a rise in anti-immigration sentiment, you also have a backlash against these humanitarian programs. It's hugely problematic and can turn violent. We saw this in the U.K. during the summer. There were riots against immigrant communities that were very violent.

● (1630)

Mr. Gord Johns: What recommendations would you make to politicians to combat anti-immigration sentiment when it comes to refugee policies and, of course, the disinformation being spread?

Ms. Christina Clark-Kazak: First of all, we have to be very careful about the words we use. For example, there is widespread use of the term “illegal immigrant”. That is empirically not true. There might be an administrative law infracted if people cross a border informally, but there's no such thing as an “illegal immigrant”. This kind of discourse criminalizes people. It then gives the public an idea that in fact there's a problem here.

The other thing is this, and I know this because of work done by colleagues at Université Laval: You, as MPs, work very hard in your constituencies to solve immigration issues. This needs to continue to be done. You need to talk to everyday people about the fact that immigrants are human beings and that they're also protected by the charter. In Canada, everyone is protected by the charter, including non-citizens.

Mr. Gord Johns: I agree 100%.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: It's over. Thank you.

We deeply thank you, Professor, for your presence with us and for your answers. They enlightened all members of the committee. Now, with regret, we wish you all the best.

[*Translation*]

I will now suspend the meeting so that we can move on to the second part of our meeting.

● (1630)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1635)

The Chair: We're back in session.

I'd like to welcome our next witnesses.

We welcome Mr. Michael Casasola, senior resettlement and complementary pathways officer, from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi, senior legal officer.

You will be given a maximum of five minutes for your statements, after which we will proceed to a round of questions.

Welcome, Mr. Casasola and Ms. Tamjeedi. Please make your opening statement. You have five minutes.

Mr. Casasola, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Casasola (Senior Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Officer, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting us.

I'm here on behalf of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or the UN Refugee Agency. We work to protect people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution in more than 130 countries.

Let me begin by setting the scene.

As of the end of June, protracted and emerging crises have driven global displacement to a staggering 122.6 million people worldwide. That's three times the population of Canada. The numbers have almost doubled since a decade ago, and show no signs of slowing down.

These figures do not capture the hundreds of thousands of people who have been recently displaced in Lebanon, nor the further 400,000 people who crossed into Syria from Lebanon or the thousands of displaced Israelis.

At the same time, away from the headlines, we are facing one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent history in Sudan. Conflict has displaced more than eight million people inside the country. We're also approaching three million refugees in neighbouring states.

The situations in Lebanon and Sudan are just two examples of the current challenges we're facing. Two-thirds of forcibly displaced people originate from just 10 countries, including Ukraine, Myanmar, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Venezuela.

The statistics are staggering, but behind the numbers are people—moms, dads, students, toddlers and seniors—ordinary folks whose lives have been torn apart, yet the world's response remains deeply unequal.

Most refugees remain in neighbouring countries, many of which are low- or middle-income nations already facing their own challenges.

The effects of climate change have further compounded the crisis, with 70% of refugees in 2022 coming from climate-vulnerable countries, an increase from 56% 10 years earlier.

As displacement rises, the resources available to respond have not kept up. This year, our operations are only 45% funded, creating a critical shortfall that severally impacts our ability to respond to an increasing number of emergencies. Cutting essential services has been inevitable. Those who depend on us for life-saving support are suffering the most.

Despite this sombre picture, the right policies, attitudes and supports can bring positive change. This is where we turn to you.

For decades, the UN Refugee Agency has relied on Canada for leadership and support in meeting these global challenges. Canada continues to be a top donor to the UN Refugee Agency. It's a partnership we value and that we hope to grow to keep up with needs.

Canada has also been a leading resettlement country and a model in pioneering new legal pathways for refugees. Both globally and in Canada, we're witnessing a rise in the number of people seeking asylum. Canada has established itself as a global leader in asylum by maintaining a fair, efficient and robust system for many years.

At the same time, we'd like to thank Canada for its support to countries in the Americas to strengthen their asylum systems. Canada regularly shares best practices and provides financial support to strengthen asylum systems in countries such as Mexico and Costa Rica.

In closing, we would like to thank the committee for your interest in how Canada can best respond to the rise of forced displacement. It is a shared global responsibility, and addressing it is only possible through a global solidarity translated into action.

This requires determined political will and financial support. It includes addressing the root causes of conflict, creating conditions for refugees to return home in safety and dignity, helping them integrate into their countries of refuge and expanding access to third country solutions. This will not be easy, but Canada has proven that it has the fortitude and commitment to make a real difference for people forced to flee worldwide.

We look forward to your questions and your continued support.

Thank you.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casasola.

I would now like to invite Ms. Tamjeedi to take the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi (Senior Legal Officer, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): I have no further comments. That would be the entirety of our comments.

The Chair: Thank you for your declaration.

I would like now to open the floor for questions.

I would like to start with Madame Pam Damoff.

You have the floor for seven minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

Thank you to our previous witness as well for the work you're doing on this really important issue.

I was in Costa Rica this summer and went to a migrant shelter, and one of the things that came up while I was there was the changing demographics of migrants. It used to be single adults, and it's now largely families who are escaping and becoming migrants. Just the challenges.... I was quite taken aback to see young children who had travelled with their families.

I wonder if you could talk a little about the demographics and how those have changed in terms of migration.

Mr. Michael Casasola: Thank you.

Thank you for drawing attention to the situation in the Americas, because often it's overlooked in terms of human displacement. I'll refer you in a moment to my colleague Azadeh Tamjeedi, who's been working in this area.

I just want to highlight that in addition to the reality of the make-up of families and the components, there has also been the element of extraregional movements. In addition to people coming, for example, to Costa Rica from Nicaragua and from neighbouring countries, we're also seeing a large number of movement up through South America, up through the Darien Gap, making their way north. It's created in itself a whole slew of human rights challenges, but I'll refer to my colleague.

● (1645)

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: Thank you for the question.

Costa Rica is definitely an important country in that it is receiving quite a few asylum seekers, and its system is now looking at how to deal with the increasing numbers.

It is true that there are more children and unaccompanied children who are now arriving in countries like Costa Rica, but the Americas traditionally have seen quite a significant number of children moving on their own throughout the region and making their way up to Mexico and then to the United States and sometimes, in some cases, to Canada.

The importance for countries like Costa Rica and other countries along the routes is to provide child-friendly protection services in terms of ensuring that those children have access to asylum and assistance as well. Increasingly we are seeing that children are undertaking much more dangerous routes on their own now, and part of the reason is that parents are unable to fund the travel of the whole family. We're seeing a lot more parents making the very difficult decision to send their children to safer areas. That perilous and dangerous journey up north is with the help of smugglers and sometimes with the help of traffickers.

Now UNHCR is responding, with the help of states and governments like Costa Rica's, to try to address these issues and is ensuring that the rights of those children along the route are respected and that they have access to services and assistance throughout the legal process they have to go through.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I also want to follow up on a question from the previous panel that my colleague Mr. Johns asked about climate refugees. It was about 20 years ago that a Canadian author named Gwynne Dyer wrote a book called *Climate Wars*. At the time, it was very prophetic in terms of how people would be displaced because of climate and the huge issues it would cause for urban centres and for conflict.

I wonder if you could comment a little on the impact that climate is having on migration.

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: In terms of climate, what we're seeing in the majority of situations is that it is exacerbating situations of displacement. We're not seeing a huge number of people, at the moment, crossing borders and making asylum applications because of a climate event, but it makes individuals who are already in a displacement situation more vulnerable. We're not seeing it as a huge cause of displacement across borders. It's more of a situation of internal displacement at the moment.

Ms. Pam Damoff: What about Bangladesh?

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: In some situations, you do see it impacting cross-border movements, but a large majority of the situations due to climate change, for now, are persons internally displaced in the country.

I recognize the question that was in the previous panel about the refugee definition and whether it would apply to those who are fleeing a climate disaster or event. We believe the refugee definition is sufficient as is. It does recognize certain situations in which a climate event would exacerbate a refugee movement, so a climate event could potentially see someone looked at and accepted as a refugee. For example, if someone is being discriminated against or persecuted in the distribution of humanitarian assistance because of their gender or their minority social group in the response to a climate event, they could qualify as a refugee if they end up crossing a border and making an asylum claim.

We believe states should look at larger solutions, such as other forms of complementary protection when they're looking at temporary protection or definitions that are broader than the refugee definition. The refugee definition should be kept the way it is and the law should be applied for the refugee status the way it is right now. States should look at broader solutions for those displaced by climate.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have just over a minute left.

I wonder if we could talk a little bit about terminology that's used, because that often drives public opinion. We're seeing in Canada a rising push-back on immigration and refugees.

I remember that several years ago we had a gentleman testify who had walked across the border at Emerson, Manitoba. He was going to be outed as gay by his coach. He chose to walk to Canada and ended up being found frozen in a field. There was a lot of political gamesmanship being done at the time around that language.

I'm wondering if you could talk briefly about how language impacts perception of these people who are fleeing for very valid reasons.

● (1650)

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: It definitely has an impact when these types of conversations happen in a politicized environment. Often when the language increases in terms of saying, “Let's keep certain people out” and “Are they real refugees, are they not real refugees or are they migrants?”, we see an increase in policies that are more negative, and countries start to close doors a little bit more. That's something that's definitely happening on a more prevalent basis globally. It's not just in places like Canada; it's global.

I think the way politicians and public servants talk about refugee issues and asylum issues is really important, because it sets the narrative and the public discourse. Often we see a lot of disinformation about who is coming and why—who they actually are and what rights they have. I think taking a more rights-based approach is very important, especially in the public discourse, as is being very mindful of the language that is used.

I echo our previous speaker's remarks on that as well. We definitely agree that it's important, when looking at who you're defining and how you're talking about these types of populations, that you look at their rights and you focus on the fact that they're human beings, because it will eventually have an impact on public opinion at large.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

The Chair: Now I would like to invite Mr. Lake to take the floor for seven minutes, please.

Hon. Mike Lake: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think your organization is interesting for folks from Edmonton. I believe that one of your global goodwill ambassadors is Alphonso Davies, who made his way to Edmonton at five years old. He was born in Ghana to refugee Liberian parents, I believe.

Mr. Michael Casasola: He was originally destined to come through, I believe, the government-assisted refugees program. He originally went to Windsor, but his family quickly moved to Edmonton.

Hon. Mike Lake: That's a good choice, moving to Edmonton.

Mr. Michael Casasola: I'm from Windsor, so I'm—

Hon. Mike Lake: Very importantly, he's a huge Oilers fan as well. When Alphonso Davies shows up at an Oilers game, it's a big event.

Anyway, he's a great Canadian success story. As he grew up, and the community embraced him and his family. He wound up having the opportunity to get involved in a soccer program for young kids who didn't have the same opportunities as everybody else in Edmonton. He's a huge success story. Hopefully we have more of those success stories as we work through some of these enormous challenges we're dealing with.

I have a couple of questions.

With the situations we're talking about, you talk about the massive numbers of people displaced. It's double what it was 10 years ago.

I just want a better understanding of how you make a determination that the situation is dire enough that you're going to move someone from the country they're from to another country. It has to be a complicated situation. Ultimately, you hope that someone can remain in their country and eventually contribute to their own country. As we take people from countries, particularly young people, when the country eventually overcomes whatever it's going through, it's going to miss those people.

How do you make the determination as to when the situation is dire enough that you're going to move somebody from the country they're in? You're probably not doing it immediately upon displacement.

Mr. Michael Casasola: Absolutely. Canada is a country of immigration. Quite often, we immediately think, “Okay, what's the immigration response to a particular crisis?” For us, it's often that we need life-saving assistance. We're not thinking immediately about resettlement.

We've been given a mandate by the UN General Assembly to be responsible for the protection of refugees and to work with countries to find a solution, either by returning them to the country they came from in safety and dignity or by finding them a home somewhere else. Resettlement is a precious and powerful tool. Canada's been a leader in that, as it's been more recently in other complementary pathways, as we call them, like private sponsorship and, even more recently, labour mobility.

We now estimate that among the 32 million people we define as refugees within the 122 million people who were forcibly displaced, about 2.9 million need resettlement. Those are the people with the most acute protection problems.

Hon. Mike Lake: I'm sorry. How many was that?

Mr. Michael Casasola: We estimate, crudely, 2.9 million.

Hon. Mike Lake: There are 2.9 million who need to move.

Mr. Michael Casasola: We'd be looking for resettlement.

That said, resettlement is a voluntary activity of states, just like the donations we rely on. It's up to Canada to decide how much it believes it can contribute to us.

It's the same thing with resettlement. We have to start from that and try to figure out what makes the most sense.

As you can imagine, we're looking for refugees with the most acute protection problems in the countries of asylum. It's not just that they're a refugee and that they had to flee their country of origin; in the country of asylum, they now have a serious protection problem. We use seven different categories, and I won't get into all the detail, but I'll just say that one of the categories where we look for refugees is in those with legal physical protection needs when they're facing detention or forced refoulement back to their country of origin or when they may be attacked by other refugee groups. For example, think of an LGBTQI refugee who's fled their country of origin; now, in another country, they're experiencing the same type of persecution.

There are also survivors of violence and torture. Because we don't have the psychosocial supports to respond to the needs of such refugees, we may pursue resettlement.

These could also be refugee women at risk. We talked earlier about some of those challenges. Dr. Clark-Kazak spoke about some of the gender gaps. Gender-based persecution is a problem. We sometimes use the women at risk program to respond to that. For example, about 20% of the refugees Canada resettled last year came through the women at risk program.

Those three categories make up the vast majority of refugees we refer. We select people with the most acute protection problems. There are obviously many more refugees who could benefit from resettlement and are in need of a solution.

Last year was a record for us. We referred people to all states, not just Canada, since we work with about 26 states to find and identify refugees for potential resettlement. That was about 150,000 people. I gave you the scale of 122 million people forcibly displaced, 32 million who are refugees under UNHCR's mandate and 2.9 million whom we estimate are in need of resettlement. With the reality that we'll have about 150,000 to 160,000 spaces—which is a record level—we have to make some very difficult choices, as you can imagine, in trying to respond to that.

You're right that it's very resource-intensive to move someone from one part of the world to another part of the world. The Canadian experience has turned out to be positive, in the sense that yes, it's a potential loss for the country of origin, but it's shown itself in reality to be a benefit for Canada. The statistics demonstrate that refugees make important contributions to Canada. Even though we selected them because of their vulnerability and the danger they were in or because we were responding to the various problems they had, the statistics show that Canada has done well by integrating them. Over time, we find that those first five or 10 years—depending on which academic you talk to—are hard, but to be fair, what Canada does well is that every year it gets better.

You mentioned that you're from Edmonton. There was a study done by Bronwyn Bragg and Dan Hiebert. A paper they wrote recently looked at housing in the six largest cities in Canada. What they found was that after 20-plus years, refugees had higher home ownership than Canadians in five of the six cities. The one exception was Edmonton; in every other city, refugees had higher home ownership.

Housing is an issue for us in Canada right now. I understand that, but I'm just saying that over time, we see these improvements. The access to opportunities pays off for everybody.

● (1655)

Hon. Mike Lake: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being with us for this extremely important study.

Ms. Tamjeedi, you spoke to us earlier about smugglers. I think this may be an angle we haven't yet touched on.

The issue of smugglers has been the subject of a lot of television coverage, but I think you're still among the people with the most expertise to talk to us about it.

Right now, criminal groups are taking advantage of migrants.

Can you provide the committee with more details on this issue?

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: Thank you for your question.

If you don't mind, I'll answer in English.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That is perfectly fine.

[*English*]

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: Smugglers and traffickers are often used by refugees and asylum seekers on the move. At times, in order to try to find safety, they definitely use them to circumvent restrictions that are often put in place.

According to the refugee convention, individuals, no matter which mode they use to enter a country, have the right to seek asylum and to seek safety. What we often look at and worry about is the exploitation and abuse of those vulnerable populations by traffickers, which is a much more serious definition.

In trafficking, you're looking at the exploitation of the individual for some kind of personal gain, whereas smuggling is lower on the danger scale and looks more at moving the individual or assisting the person to move, either for a small amount of money, for instance, or for some kind of return. Trafficking, however, is exploitation of the individual, which is much more serious in our Criminal Code and internationally than the smuggling definition.

It is definitely something that we see often, and we're seeing it on the rise as countries are looking at more restrictive measures to keep people out. As you may know, people who are desperate and who want to find safety will increasingly resort to more dangerous routes and the use of smugglers and traffickers in order to find safety.

● (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: This is indeed a very worrying phenomenon.

What we're hearing—perhaps you can give us more details on this—is that more and more violent groups, particularly Mexican cartels, are associated with the phenomenon.

We know that these cartels use excessive violence to traffic drugs, weapons and human beings. Now, this violence is coming into play because of the migration routes that pass through their territory. As we understand it, these cartels find themselves gaining more power, and more and more people are falling into their clutches.

Can you confirm this to the committee?

[*English*]

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: That would really depend on the situation. The different smuggling routes and the traffickers that are used really depend on which region of the world you look at. It's hard to make a blanket statement to confirm your question. Definitely, it is something that—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'll take the liberty of interrupting you.

I'm trying to focus on Latin America. I'm thinking of the famous migratory route in this region, where, according to what we hear, Haitians are passing through Brazil to go up through Colombia and Venezuela.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Casasola: This is why one of the strategies we've been employing, which is being led by the United States—and Canada has been supporting it, and Spain and other countries have been working on it —is what we're calling “safe mobility offices”. It's an initiative to try to provide access to legal immigration routes earlier in the process so that instead of travelling all the way through, there are operations set up in Colombia, Ecuador, Costa Rica and Guatemala. The idea is to try to assess if someone has a protection problem and can articulate it now. There may be a migrant with a non-protection-driven reason, something that's not being driven by persecution but some other need. We then try to determine if they access available programs in the United States, Canada and such.

This is a measure we're already taking. We're already into the hundreds of thousands of people who are accessing it. This is one way we're trying to, as I said, avoid the dangers that are so evident in the Darien Gap and other parts of the Americas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Earlier, you said that countries don't all react in the same way.

It's perfectly logical for countries to react differently to problems.

However, when these problems affect so many countries over such a vast territory, couldn't Canada then play a role by trying, for example, to convince other countries to participate in programs and establish bilateral agreements for the reception of migrants, like the ones we've just talked about, which have been concluded with Colombia, Guatemala and Costa Rica, among others?

[*English*]

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: I think a regional approach is a good way to respond and to look at it for the Americas.

As my colleague indicated, the safe mobility offices are one response. However, it should be a multi-faceted response, and you should study the routes that people are taking and look at an approach that's done along the routes.

The safe mobility offices are one way to respond, and Canada could definitely encourage more countries to participate and could look at programs that are similar.

Another way to respond is by strengthening asylum systems in the region and stopping people from moving forward. If they could access protection earlier through the asylum system of a country, that would be another way to respond and to ensure that they're not using smugglers to move further north. Another way would be having more programming and supports specifically for vulnerable populations like women on the move and unaccompanied children on the move, with programming along the route that goes from the south of Latin America up north.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I've personally met people who've made the entire trip, including one woman, whose name we won't mention.

She told me her story, which is terrible, especially for the part of the journey where you have to cross Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela. What we're hearing is that the criminal groups are getting bigger and bigger. Mexican cartels, Colombian cartels or organized crime necessarily mean corruption on the part of local authorities, and even, to a certain extent in some countries, corruption at government and national levels.

Is your organization aware of this problem? Do you make it a priority? What I hear from migrants is that their biggest fear is facing these groups and the authorities that these groups corrupt.

[*English*]

The Chair: Give a quick answer, please, because time has exceeded 25 seconds.

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: I'll just confirm that yes, we are aware that they are being used. We are aware of the situation, and we do speak to states about this issue on a very frequent basis. We do encourage co-operation between states to address these issues and to strengthen their own systems and their own rights-based approaches.

Of course, it's not always easy, but we are hoping that the situation over time, over the long term, will improve. It is definitely something that we are aware of.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Johns, you have the floor for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: First, thank you so much for your testimony. I'm very grateful for the work you do and I commend you for the important work that you do.

I was very encouraged when you talked about refugees having a high success rate when it came to home ownership over the last 20 years, as your study revealed. However, we also know across Canada that many asylum seekers and refugees are living in shelters or hotels or are unhoused.

Do you believe that the federal government is providing adequate supports to displaced persons coming to Canada in terms of housing, health care and employment? Maybe you can talk a little bit about where we need to do better. As well, what is the impact of Canada's high cost of living when it comes to newcomers?

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: Canada is definitely a country that has a great integration model and a great reception model for a lot of displaced populations. Compared to other parts of the world, it definitely has a fairly high standard. However, like other countries around the world, Canada is seeing a very, very big housing crisis that it's trying to address, so it is not a surprise that asylum seekers are seeing an impact, and it is not a surprise at all that they are also impacted by the housing crisis.

There are things that Canada could look at and do better. There are always improvements that countries can make in terms of their reception. One example is that many countries in South America are looking at models that take employment opportunities for asylum seekers and try to move them to parts of the country where those employment opportunities exist, for instance. Those are interesting programs, because they lead to better settlement of asylum seekers, and asylum seekers also have a better opportunity to find housing on their own and to support themselves.

We do know that if a certain market is saturated in terms of having too many people in one city and you are looking at relocating them, you shouldn't just look at relocating them based on housing availability: You should look at relocating them based on employment availability and other services that would be available. That would be something that Canada could definitely look at.

However, compared to what exists around the world, Canada definitely has a very good system in terms of integration, settlement and services offered to displaced populations, not just asylum seekers and refugees. As a model, I think Canada has a lot of things it could teach other countries around the world, which it is doing, and we encourage it to do a lot more of that.

Mr. Michael Casasola: If I may add to Ms. Tamjeedi's last point, it's routine for governments from around the world to come and look at the Canadian integration model.

Also, Canadians wring their hands about whether we're doing a good enough job about it, but it's often seen as a model because of those outcomes, as I mentioned earlier, because it gets better for newcomers over time. The next generation doesn't just plateau but does better. We know right now, from the most recent Statistics Canada study that we've seen, that refugee children have a higher graduation rate from college, university and postgraduate studies than Canadian-born children. It doesn't mean they're smarter; it just means the system works.

If you give them access to opportunities, Canada benefits.

● (1710)

Mr. Gord Johns: Would you agree, though, given the housing situation we're in right now, that there are areas where we can improve? Do you have some suggestions and thoughts on that?

In the last few years, we've certainly seen the housing crunch impact most communities in Canada. I imagine you might have seen different models around the world that Canada could look at to improve the situation.

Mr. Michael Casasola: I'll let Ms. Tamjeedi respond to some of the latter part with some ideas, but I want to acknowledge that this is a problem we're hearing about from everybody. This is a problem we're hearing about from all states. This is more of a global phenomenon that all countries are wrestling with.

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: It really depends on which populations you're referring to. If you're bringing in someone as a resettled refugee, they have access to different types of services versus an asylum seeker. I'll focus my comments on asylum seeker populations.

There are definitely different models globally. Certain countries have a reception centre model, for example, so when the asylum seeker is going through the asylum process, they will be housed in a reception centre where they have access to legal assistance, counsel, social services and information on how to find a job, work permits and things like that. It's all housed under one roof. Certain countries, particularly in Europe, prefer this model because they believe it assists the individual while they're going through their asylum process and allows them to better move on from a reception centre if they are accepted. Canada could consider looking at existing programs like that.

Other countries have models that focus on NGOs and rely on them to provide those services. They provide support and funding to those NGOs to provide services that are geared toward the specific needs of these populations.

It's not just one size fits all. You could also do combinations of those different models. I definitely invite Canada, if you have questions about that, to come to our organization. We have a vast array of information on the different models used globally, and there's always a mix-and-match of best practices that could be used.

Mr. Gord Johns: I appreciate that.

There's an incredible group in my riding in the Comox Valley that has been welcoming Ukrainians, but it hasn't had any resources from the government, so it's almost all volunteer-based. It absolutely needs resources to give the Ukrainians who are here the best chance possible. There are opportunities, I believe.

In terms of what we can do to reduce the drivers of forced migration, can you speak a bit about that, especially in places where Canada plays a pivotal role? I think about Ethiopia, where we provide international development assistance. We have an influence.

Can you speak about what we can do and what role we can play in reducing the drivers of forced migration?

The Chair: You have a minute.

Mr. Michael Casasola: The first thing would be to address the root causes. We are a neutral organization. We must work on both sides of the border whenever there's a conflict. We work with the internally displaced, yet on the other side of the border, we're also working with the refugee population. However, we look to states to effectively address the causes of forced displacement.

There are some examples that Dr. Clark-Kazak referenced earlier that we could also be doing. On support for host communities in terms of integration, for example, if there's no need to set up an education system for refugees that is separate from the host population's education system, why not support the host population in allowing refugees to access it?

Also, we need to bring in new actors to help find these solutions, because at these unprecedented levels, we're looking now to the World Bank and private sector donations. In Canada, it's not just the Government of Canada. Canadians have been a key source of support for us as an organization. About two years ago, we reached $1 billion in donations from the private sector, which has been critically important to us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I invite Mr. Ehsassi to take the floor for three minutes, please.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you also to the witnesses. Your testimony certainly has been very helpful.

I believe you were here in the room when we heard from the first witness that protocols are being developed in the EU to deal with the issue of trafficking when it comes to refugees. I was wondering if you're aware of those guidelines or protocols and whether there is any room to apply those very same practices to the Americas as well.

● (1715)

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: Since it is very specific, I will definitely get back to the committee on that question to provide the specific guidelines that we have in addressing situations of trafficked persons and the ones that are being developed by the EU. I'll do that in writing.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Okay. Thanks so much.

Ms. Tamjeedi, I understand you're an expert in setting up legal frameworks to deal with different streams of displaced people or refugees. In the system that we have in place, are those legal frameworks responsive to what we have been experiencing in terms of increased levels of refugees over the course of the past several years?

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: I think it's important to look at the legal framework here. There's a vast array of responses that Canada employs, and my colleague can definitely talk about the resettlement and the complementary pathways types of programs.

When you're looking at asylum, Canada's system is fairly robust. It is a system that we often look to as an example to the world. It was developed with a certain number of claims in mind that we would receive a year, around 50,000 to 60,000 claims. The harder part right now is looking at how to make that system more flexible for the larger number of asylum claims that we are receiving.

That is possible to do within the current framework, and it is possible to look at things like differentiated case processing. This basically means treating different cases and files from different countries at a different rate. Let's say that if you have a case of Afghans who are coming and making asylum claims, you would process their cases much faster than you would process claims from people of a different nationality if their cases are more complex, for instance. That would help you address backlogs in the system.

There is a lot of work being done at the government level, and at UNHCR's level as well, to look at Canada's asylum system and see if it's flexible enough and if there are tweaks that could be made, and there are always improvements, I believe, that could be made on that side.

My colleague can speak on the resettlement and complementary pathways.

Mr. Michael Casasola: I just want—

The Chair: Wrap it up, please.

Mr. Michael Casasola: Very quickly then, I would just say that Dr. Clark-Kazak mentioned the issue of the different responses that Canada has applied to different groups in terms of these additional special humanitarian initiatives.

I'll be honest and transparent with you: What's been really key for us is that it has not been at the expense of resettlement spaces. It has not been at the expense of those additional needs that I talked about earlier, and that's been really key for us.

I know that the government is working on its own crisis response framework to deal with some of these concerns, but for us, from our vantage point, it has not had the impact that we've seen in other countries that it has impacted, so we're grateful.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Majumdar, you have three minutes. The floor is yours, please.

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you for taking the time to give us such a comprehensive assessment.

I'd like to take a tack that is slightly different from my colleagues' approaches by looking more at the source of refugees.

Authoritarian regimes, as your colleague previously testified, play a role in generating a refugee crisis, whether it's internally displaced or internationally. In your perspective, where would you say authoritarian regimes have modernized their approach in weaponizing the displacement of people as a matter of their policy?

Mr. Michael Casasola: I'm not sure. As a UN agency, we have to work with all states regardless, so it's not for me to specifically refer to any particular state. As I mentioned earlier, we have to work on both sides of the border, both internally and externally. We work in a variety of different languages and cultures and needs and so on.

I'll be transparent with you. I'm not sure how to address that question. Obviously, we're always concerned that the rights and the protection of refugees be respected throughout. I guess that would also extend to migrants and other groups. Of course, they have rights as well. However, I'm not sure how to unpack that question. I'll be transparent.

● (1720)

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar: Maybe instead of naming individual states, given the situation that the UNHCR has to operate within, let me ask broad questions.

Are authoritarian states weaponizing migration as a means to destabilize other regions?

Mr. Michael Casasola: Oh, I think that's much more of a question for an academic, who could give you much more of a perspective. I'm just saying it sounds suitable for comments from the Secretary-General or something.

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar: Look, at the UNHCR you assess forced migration from a multitude of perspectives. It's okay to discuss how countries absorb and deal with those issues, whether it's in the global north, the global south or wherever it might be, but I think that absent an appreciation of where the source is, the prevention you've described as necessary to deal with this mass displacement of people—which, to your tune, has increased times two in 10 years—requires a better assessment as to why it's being accelerated in the way it is.

Mr. Michael Casasola: Well, I would say on that point that it's a question of the political will to find solutions to conflicts.

We've been obviously very concerned about the treatment of asylum seekers globally, in terms of state responses and whether states are using the weaponization of asylum, or somehow trying, as you say, to use it. I'm just not sure how to unpack that.

Certainly we are concerned about the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers globally, period. We're concerned about people continuing to have access to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement. These are important key principles. The previous speaker spoke about them.

As to whether or not newcomers are used as a particular tool, I can't really speak to that, but I can say that we are obviously very concerned about the situation and the rising number of forcibly displaced persons and their treatment.

Do you want to say anything, Azadeh?

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: I do want to add that internationally we do look at protection issues that people of forcibly displaced populations are facing. If you look at our global trends report, it will give you a good indication of the protection issues that individual populations are facing.

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar: I appreciate that.

On the question, the examples that come to mind that maybe I can say and that you maybe cannot are of how Russia flies displaced people from one region of the world to Minsk and then goes on to destabilize Poland in that way, which is documented by academics, UN personnel and others around the world as a means of doing so, and also how Turkey has been turning the pressure valve on and off by threatening migration into Europe to destabilize European Union systems.

Additionally, in the Americas, it's how the forced displacement of people is being used to destabilize our hemisphere alone, as colleagues have touched upon, through trafficking networks—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Majumdar.

Could we have a quick answer, please, in 25 seconds?

Mr. Michael Casasola: I also have to acknowledge, though, to be fair, that when you gave one of the examples as Turkey, Turkey hosts more refugees than any other country in the world. We need to recognize that some of these states do carry a tremendous amount of responsibility in that way.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for three minutes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses once again for being with us today.

I imagine that your organization must foresee future conflicts or political situations that would bring an additional migrant crisis. Does your organization make such forecasts?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Casasola: I don't think we do any public forecasting, but—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: No, I wasn't thinking of public forecasts, but internally, you have—

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Casasola: Absolutely. We have stockpiles of materials around the world so that when an emergency takes place, we'll be there. That's one of the benefits we have. While it can be challenging being a large organization, the benefit is that we are everywhere. We're in 100-plus countries.

We have a presence around the world and, as I said, there are stockpiles of relief items around the world so that we can respond when events take place, including when, for example, an earthquake has taken place and it affects the refugee population. Then we will help the refugee population and the local population with that assistance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: There's a worrying situation that we don't hear enough about, unfortunately, and that I've been trying to raise for some time. You're probably aware of it.

Two weeks from now, there will be a very important election south of the Canadian border, in the United States. Right now, the candidates are neck and neck in the polls. One of the U.S. presidential candidates said that, if he took power, he would deport—that's the term he used—millions of people. The figure of 10 million people is often mentioned. Whether it's feasible or not, what's unfortunate is that he said it and that people feel targeted by it.

Are you prepared for the consequences of the victory of this candidate, whom I don't need to name?

As we know, there has been a massive influx of asylum seekers in recent years here in Canada. From what we're hearing from various organizations working on both sides of the border, if this person wins the election, the very next day there could be hundreds of thousands of people seeking protection and heading for the most developed country possible. Between you and me, that country is likely to be Canada.

Are you prepared for that?

● (1725)

[*English*]

The Chair: Please give a quick answer.

Ms. Azadeh Tamjeedi: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] Canada as UNHCR, but we are here to support the government. If the government does have an increase in asylum claims for whatever reason, we're there to support them in addressing that increase.

The Chair: Mr. Johns, you have the floor for three minutes.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses again for the important work they're doing and for today's testimony.

Right now in Lebanon, it's estimated that there are nearly 200,000 migrant workers. Many are undocumented as well, as we're learning. Can you speak about the unique challenges migrant workers face during times of conflict, such as what's happening in Lebanon right now?

Mr. Michael Casasola: Thank you for drawing attention to the situation in Lebanon, where right now already about 1.2 million people have been displaced inside the country. Another 400,000-plus have crossed the border into Syria. About 70% of them are Syrians. The remaining are Lebanese and some other nationalities.

We're also in a situation of displacement for ourselves in that country—I mean, many of our staff have been displaced. We have had two staff members killed in Lebanon.

We are providing assistance to everyone in the country who's displaced. We are providing real and substantive.... We are the lead UN agency. Despite the challenges faced by our own staff, we're delivering services.

I can't speak to the specific situation of migrant workers. They're not under our mandate as an organization. They would be more the responsibility of the International Organization for Migration. They have rights. Unlike refugees, for assistance they could be expected to approach the embassy of the country from which they came.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you. I send my condolences to you and your colleagues and of course the families of those who have been killed in this terrible conflict.

Do you believe the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration are achieving their goals? Perhaps you could identify some of the gaps that still need to be addressed in international policy, such as climate change, which you touched on a little bit earlier.

Mr. Michael Casasola: Thank you for the question. I can't comment on the global compact on migration, because I'm just not familiar with it. I'd have to refer it to the International Organization for Migration.

With regard to the Global Compact on Refugees, we are seeing results. We are seeing, as I mentioned earlier, new actors getting involved. It has managed to try to build support for the countries that are hosting most of the refugees. It's really encouraging to see the number of new pledges and the number of new states involved.

That said, obviously there's further we could go. Obviously, more could be done. In addition to the number of pledges, we have to ensure that states and other actors who made pledges—because they're not just states—fulfill those pledges. The first step is getting states to agree to take action and to provide additional assistance and such. The second is actually for that to be implemented.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Casasola, I would like to seize the opportunity to comment on something.

Lebanon is my native country. I would like you to be more vigilant in providing humanitarian aid and services. I come from northern Lebanon. In my small town in northern Lebanon, 85 families for three weeks now have received zero humanitarian aid. In many villages it's the same thing, so do not concentrate only on the city. Go to other parts of the country. Thank you.

I would like to thank both of you for being here and for your testimony. It was very interesting to hear you. If you'd like to share more information with the committee, you can always write to the clerk.

Thank you. We wish you all the best.

The meeting is adjourned.