

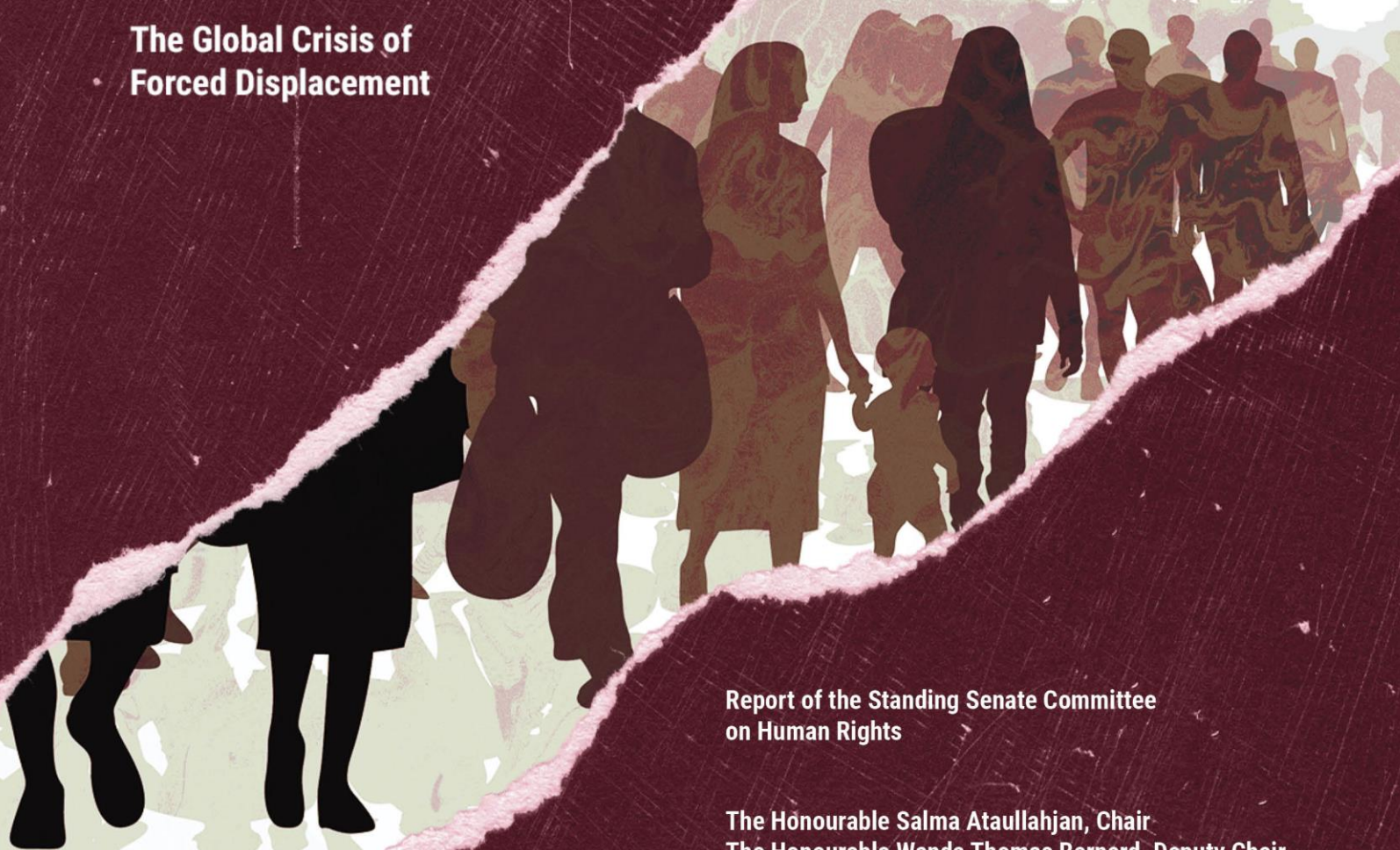


SENATE
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CANADA

DECEMBER 2024

RIPPED FROM HOME

The Global Crisis of
Forced Displacement



Report of the Standing Senate Committee
on Human Rights

The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, Chair
The Honourable Wanda Thomas Bernard, Deputy Chair



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Acknowledgement

The committee wishes to thank all of the witnesses who appeared as part of this study. Their diverse experiences and valuable insights were critical to the committee's understanding of this important topic, and helped inform the report's recommendations.

The Committee Membership

At the time of the report's adoption by the committee



The Honourable
Salma Ataullahjan
Chair



The Honourable
Wanda Thomas Bernard
Deputy Chair

The Honourable Senators



David M. Arnot



Amina Gerba



Fabian Manning



Ratna Omidvar
(retired on November 5,
2024)



Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler



Kim Pate
(member of the
Subcommittee on Agenda
and Procedure)

Ex-officio members of the committee:

The Honourable Marc Gold, P.C., or the Honourable Patti LaBoucane-Benson
The Honourable Donald Neil Plett or the Honourable Yonah Martin
The Honourable Raymonde Saint-Germain or the Honourable Bernadette Clement
The Honourable Scott Tannas or the Honourable Rebecca Patterson
The Honourable Pierre J. Dalphond or the Honourable Judy A. White

Other Senators who have participated in the study:

The Honourable Sharon Burey
The Honourable Andrew Cardozo
The Honourable Bernadette Clement
The Honourable Jane Cordy (retired)
The Honourable Nancy J. Hartling (member of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure until April 2024)
The Honourable Mobina S. B. Jaffer (retired)
The Honourable Frances Lankin, P.C. (retired)
The Honourable Marilou McPhedran
The Honourable Marie-Françoise Mégie
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Debbie Larocque, Administrative Assistant (until October 2024)

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Amely Coulombe, Manager, Strategic Communication
Chelsea DeFazio, Communications Officer

Order of Reference

Extract from the *Journals of the Senate* of Thursday, March 3, 2022:

The Honourable Senator Atallahjan moved, seconded by the Honourable Senator Wells:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, in accordance with rule 12- 7(14), be authorized to examine and report on such issues as may arise from time to time relating to human rights generally; and

That the committee submit its final report to the Senate no later than June 12, 2025.

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

Gérald Lafrenière
Interim Clerk of the Senate

Executive Summary

Between October 2023 and June 2024, the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights (the committee) undertook a study on global forced displacement, hearing from 42 witnesses during eight public meetings, and receiving written submissions from a range of experts and stakeholders.

The committee was alarmed to hear that global forced displacement is a crisis at a scale without precedent since the end of the Second World War. Conflicts in Sudan, Ukraine and Gaza are among the most pressing emergencies currently driving global displacement. At the same time, tens of millions of refugees have been in camps or other protracted situations for more than 20 years, with no end in sight.

Globally, there is no credible plan to address the scale of the displacement crisis, which is expected to grow as climate change increasingly fuels devastating changes to environmental, economic and physical wellbeing.

International and Canadian law have long recognized universal rights relating to global forced displacement. Among these are the right to seek asylum from persecution in another country, and the right not to be returned to a country where the rights to life or freedom are threatened because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.

These rights promise the most basic level of human security. The committee was therefore disturbed to hear that they are nevertheless under direct threat in various jurisdictions, and are at broader risk of being compromised by the sheer scale of the global displacement crisis.

Canada's leadership on issues of global forced displacement is commendable, but the overall results have been insufficient. While there are no easy solutions, Canada has the opportunity and the moral obligation to lead at multiple levels: nationally, regionally, and internationally. Through careful consideration of the nexus between peace and security, development and human rights, Canada will be well positioned to help develop strategies that are proportional to the scale of human suffering that is at stake.

This report offers recommendations to the Government of Canada based on the testimony that the committee heard between October 2023 and June 2024. The committee urges the government to carefully consider and respond to each of its recommendations.

Recommendations

Based on the testimony heard during this study, the committee has the following 15 recommendations for the Government of Canada, grouped according to their scope: global, regional and national.

Global

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada make forced displacement a top foreign policy priority and adjust its international efforts to align with this objective. In addition, the Government of Canada must ensure that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Global Affairs Canada coordinate their efforts globally, regionally and domestically.

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada lead with like-minded international partners to advocate for mandatory, proportional contributions from United Nations member states to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), ensuring that both agencies have stable and sufficient funding over the long term.

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada increase voluntary, unearmarked contributions to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and encourage other countries to do the same.

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada lead like-minded international partners to develop a global plan for rapid progress on protracted situations, including detailed benchmarks for responsibility-sharing and timelines for implementation.

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada increase its support to countries that host refugees, including for education and training in refugee camps, and encourage other countries to do the same.

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada increase private sponsorship and expand its support for the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative and the Resettlement Diplomacy Network, while advocating for the principle of additionality.

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada recognize climate displacement as an existential crisis and take an international leadership role on mitigating and adapting to climate change. This includes fully funding Canada's climate finance commitments and addressing climate migration through international instruments such as the Convention on Statelessness.

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada work with like-minded partners to leverage the role of international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, as well as regional institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank to reduce the burden on host countries.

Regional

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada take a leadership role in crafting regional responses on displacement issues in the Americas, including through the sharing of infrastructure and resources, increased commitments to protection pathways, and pursuit of a Canada–United States–Mexico regional framework on human smuggling.

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada craft public policy exceptions to the *Canada–United States Safe Third Country Agreement* based on a principled evaluation of how United States refugee law differs from Canadian refugee law, including with respect to gender, disability, and the treatment of unaccompanied minors. In addition, the federal Cabinet must ensure that it meets its legal obligation to continually review the policies, practices and human rights record of the United States to verify its status as a safe third country, and to withdraw from the agreement if doing so is supported by evidence that it is not a safe country for refugees.

National

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada expand the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot internationally and that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada continue to innovate new pathways for refugees, bearing in mind the importance of retaining a robust government-assisted refugee program.

Recommendation 12

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada consider introducing new pathways for refugees based on specific human rights considerations, such as for victims of gender-based violence and people displaced by climate change, and develop related training for judges, lawyers and immigration officials.

Recommendation 13

That the Government of Canada examine its differential responses to displacement crises in view of its obligations to equality rights and its commitment to an anti-racism strategy, and that it work to reduce differential outcomes based on race.

Recommendation 14

That the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada address lengthy delays and backlog by accelerating its modernization of technology to increase efficiency while safeguarding the rights of all claimants, including those who face particular vulnerabilities based on their gender, gender identity, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, or other intersecting factors.

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada work with its provincial and territorial counterparts to address gaps in refugee services, including health care and other settlement programming.

Overview of Global Forced Displacement

Over the course of its study, the committee heard that more than 114 million people are currently displaced worldwide, approximately 40% of whom are children and 49% of whom are women and girls.¹ Many displaced people have overlapping vulnerabilities based on their gender, race, disability, economic status, sexual orientation, and other intersecting factors.

Devastating conflicts in Sudan, Gaza, Ukraine, and elsewhere are fueling extraordinary human suffering, while longstanding crises, including in Myanmar, are at risk of being forgotten.

At the same time, climate change is contributing to more extreme weather events and to slow-onset disasters that threaten to escalate the displacement crisis at an unimaginable scale. As noted by the Honourable Robert Rae, P.C. (Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York, Global Affairs Canada), “the number of crises is unprecedented. Since 1945, we’ve never seen anything like this.”²

Most displaced people remain in their own country. Others cross borders to seek safety as refugees. While most refugees currently come from just three countries – Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine³ – James C. Hathaway (Professor of Law, Founding Director of the Program in Refugee and Asylum Law, University of Michigan) highlighted that 24 million people – two-thirds of all refugees – are in protracted situations, “meaning that their situation has gone on for at least 20 years with no end in sight. ... Of those 24 million people whose lives have been put on hold, only a paltry 120,000... get resettled in a given year.”⁴

While these statistics are important to understand the scale of the crisis, witnesses repeatedly emphasized that “these are people, not just numbers.”⁵ Noting the rise in

¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights (RIDR), *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Matthieu Kimmell, Director, Humanitarian Policy, Global Affairs Canada); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023*, p. 18.

² RIDR, *Evidence*, 3 June 2024 (Hon. Robert Rae, P.C., Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York, Global Affairs Canada).

³ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Rema Jamous Imseis, Representative to Canada, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

⁴ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (James C. Hathaway, Professor of Law, Founding Director of the Program in Refugee and Asylum Law, University of Michigan – As an individual).

⁵ RIDR, *Evidence*, 27 November 2023 (Bahati Maganjo, Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot Consultant and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada – As an individual).

negative discourse about refugees, John Slocum (Executive Director, Refugee Council USA) highlighted the important role that Canada can play in continuing its “defence of the notion that seeking asylum is legal,” while underscoring the fact that “a high proportion of asylum seekers are, in fact, refugees.”⁶

Most of the world’s refugees (approximately 75%) are hosted in low- and middle-income countries, largely due to their proximity to significant countries of origin such as Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia.⁷ Ukrainian refugees are a significant exception to this trend, with most hosted in high-income countries such as Germany, Poland and Czechia.⁸ Globally, the host countries with the largest refugee populations are currently Iran, Türkiye, Germany, Colombia and Pakistan, which host between 2.1 million and 3.4 million refugees each.⁹

Several witnesses highlighted the fact that many host countries have limited resources and are often simultaneously dealing with humanitarian crises of their own.¹⁰ Countries that are geographically removed from current conflict zones – such as Canada – must do more to fill the gap.

The committee is acutely aware that there are no easy solutions. As this report outlines, various conflicts, humanitarian crises, and environmental disasters often overlap, while also presenting specific and unique challenges. In light of this complexity, the committee agrees with what some witnesses referred to as the nexus approach: encouraging international cooperation on strategies that are grounded in a commitment to the world’s most vulnerable and that consider holistically the dimensions of peace and security, development and human rights.

The Refugee Convention

The 1951 United Nations *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* (the Refugee Convention) is the foundation of international refugee law and is broadly reflected in national laws, including in Canada. The Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who is outside of their country of origin and who is unable or unwilling to

⁶ RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (John Slocum, Executive Director, Refugee Council USA).

⁷ United Nations Development Programme, *Increased support to refugee-hosting countries key to addressing rising displacement*, News release, 12 December 2023.

⁸ UNHCR, *Ukraine Refugee Situation*, Operational Data Portal, accessed 24 April 2024.

⁹ UNHCR, *Refugee Data Finder*, accessed 24 April 2024.

¹⁰ See for example, RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Matthieu Kimmell, Director, Humanitarian Policy, Global Affairs Canada).

return due to a well-founded fear of persecution. The Refugee Convention sets out the rights of refugees, including the right to non-refoulement, which means that they cannot be returned to the place where their life or freedom would be threatened because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Moreover, complementing this right, article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that everyone has the right to seek asylum from persecution in other countries.¹¹

In testimony to the committee, Michelle N. Mascoll (Director General, Resettlement Policy Branch, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) explained that the needs of displaced populations are much broader than can be addressed through the Refugee Convention.

“[T]he international refugee protection system is structured to address the needs of persons who meet the refugee definition and works to prioritize resettlement for those most in need of protection. This can create challenges when responding to the needs of all forcibly displaced persons, as our existing frameworks, legal tools, operational structures and partnerships may not be available. Responding to these types of situations is inherently complex and may be taking place in a crisis context, where supporting movement is even more challenging.”

Michelle N. Mascoll (Director General, Resettlement Policy Branch, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada)¹²

Jennifer Bond (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Pathways International and Chair, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative) described the global refugee system as collapsing and failing, arguing that it is no longer fit for purpose. Professor Bond provided the example of 85,000 Afghan refugees who were admitted to the United States (U.S.) through the humanitarian parole program because the U.S. refugee program was too cumbersome. In other words, even when governments are motivated to act, the refugee system may not be effective. Professor Bond concluded that “we have to be really candid that the refugee system is profoundly

¹¹ UN, [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

¹² RIDR, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2023 (Michelle N. Mascoll, Director General, Resettlement Policy Branch, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

broken, and we can't just tinker with it. We have to acknowledge it's no longer protecting people who need protection."¹³

In contrast, Rema Jamous Imseis (Representative to Canada, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) argued that the Refugee Convention is fit for purpose, and that what is lacking is international solidarity and support for refugee-hosting countries.¹⁴

Bill Frelick (Director, Refugee and Migrant Rights Division, Human Rights Watch) noted that the definition of refugee could be expanded beyond the narrow terms of the Refugee Convention by states such as Canada. He noted that some regional instruments have taken this approach, such as the *Cartagena Declaration on Refugees* and the *Organisation of African Unity Refugee Convention*. Similarly, "in the European Union, there's a qualification directive that includes victims of armed violence and victims of inhuman and degrading treatment, which is also not in the Refugee Convention itself."¹⁵ He also suggested that people whose lives are directly threatened by climate change ought to be considered refugees "because whether you die at the hands of a torturer or whether you die because you're drowning, your life is being threatened one way or the other."¹⁶

Professor Hathaway stressed that the catalogue of rights granted under the Refugee Convention works well when respected, but that a mechanism is needed to "operationalize the global system in a way that is equitable and predictable for all countries."¹⁷ The committee agrees that such a system should be the Canadian goal.

Recommendation 12

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada consider introducing new pathways for refugees based on specific human rights considerations, such as for victims of gender-based violence and people displaced by climate change, and

¹³ RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (Jennifer Bond, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Pathways International and Chair, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative – As an individual).

¹⁴ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Rema Jamous Imseis, Representative to Canada, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

¹⁵ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Bill Frelick, Director, Refugee and Migrant Rights Division, Human Rights Watch).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (James C. Hathaway, Professor of Law, Founding Director of the Program in Refugee and Asylum Law, University of Michigan – As an individual).

develop related training for judges, lawyers and immigration officials. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

The Global Compact on Refugees

In 2016, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*, a non-binding resolution that called for greater international cooperation in managing large movements of refugees and migrants, acknowledging a shared responsibility to do so in a manner that is humane and compassionate. Among other measures, it called for states to strengthen international border management cooperation and support capacity-building for countries that receive large movements of refugees and migrants. While doing so, it called for states to promote gender equality, give primary consideration to the best interests of children, and combat xenophobia, racism and discrimination against refugees and migrants. Finally, the resolution included a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which outlined detailed and specific measures designed to manage and support the needs associated with large-scale refugee movements.

Following evaluation of the CRRF and consultations led by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2018 the UN General Assembly built upon the New York Declaration by endorsing the *Global Compact on Refugees* (GCR), with 181 votes in favour (including Canada), two opposed (Hungary and the U.S.), and three abstentions. The GCR includes the CRRF as well as a program of action and measures for follow-up and review. In particular, the GCR calls for a meeting of states and relevant stakeholders every four years to take stock of progress, exchange good practices and experiences, review the efficacy of existing arrangements for burden- and responsibility-sharing, and pledge additional measures. The first Global Refugee Forum occurred in December 2019, and the second in December 2023.¹⁸

Several witnesses highlighted shortcomings of the GCR. For example, Bill Frelick noted that “one of the problems is it’s not binding” rendering it mere “words on paper ... until governments step forward.”¹⁹

¹⁸ For more information on the *Global Compact on Refugees* see Madalina Chesoi and Brendan Naef, [Primer on the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#), Library of Parliament, Publication No. 2019-21-E, 20 May 2019.

¹⁹ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2023 (Bill Frelick, Director, Refugee and Migrant Rights Division, Human Rights Watch).

James C. Hathaway described the GCR as “too little, too late” while also being “the only game in town.”²⁰ Professor Hathaway stressed that there is nothing wrong with the Refugee Convention’s definition and catalogue of rights, but that it is missing operational components. He recommended that Canada continue to engage with the GCR, with the goal of ultimately operationalizing the global refugee system in a way that is equitable and predictable for all countries.

International Institutions

Several international institutions play key roles in triaging and responding to the most pressing global displacement issues. For example, the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) work closely together in contexts involving mixed movements of migrants and refugees.²¹ The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which provides assistance to Palestinian refugees, is discussed in the “Regional Overviews” section of this report.

The UNHCR was established in 1950 to lead and coordinate international protection for people displaced during the Second World War. Its mandate was soon expanded to lead international action for the protection of all refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people.

The UNHCR provides basic assistance such as shelter, food, water and medical care to forcibly displaced people, and advocates for their basic human rights and their inclusion in poverty reduction efforts. The UNHCR identifies and refers refugees in greatest need of resettlement, works to improve and monitor refugee and asylum laws and policies, and coordinates with a wide range of actors to reinforce and strengthen partnerships to find durable solutions for forcibly displaced people.²² Finally, the UNHCR facilitates the exchange of good practices with respect to the GCR, including by convening a Global Refugee Forum every four years.

The IOM was established in 1951 to help European governments identify resettlement countries for people displaced during the Second World War. Its mandate has since evolved to include leading intergovernmental and civil society

²⁰ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (James C. Hathaway, Professor of Law, Founding Director of the Program in Refugee and Asylum Law, University of Michigan – As an individual).

²¹ UNHCR, *Serving and Protecting Together: IOM/UNHCR Framework of Engagement*, 30 June 2022.

²² See for example UNHCR, “*Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways*.” For further information on UNHCR’s work see UNHCR, *UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026 | Global Focus*, March 2022.

efforts to promote humane and orderly migration. In 2016, the IOM was adopted as part of the UN system.

The IOM provides services to people in need of international migration assistance, including by helping to address basic needs in crisis situations. It also offers advice, research and technical assistance to build national capacities and facilitate international cooperation on migration matters. As part of these efforts, the IOM is the coordinator of the UN Network on Migration, which supports the implementation and review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Despite the importance of these institutions, the committee heard that they struggle to obtain the resources necessary to do their work. James C. Hathaway informed the committee that “98% of the UNHCR budget is not guaranteed ... which means that the organization is highly susceptible to being influenced by current trends at any given time. It doesn’t have the opportunity to properly plan for the future.”²³

To address this issue, several witnesses suggested that Canada advocate for a different funding model. For example, the Honourable Allan Rock, P.C. (Council Member, World Refugee and Migration Council and Canada’s Former Ambassador to the United Nations) stated that the UN should have compulsory assessments for each member state to contribute its fair share to the UNHCR in proportion to its economy – as is the current practice for peacekeeping. The Honourable Allan Rock, P.C. emphasized that voluntary contributions are “ridiculous when we’re talking about the desperate needs of 114 million people, 36 million of whom are refugees.”²⁴

Similarly, James C. Hathaway advocated for a shift toward “a model of common but differentiated responsibility at the global level,” noting the financial waste and ineffectiveness of the current system. Professor Hathaway observed that rich countries spend more than \$20 billion every year to assess refugee claims, which is four times more than what is available to actually address the needs of refugees in the Global South, describing this disparity as “a travesty and immoral.”²⁵

²³ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (James C. Hathaway, Professor of Law, Founding Director of the Program in Refugee and Asylum Law, University of Michigan – As an individual).

²⁴ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (the Honourable Allan Rock, P.C., Council Member, World Refugee and Migration Council and Canada’s Former Ambassador to the United Nations – As an individual).

²⁵ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (James C. Hathaway, Professor of Law, Founding Director of the Program in Refugee and Asylum Law, University of Michigan – As an individual).

The IOM, according to Irena Vojácková-Sollorano (Deputy Director General for Management and Reform ad interim, International Organization for Migration), exists at the nexus between humanitarian assistance and development. The organization balances providing urgent humanitarian assistance and working with migrants on voluntary assisted returns, with assisting home countries and governments to address the driving factors behind displacement. Irena Vojácková-Sollorano recommended that the Canadian government support this nexus through “these activities that connect immediately after humanitarian assistance to stabilize communities” and help governments to manage migration.²⁶

Irena Vojácková-Sollorano also explained the IOM’s practice of voluntary assisted return, which was developed in the 1980s. The IOM assists migrants who find themselves between legal systems or in countries where they cannot stay by identifying their opportunities for migration, and assisting with their return and reintegration into their home country, when the situation is safe to do so.²⁷

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada lead with like-minded international partners to advocate for mandatory, proportional contributions from United Nations member states to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), ensuring that both agencies have stable and sufficient funding over the long term. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

The Impacts of Climate Change on Displacement

Various witnesses brought the committee’s attention to the urgent need to address climate change as a driver of displacement. The committee heard that displaced people leave their homes due to a range of causes, which may include “devastating climate-related disasters, such as hurricanes, droughts and floods, which exacerbate their conditions of social and economic vulnerability” through the destruction of homes, businesses and agricultural lands.²⁸ As a result, witnesses observed that it can

²⁶ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Irena Vojácková-Sollorano, Deputy Director General for Management and Reform ad interim, International Organization for Migration).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (Camila Bustos, Assistant Professor of Law, Pace University).

be difficult to define and quantify climate-induced displacement.²⁹ Moreover, witnesses emphasized that climate change disproportionately affects groups who have contributed the least to it, and exacerbates their vulnerabilities, including for women, children and people with disabilities.³⁰

Payam Akhavan (Professor of International Law and Chair in Human Rights, Massey College, University of Toronto) warned that at its current trajectory, global displacement resulting from climate change will eventually reach a catastrophic scale, and ultimately be far worse than displacement resulting from all wars and conflicts combined. Professor Akhavan cited UNHCR estimates that more than 20 million people are forcibly displaced because of climate change each year globally. He emphasized the urgent need to mitigate and adapt to climate change, stating that “the conspicuous failure of the major polluters to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions has arguably become the biggest threat to human security.”³¹

The Honourable Allan Rock, P.C. explained that more people are going to need to move within and across borders to survive, increasing the importance of finding ways to slow climate change and deal with its impacts. He highlighted the particular vulnerability of small island developing states, some of which are at risk of being submerged due to rising sea levels.³² The Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, P.C. (Chair, World Refugee and Migration Council) also observed that Canada is not immune to these trends, noting the example of recent wildfires prompting displacement within Canada.³³

Given the projected scale of climate displacement, witnesses emphasized the need to examine strategies to manage climate migration. Camila Bustos (Assistant Professor of Law, Pace University) pointed the committee to a 2020 legal guidance from the UNHCR on how climate change intersects with refugee law. Professor Bustos explained that there are ways that people displaced because of climate change can have viable claims under existing refugee law, such as when a displaced person is also a persecuted environmental defender, or is persecuted because of their economic vulnerability stemming from the destruction of their livelihood. She

²⁹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (John Slocum, Executive Director, Refugee Council USA).

³⁰ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (Camila Bustos, Assistant Professor of Law, Pace University – As an individual).

³¹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 May 2024 (Payam Akhavan, Professor of International Law and Chair in Human Rights, Massey College, University of Toronto – As an individual).

³² RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (the Honourable Allan Rock, P.C., Council Member, World Refugee and Migration Council and Canada’s Former Ambassador to the United Nations – As an individual).

³³ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, P.C., Chair, World Refugee and Migration Council).

also explained that in the Americas, after extreme weather events, governments tend to offer time-limited temporary protection without a pathway to permanent protection, often resulting in “legal limbo” or a return to their country of origin at the expiration of their status.³⁴

Similarly, the Honourable Allan Rock, P.C. explained that people who are forced to leave their country due to climate change displacement likely would fall within the provisions of the 1954 statelessness convention, arguing that it may simply “need a slight amendment to specifically provide for those displaced by climate.”³⁵

Witnesses stressed the need to think creatively about solutions to climate-induced displacement, with some highlighting the example of a visa program in Argentina. Professor Bustos explained that this visa is a form of private sponsorship that allows civil society organizations to sponsor refugees from a listed set of climate-affected or climate-vulnerable places.³⁶ While noting that it is unlikely to become law in the current context, John Slocum (Executive Director, Refugee Council USA) highlighted as a potential model the example of a bill in the U.S. known as the Climate Displaced Persons Act, reintroduced in November 2023, which aims to create a new immigration pathway for individuals displaced by environmental disasters or climate change.³⁷

Similarly, Monica Iyer (Clinical Fellow, International Human Rights Clinic, Duke Law School) pointed to a 2017 advisory opinion of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which held that countries can be liable for the extraterritorial human rights impacts of environmental damage that they cause. She explained that in practice, “this means that states, particularly those that have contributed significantly to greenhouse gas emissions, have a human rights obligation to move immediately and decisively toward ending such emissions, in particular by ending global reliance on fossil fuels.”³⁸

³⁴ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023 (Camila Bustos, Assistant Professor of Law, Pace University – As an individual).

³⁵ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2023 (the Honourable Allan Rock, P.C., Council Member, World Refugee and Migration Council and Canada’s Former Ambassador to the United Nations – As an individual).

³⁶ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023 (Camila Bustos, Assistant Professor of Law, Pace University – As an individual).

³⁷ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 8 April 2024 (John Slocum, Executive Director, Refugee Council USA); U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, “[Climate Displaced Persons Act Would Create Vital New Humanitarian Pathway](#),” 16 November 2023.

³⁸ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023 (Monica Iyer, Clinical Fellow, International Human Rights Clinic, Duke Law School – As an individual).

Finally, witnesses raised specific concerns about the compounding impacts of climate change on pre-existing displacement challenges, such as in Iraq and Yemen, where millions of internally displaced persons and asylum seekers are concentrated.³⁹

In short, climate change must no longer be thought of as a peripheral concern in the context of global displacement. It is already amplifying threats to peace and security, development and human rights, and has the potential to supercharge global displacement to unprecedented levels. Mitigating and adapting to climate change is therefore central to the nexus approach to global displacement.

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada recognize climate displacement as an existential crisis and take an international leadership role on mitigating and adapting to climate change. This includes fully funding Canada’s climate finance commitments and addressing climate migration through international instruments such as the Convention on Statelessness. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

Regional Overviews

The Middle East and Asia

Various conflicts and disasters continue to fuel displacement across the Middle East and Asia, with some countries enduring decades of conflict and others hosting large numbers of refugees in protracted situations, such as displaced Afghan and Syrian populations.

Afghan and Syrian Refugees

Afghanistan has one of the largest displaced populations in the world. Approximately 3.25 million people are displaced within the country due to the combined effects of conflict and disasters such as earthquakes, droughts and floods, in addition to 5.3 million Afghan refugees and asylum seekers registered in neighbouring countries, most significantly in Iran and Pakistan.⁴⁰ The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan became markedly worse in August 2021, when the Taliban took control of the

³⁹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Kelsey Norman, Fellow for the Middle East, Director, Women’s Rights, Human Rights and Refugees Program, Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy - As an individual).

⁴⁰ UNHCR, *Afghanistan emergency*, updated March 2024.

country. In response, the Government of Canada committed to welcoming at least 40,000 Afghan refugees, implementing special immigration measures to resettle vulnerable Afghans and Afghan nationals who assisted the Canadian government, among other targeted immigration programs.⁴¹

The committee heard that the situation facing Afghan refugees, both in Afghanistan and in regional host countries, is precarious. Muzna Dureid (Advocacy and Partnership Manager, Nobel Women’s Initiative and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada) recommended that Canada make more commitments to support Afghan refugees, stating that under the Taliban, Afghan women face gender apartheid, while in Pakistan, Afghan refugees are at risk of deportation.⁴²

The Honourable Allan Rock, P.C. noted that although the Government of Canada succeeded in meeting its target of welcoming 40,000 Afghan refugees since August 2021, it has been “very difficult” to extract vulnerable Afghans from Afghanistan and to facilitate their journeys from intermediary countries to Canada.⁴³ Similarly, Bill Frelick stated that despite the creation of Canada’s Special Immigration Measures Program and humanitarian programs intended to relocate vulnerable women leaders, human rights advocates and minority groups, many Afghans who have applied for resettlement in Canada remain in Pakistan in danger of deportation.⁴⁴

Bill Frelick warned that as global attention focuses on Israel and Palestine, other actors may use the opportunity to force out long-standing refugee populations. For example, Pakistan announced on 3 October 2023 that all unregistered Afghans must leave by 1 November and that any who remained would face deportation. Bill Frelick explained that in addition to 1.3 million registered Afghan refugees, at least 2.2 million Afghans reside in Pakistan without legal status, because many have not been allowed to register as refugees.⁴⁵

The committee was especially concerned to hear about how living without legal status adversely affects children as they are not granted the opportunity to attend school or continue with their basic life development. Among the Afghan refugees Bill

⁴¹ Government of Canada, *Supporting Afghan nationals: About the special programs*.

⁴² RIDR, *Evidence*, 11 December 2023 (Muzna Dureid, Advocacy and Partnership Manager, Nobel Women’s Initiative and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada – As an individual).

⁴³ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (the Honourable Allan Rock, P.C., Council Member, World Refugee and Migration Council and Canada’s Former Ambassador to the United Nations – As an individual).

⁴⁴ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Bill Frelick, Director, Refugee and Migrant Rights Division, Human Rights Watch).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Frelick encountered in Türkiye, he found that most “who were being abused, pushed back at borders and deported to Afghanistan were unaccompanied young people.”⁴⁶

Similarly, various witnesses described a vulnerable situation for refugees in Türkiye. Jessie Thomson (Head of Delegation for Türkiye, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) stated that Türkiye hosts more than three million refugees while facing challenges relating to inflation, COVID-19 and a major earthquake. She warned that “the overall ability for the host community to continue to offer welcome as the years drag on, becomes harder and harder.”⁴⁷ Kelsey Norman (Fellow for the Middle East, Director, Women’s Rights, Human Rights and Refugees Program, Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy) also asserted that the 2023 earthquake and the presidential election in Türkiye “re-aggravated tensions between citizens and refugees.”⁴⁸

Bill Frelick explained that the Turkish government deports large numbers of Afghans and Syrians and is “violently pushing back asylum seekers and migrants on its border with Syria and Iran,”⁴⁹ resulting in migrants taking hazardous journeys and at times experiencing abuse while attempting to enter other neighbouring countries, like Bulgaria and Greece.

The committee also heard testimony regarding the challenges facing displaced Syrians. Muzna Dureid outlined that as a result of the Assad regime’s continued violence and the ramifications of an earthquake in Northwest Syria, 6.7 million Syrians have been internally displaced and five million have fled to nearby countries such as Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. She explained that although the Canadian government instated a program to support earthquake victims in Syria, many of the victims had lost their official papers and passports and are therefore unable to complete the visa application to come to Canada.⁵⁰

Kelsey Norman explained that Lebanon hosts one refugee for every four citizens, and that refugees and poorer host communities are disproportionately affected by Lebanon’s economic crisis. She recommended that Canada encourage such host

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ RIDR, *Evidence*, 27 November 2023 (Jessie Thomson, Head of Delegation for Türkiye, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies).

⁴⁸ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Kelsey Norman, Fellow for the Middle East, Director, Women’s Rights, Human Rights and Refugees Program, Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy – As an individual).

⁴⁹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Bill Frelick, Director, Refugee and Migrant Rights Division, Human Rights Watch).

⁵⁰ RIDR, *Evidence*, 11 December 2023 (Muzna Dureid, Advocacy and Partnership Manager, Nobel Women’s Initiative and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada – As an individual).

countries not to forcibly return Syrian refugees, in order to prevent the renewal of cycles of violence and repression that lead to further conflict.⁵¹ Similarly, Bill Frelick stated that summary deportations of Syrians from Lebanon have increased this year, and that since Lebanon has banned the UNHCR from registering Syrian refugees, only 17% of Syrian refugees hold legal residency.⁵²

The humanitarian situation in Northeast Syria was described by witnesses as particularly dire. According to Irena Vojácková-Sollorano, refugee camps in this region are inaccessible to humanitarian organizations and individuals in these camps experience “horrible things.”⁵³ Muzna Dureid called Northeast Syria a “forgotten area” of the region, lacking infrastructure and experiencing bombardments from Türkiye and international partners in the fight against ISIS. She called on the Canadian government to support more initiatives and infrastructure projects for civilians in the region.⁵⁴

Myanmar and Bangladesh

In 2017, following attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army – a non-state armed group – Myanmar government forces disproportionately retaliated against the Rohingya – a Muslim ethnic minority – prompting internal displacement within Myanmar as well as cross-border displacement to neighbouring Bangladesh.⁵⁵ In February 2021, a military takeover in Myanmar intensified armed conflict, violence against civilians, and human rights abuses, exacerbating existing displacement trends.⁵⁶

The Honourable Robert Rae, P.C. explained to the committee that since the February 2021 coup, there has been “massive fighting at every level across the country”

⁵¹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Kelsey Norman, Fellow for the Middle East, Director, Women’s Rights, Human Rights and Refugees Program, Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy – As an individual).

⁵² RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Bill Frelick, Director, Refugee and Migrant Rights Division, Human Rights Watch).

⁵³ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Irena Vojácková-Sollorano, Deputy Director General for Management and Reform ad interim, International Organization for Migration).

⁵⁴ RIDR, *Evidence*, 11 December 2023 (Muzna Dureid, Advocacy and Partnership Manager, Nobel Women’s Initiative and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada – As an individual).

⁵⁵ Government of Canada, *Canada’s response to the Rohingya and Myanmar crises*. For background on the crisis, refer to Brian Hermon, *Political and Civil Instability in Myanmar*, Working paper, Library of Parliament, 12 September 2022.

⁵⁶ Government of Canada, *Canada’s response to the Rohingya and Myanmar crises*; and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Myanmar situation*.

causing major destruction and contributing to further displacement, particularly in the Rakhine State, where violence has intensified.⁵⁷

As of 30 September 2023, there were more than 1.2 million Myanmar refugees and asylum seekers in the world, 74.6% of whom were in Bangladesh. An additional 1.5 million people were internally displaced in Myanmar. Since January 2022, more than 6,000 Rohingya refugees have embarked on dangerous sea journeys to cross borders in the region, with 573 refugees reported dead or missing as a result.⁵⁸

Jason Nickerson (Humanitarian Representative to Canada, Doctors Without Borders) discussed the situation facing the Rohingya population in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Malaysia. In Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, the largest refugee camp in the world, approximately one million people "find themselves contained and with limited or no rights to employment, education or livelihoods and with no clear solutions being proposed."⁵⁹ Rohingya refugees often flee violence in the camps in Cox's Bazar and find themselves lacking legal protections and safety in Malaysia, where thousands are arrested and held in detention centres, often for immigration violations.⁶⁰

Irena Vojácková-Sollorano discussed the IOM's capacity building efforts in Cox's Bazar, and mentioned the high levels of gender-based violence that occur in the camps. In these contexts, humanitarian organizations like the IOM assist by providing services, awareness programs and training to both women and men in order to create more community understanding about gender-based violence.⁶¹

Gaza Strip

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established in 1949 to respond to the needs of approximately 750,000 Palestine refugees who were forcibly displaced during the 1948 Arab–Israeli War.⁶² UNRWA continues to provide protection and assistance to approximately 5.9 million

⁵⁷ RIDR, *Evidence*, 3 June 2024 (The Honourable Robert Rae, P.C., Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York, Global Affairs Canada).

⁵⁸ UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal: Myanmar Situation*, accessed 5 April 2024.

⁵⁹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Jason Nickerson, Humanitarian Representative to Canada, Doctors Without Borders).

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Irena Vojácková-Sollorano, Deputy Director General for Management and Reform ad interim, International Organization for Migration).

⁶² United Nations, *The Question of Palestine*.

descendants of this group, including 1.5 million individuals who live in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.⁶³

On 7 October 2023, Hamas launched a terrorist attack in Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking approximately 240 hostages.⁶⁴ Israel responded by declaring a state of war, and ordering an air assault and ground invasion in Gaza. Between 7 October 2023 and 24 April 2024, an estimated 34,262 Palestinians were killed and an estimated 77,229 were injured.⁶⁵ As of 1 April 2024, approximately 1.7 million people – about 75% of the population – have been displaced inside the Gaza Strip, with most displaced multiple times.⁶⁶ In addition, 180 UNRWA workers have been killed, as well as 428 internally displaced persons sheltering in UNRWA premises.⁶⁷

The committee heard testimony from William Deere (Washington Representative Office, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) about the situation in Gaza and the difficulties that UNRWA faces in continuing to provide humanitarian relief and social services during the ongoing conflict. He emphasized that the organization is facing an existential threat as it only had sufficient funding to operate through the end of June 2024 and had put out an emergency appeal for \$1.2 billion to meet the needs of Gaza until the end of the year.⁶⁸

William Deere acknowledged the allegations by the Government of Israel that certain employees of UNRWA had participated in the 7 October 2023 attacks. He outlined the steps taken in response by the Commissioner General of UNRWA, which included the immediate termination of the named individuals and two investigations commissioned in conjunction with the Secretary-General of the United Nations: an investigation by the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services into the veracity of the

⁶³ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), "[Palestine Refugees](#)."

⁶⁴ Peter Saidel, Summer Said and Anat Peled, "[Hamas Took More Than 200 Hostages from Israel. Here's What We Know](#)," *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 March 2024.

⁶⁵ The Ministry of Health in Gaza is responsible for healthcare in the Gaza Strip and operates under the administration of Hamas. The ministry's figures have not been independently verified, but are commonly cited by international organizations, including United Nations agencies. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), [Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #157](#), 24 April 2024.

⁶⁶ UNRWA, [UNRWA Situation Report #99 on the situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem](#), 4 April 2024.

⁶⁷ UNRWA, [UNRWA Situation Report #103 on the Situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Including East Jerusalem](#), 23 April 2024.

⁶⁸ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 May 2024 (William Deere, Washington Representative Office, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East).

allegations and an independent outside review of the agency's adherence to the principle of neutrality. The latter report made approximately 50 recommendations, which the Commissioner-General committed to implementing. William Deere emphasized the report's claim that there has been "no evidence provided by the Government of Israel to support the allegation that there is widespread affiliation amongst agency employees."⁶⁹

Various witnesses illustrated the scale of the emergency in Gaza. Jason Nickerson emphasized that "people in Gaza are deprived of essential items such as food, water, shelter, fuel and electricity, as well as health care, due to Israel's siege of the entire Gaza Strip."⁷⁰

At the time of her testimony, Irena Vojácková-Sollorano stated that more than 30,000 people had been killed since the 7 October 2023 attacks, including 13,000 children and 220 humanitarian workers. As famine and deprivation disproportionately affect women, girls and children, more than one-third of those who had died in the past months were children, she said.⁷¹ Kelsey Norman called the scale of internal displacement in Gaza "unprecedented, with 80% of the strip's residents, 1.9 million people, forced to leave their homes" with nowhere to go.⁷² Irena Vojácková-Sollorano recommended that Canada continue its efforts for family reunification and resettlement, including by negotiating exits from Gaza.⁷³

Kelsey Norman also pointed to the issue of funding, noting that UNRWA is entirely dependent on voluntary contributions, leaving its vital work subject to political whims. She stated that moving away from this model "is critical to ensure life-saving assistance to millions of individuals."⁷⁴

In response to Canada's abstention from voting on a United Nations humanitarian resolution calling for a ceasefire, Muzna Dureid stated, "If Canada wants to have a

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Jason Nickerson, Humanitarian Representative to Canada, Doctors Without Borders).

⁷¹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Irena Vojácková-Sollorano, Deputy Director General for Management and Reform ad interim, International Organization for Migration).

⁷² RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Kelsey Norman, Fellow for the Middle East, Director, Women's Rights, Human Rights and Refugees Program, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy – As an individual).

⁷³ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Irena Vojácková-Sollorano, Deputy Director General for Management and Reform ad interim, International Organization for Migration).

⁷⁴ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Kelsey Norman, Fellow for the Middle East, Director, Women's Rights, Human Rights and Refugees Program, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy – As an individual).

diplomatic role in building peace, as it was known, and to contribute to saving lives, then it should revisit its votes and its actions, and call for an immediate ceasefire.”⁷⁵

The committee was concerned to hear about the acute scale of need in Gaza, as well as the ongoing and urgent needs of communities facing protracted crises, such as the Rohingya, Afghan and Syrian populations. Testimony about these regions highlighted the need for comprehensive, long-term efforts that promote responsibility-sharing, peace and security, and solutions for displaced people in protracted situations, including through funding commitments for UNHCR and UNRWA.

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada increase voluntary, unearmarked contributions to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and encourage other countries to do the same. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada lead like-minded international partners to develop a global plan for rapid progress on protracted situations, including detailed benchmarks for responsibility-sharing and timelines for implementation. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

Africa

The continent of Africa hosts an estimated 30 million displaced persons, or around one-third of the world’s refugee population.⁷⁶ The committee heard testimony about migration trends in Africa and the major crises contributing to displacement, such as the conflicts in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Janemary Ruhundwa (Co-Founder and Executive Director, Dignity Kwanza) explained that the major migration flows in Africa take place within and between countries in the Great Lakes region, the Horn of Africa and west and central Africa, which

⁷⁵ RIDR, *Evidence*, 11 December 2023 (Muzna Dureid, Advocacy and Partnership Manager, Nobel Women’s Initiative and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada – As an individual).

⁷⁶ RIDR, *Evidence*, 27 November 2023 (Bahati Maganjo, Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot Consultant and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada).

together host over 5.2 million refugees and over 18 million internally displaced people due to conflicts as well as drought and climate-related causes. She stated that among these refugees, 37% are children under 11 years old; 53% are under 18 years old; 82% are women, children and the elderly; and 75% are internally displaced people who receive little or no support from the international community.⁷⁷

Janemary Ruhundwa reported that most refugees in Africa are in protracted situations, and most in refugee camps which “severely limits their ability to be self-reliant,” and where restrictions expose them to various risks including arrest and detention, gender-based violence, human trafficking and exploitation. She used examples from Tanzania, where many have lived as refugees for over 50 years, lacking the full services and entitlements granted by citizenship, adding that the country has at times taken action to grant citizenship to groups of refugees and provide birth certificates to refugee children.⁷⁸

Alissa Pavia (Associate Director, Atlantic Council’s North Africa Program) highlighted the conditions for migrants in North Africa. She told the committee that Tunisia, and specifically its port city of Sfax, has become a significant transit hub for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, experiencing a 260% increase in departures this year compared to the previous year. She explained that migrants in Tunisia have experienced heightened persecution in the country since President Kais Saied assumed office in 2019. According to Alissa Pavia, “the situation took a dire turn in July when Tunisian authorities rounded up Black African migrants from Sfax and forcibly expelled them, leaving them stranded for weeks in the deserts bordering Libya and Algeria.”⁷⁹

Bahati Maganjo (Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot Consultant and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada) spoke about her experience living as a refugee in Kenya for 25 years, where she was able to train as a nurse before migrating to Canada in 2021. She advocated for Canada to invest more in host countries, especially in Africa. In particular, she suggested investing in programs that help refugees build skills and expertise so that they can support their communities.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 11 December 2023 (Janemary Ruhundwa, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Dignity Kwanza).

⁷⁸ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 11 December 2023 (Janemary Ruhundwa, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Dignity Kwanza).

⁷⁹ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 27 November 2023 (Alissa Pavia, Associate Director, Atlantic Council’s North Africa Program).

⁸⁰ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 27 November 2023 (Bahati Maganjo, Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot Consultant and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada – As an individual).

“For example, did you know that the entry-level health care training delivered in Canada for personal support workers or continuing care assistants in senior care homes is typically less than one year in length? How many refugees would jump at the chance to receive such training if it resulted in an employment opportunity in Canada?”

Bahati Maganjo (Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot Consultant and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada)⁸¹

Various witnesses discussed the ongoing civil war in Sudan. The Honourable Robert Rae, P.C. stated that “Sudan is probably the biggest displacement crisis at the moment and the biggest protection crisis in the world,” in addition to posing a high risk of famine. He emphasized the role that outside actors play in fuelling the conflict by supplying arms to groups within Sudan.⁸² According to Kelsey Norman, the conflict has displaced more than eight million individuals in the last year, including 1.8 million who have crossed international borders to seek protection. She stated that 450,000 have entered Egypt, a challenging economic and political environment where financial aid is largely focused on securing borders, rather than supporting newcomers, effectively “further entrapping refugees in Egypt.”⁸³

Muzna Dureid highlighted the heightened risk of sexual violence facing four million women and girls in Sudan. She stated, “[w]hile the measures taken by Canada to relocate the families of Canadians and Sudanese permanent residents contributed to saving lives, the window of this program is short despite the fact that this conflict knows no deadline,”⁸⁴ and recommended that Canada provide a longer timeframe for families to apply to the family reunification program.

Jason Nickerson also described the scale of displacement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where a conflict linked to the resurgence of the M23 armed group has aggravated violence in the North Kivu province for more than two years. In North

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² RIDR, *Evidence*, 3 June 2024 (The Honourable Robert Rae, P.C., Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York, Global Affairs Canada).

⁸³ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Kelsey Norman, Fellow for the Middle East, Director, Women’s Rights, Human Rights and Refugees Program, Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy – As an individual).

⁸⁴ RIDR, *Evidence*, 11 December 2023 (Muzna Dureid, Advocacy and Partnership Manager, Nobel Women’s Initiative and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada – As an individual).

Kivu, 2.5 million people are displaced, and sexual violence has reached shocking levels. Jason Nickerson called the international humanitarian response to the crisis “completely inadequate”⁸⁵ and called on Canada to act.

Multiple witnesses drew the committee’s attention to the the inequity in Canada’s responses to refugees from African and Middle Eastern countries compared to its response to Ukrainian refugees.

“We see plainly every day the difference in the response to Ukraine as opposed to refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo or other African nations. It is simply a question of Black and White, isn’t it?”

The Honourable Allan Rock, P.C., Council Member, World Refugee and Migration Council and Canada’s Former Ambassador to the United Nations

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Similarly, Muzna Dureid pointed out that although Canada did not set a cap on the number of Ukrainians who could enter Canada under the Canada–Ukraine authorization for emergency travel, “When it comes to Afghan refugees, we have only 40,000. There is no equal footing. As refugees, we feel there is discrimination based on the background of refugees, from where they are coming.”⁸⁷

Recommendation 13

That the Government of Canada examine its differential responses to displacement crises in view of its obligations to equality rights and its commitment to an anti-racism strategy, and that it work to reduce differential outcomes based on race. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

⁸⁵ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Jason Nickerson, Humanitarian Representative to Canada, Doctors Without Borders).

⁸⁶ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (the Honourable Allan Rock, P.C., Council Member, World Refugee and Migration Council and Canada’s Former Ambassador to the United Nations – As an individual).

⁸⁷ RIDR, *Evidence*, 11 December 2023 (Muzna Dureid, Advocacy and Partnership Manager, Nobel Women’s Initiative and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada – As an individual).

Europe

Jessie Thomson raised five key concerns related to migration in the European context, which were echoed throughout other witness testimony. These included:

- the perilous journeys taken by migrants, including the dangerous route across the Mediterranean;
- heightened security measures preventing access to protection, such as the construction of walls and fences at borders;
- challenges for migrants to access information and essential services, which create risks of abuse and exploitation, especially for migrants moving irregularly or without documentation;
- language difficulties, insufficient knowledge of rights, legal and administrative challenges, and limited access to essential services in destination countries; and
- stigmatizing and negative rhetoric about migrants in Europe.⁸⁸

In a brief submitted to the committee, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies expressed concern about the dangers that migrants face crossing the Mediterranean, “which has become one of the deadliest migratory routes in the world.”⁸⁹ The brief noted that migrants taking this journey are “vulnerable to exploitation by smugglers, including risks of sexual and gender-based violence, trafficking and abuse” and that “the absence of a coordinated international search and rescue mechanism is perpetuating this crisis.”⁹⁰

The Honourable Allan Rock, P.C. noted that irregular migration often involves dangerous journeys across open seas or narrow gaps, and criticized the European Union (EU) for downloading its legal and moral responsibilities by “paying Türkiye and the racist regime in Tunisia to thwart the flow of migrants and refugees to Europe.”⁹¹ Alissa Pavia noted the humanitarian consequences of these practices, highlighting in particular that the EU’s efforts to halt migration flows from North

⁸⁸ RIDR, *Evidence*, 27 November 2023 (Jessie Thomson, Head of Delegation for Türkiye, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies).

⁸⁹ RIDR, *Brief*, 5 December 2023 (International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (the Honourable Allan Rock, P.C., Council Member, World Refugee and Migration Council and Canada’s Former Ambassador to the United Nations – As an individual).

Africa resulted in the Libyan coast guard leaving refugees and migrants in detention camps with terrible conditions.⁹²

According to Melissa Siegel (Professor and Head of Migration Studies, United Nations University-MERIT and Maastricht University), issues relating to asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants became more salient in the EU beginning in 2015, as significant numbers of Syrians began to seek asylum. She explained that several Eastern European countries refused to take in refugees, including through resettlement from relatively overburdened EU countries such as Greece and Italy. Professor Siegel contrasted this response to the widespread acceptance of Ukrainian refugees in early 2022, including the first ever activation of the EU's temporary protection directive, which allows for direct entry and access to the labour market and government services. Nevertheless, she highlighted several key challenges continuing to face the EU in its response to refugees, including the distribution of refugees between EU countries, overcrowding of refugee camps and reception centres, housing issues, labour market integration, and social exclusion.⁹³

Naika Foroutan (Director, German Center for Integration and Migration Research and professor, Integration Research and Social Policy, Humboldt University) contrasted the reception of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees in Germany, where political discourse is becoming harsher toward refugees. Professor Foroutan recounted that nearly 1.1 million Ukrainian refugees live in Germany, making the country the third-highest refugee-hosting country in the world (after Iran and Türkiye). Professor Foroutan explained that nearly 80% of the men and 60% of the women who came to Germany as Syrian refugees are integrated into the regular job market, compared to 18% of Ukrainian refugees. Nonetheless, she drew the committee's attention to "how different, in terms of racial hierarchies, the treatment was for those who came from Syria and other Islamic countries in 2015 and 2016 and those who came from Ukraine," explaining that because Ukrainians are perceived to share European religion and culture, some Germans "direct their anger and mistrust toward asylum seekers against the other group whom they say don't have the same rights to stay here in their country."⁹⁴

⁹² RIDR, *Evidence*, 27 November 2023 (Alissa Pavia, Associate Director, Atlantic Council's North Africa Program).

⁹³ RIDR, *Evidence*, 27 November 2023 (Melissa Siegel, Professor and Head of Migration Studies, United Nations University-MERIT and Maastricht University – As an individual).

⁹⁴ RIDR, *Evidence*, 27 November 2023 (Naika Foroutan, Director, German Center for Integration and Migration Research and Professor, Integration Research and Social Policy, Humboldt University – As an individual).

The committee noted the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies’s recommendation that Canada encourage the EU to urgently provide more pathways for people in need of protection, and “work with the EU and its Member States to advance efforts to establish operation and maintenance of adequate, coordinated, and effective search and rescue operations covering the entire Mediterranean Basin.”⁹⁵

The Americas

Migration in the Americas is characterized by mixed flows of irregular and regular movement driven by diverse and, at times, overlapping factors, such as fleeing persecution or violence or seeking economic opportunity, among a continuum of other social, political, economic or environmental causes. Andrew Selee (President, Migration Policy Institute) explained that these mixed migration flows pose challenges for policymakers attempting to determine and respond to migrants’ motivations for migration.⁹⁶

According to Eduardo Stein (Joint Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, United Nations Refugee and United Nations Migration Agencies), the Americas are also experiencing a surge in irregular and multidirectional transit, as more migrants move onward from their first host country to seek more sustainable opportunities in new destinations.⁹⁷ Jose Samaniego (Regional Director for the Americas Bureau, United Nations Refugee Agency) further illustrated the recent spike in irregular and dangerous migration, noting that the number of people crossing the Darién Gap – known to be one of the world’s most dangerous routes for migration – doubled to 520,000 in the previous year, and included an increasing number of migrants from other continents, like China and Afghanistan.⁹⁸

In the Americas, the crisis of Venezuelan displacement is a major source of migration. Andrew Selee informed the committee that over 7.7 million Venezuelans have left their country, largely migrating to other countries in the region,⁹⁹ and Eduardo Stein explained that because departures from Venezuela continue to surpass returns,

⁹⁵ RIDR, *Brief*, 5 December 2023 (International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies).

⁹⁶ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (Andrew Selee, President, Migration Policy Institute).

⁹⁷ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 May 2024 (Eduardo Stein, Joint Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, United Nations Refugee and United Nations Migration Agencies – As an individual).

⁹⁸ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 May 2024 (Jose Samaniego, Regional Director for the Americas Bureau, United Nations Refugee Agency).

⁹⁹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (Andrew Selee, President, Migration Policy Institute).

persistent humanitarian, protection and integration needs remain.¹⁰⁰ Governments in the region have responded to the influx of Venezuelan migrants with a variety of pathways to legality, resulting in around two-thirds of Venezuelan migrants receiving some form of legal status in their host countries.¹⁰¹

Eduardo Stein acknowledged that progress has been made in access to regularization and legal status for Venezuelans in the region, but also pointed out that “factors such as the growth of xenophobia, [and] national economies in crisis continue to challenge integration and social cohesion”¹⁰² and that irregularity remains high. Andrew Selee also touched on how the use of temporary protection measures has taken some pressure off the refugee system in certain Latin American countries, and advocated for supporting governments in countries of origin to build capacity to deal with internal displacement.¹⁰³

Several witnesses spoke to the committee about displacement from Haiti. According to Andrew Selee, displacement from Haiti has been ongoing since the 2010 earthquake. Around a million Haitian migrants live outside of their country, largely concentrated in the Caribbean and Latin American regions.¹⁰⁴ Bill Frelick discussed Haiti’s relationship with the neighbouring Dominican Republic, explaining that deportations of Haitians had spiked. Bill Frelick recommended that Canada work with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and other partners “to reduce community violence, strengthen the rule of law and support development, stabilization and humanitarian needs” as well as advocate against collective expulsions of Haitians.¹⁰⁵

Andrew Selee also discussed the Mexican asylum system, calling it “completely overwhelmed” and explaining that a lack of alternative legal pathways leads to an influx of applicants who do not qualify for asylum, many of whom are trying to get to the U.S.¹⁰⁶

The hemispheric approach to migration, also called the route-based approach, is at the core of regional mechanisms like the *Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and*

¹⁰⁰ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 May 2024 (Eduardo Stein, Joint Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, United Nations Refugee and United Nations Migration Agencies – As an individual).

¹⁰¹ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023 (Andrew Selee, President, Migration Policy Institute).

¹⁰² RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 May 2024 (Eduardo Stein, Joint Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, United Nations Refugee and United Nations Migration Agencies – As an individual).

¹⁰³ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023 (Andrew Selee, President, Migration Policy Institute).

¹⁰⁴ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023 (Andrew Selee, President, Migration Policy Institute).

¹⁰⁵ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2023 (Bill Frelick, Director, Refugee and Migrant Rights Division, Human Rights Watch).

¹⁰⁶ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023 (Andrew Selee, President, Migration Policy Institute).

Protection and the Palenque Summit. Jose Samaniego explained that such an approach involves initiatives that include countries of origin, transit, destination and return, “with common goals such as enhanced protection in all phases of displacement, promoting the stability of communities through socio-economic integration, expanding responsibility-sharing mechanisms and strengthening the humanitarian response.”¹⁰⁷ Additionally, Jose Samaniego provided examples of host countries’ implementation of successful labour integration programs, adding that “the support of development actors, particularly the financial institutions such as the World Bank and the [Inter-American Development Bank], have also been key to complement the efforts of states through concessional loans ... and the promotion of public policies.”¹⁰⁸

Finally, Jose Samaniego emphasized that the best way to support the region is by building capacity in the countries themselves. The committee heard that capacity building efforts are needed to create more robust protection systems and additional legal pathways that complement asylum systems, particularly given the mixed and diverse factors driving migration in the region.¹⁰⁹ The committee sees an opportunity for Canadian leadership on displacement issues in the Americas by continuing to engage in the hemispheric approach, investing in capacity building efforts and innovating new pathways to protection.

The United States

The United States faces a growing immigration challenge at its southern border with Mexico. To respond to the influx of migrants – whose countries of origin include not only South and Central American countries, but also Asian, African and Middle Eastern countries¹¹⁰ – the U.S. government has introduced various policy innovations in recent years.

John Slocum (Executive Director, Refugee Council USA) provided an overview of recent updates to the U.S. immigration system. Notably, he discussed the introduction of three new private sponsorship pathways, which were largely inspired by the Canadian model of private sponsorship. Ukrainian arrivals, for example, were

¹⁰⁷ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 May 2024 (Jose Samaniego, Regional Director for the Americas Bureau, United Nations Refugee Agency).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 May 2024 (Fen Hampson, Chancellor’s Professor, Carleton University, and President, World Refugee and Migration Council – As an individual).

permitted through the Uniting for Ukraine private sponsorship program. A similar sponsorship program was created in 2023 to allow up to 30,000 individuals per month to be sponsored from Haiti, Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela for a stay of up to two years. However, entrants under parole programs, including Uniting for Ukraine and Operation Allies Welcome, (through which 90,000 Afghans entered the U.S.) are not considered refugees, as they hold humanitarian parole status. By contrast, the Welcome Corps Initiative, a third private sponsorship pathway within the Refugee Admissions Program itself, was also established in 2023.¹¹¹ Jennifer Bond cited expert opinions that the introduction of these private sponsorship initiatives is “the most significant transformation in the U.S. refugee program in over 40 years.”¹¹²

The U.S. government has also attempted to discourage irregular migration toward its border by establishing Safe Mobility Offices in Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Guatemala, where individuals are able to submit their applications and undergo UNHCR screenings for protection needs prior to arriving in the U.S.¹¹³

Finally, John Slocum emphasized U.S. and Canadian innovations in promoting the meaningful participation of refugees in policy arenas, highlighting the Refugee Advisory Network of Canada and the United States Refugee Advisory Board.¹¹⁴ The Refugee Advisory Network, a group of 12 refugees from across Canada, brings the perspectives and knowledge of refugees into policy and decision-making processes, such as through their inclusion in Canada’s delegation to the Global Refugee Forum.¹¹⁵ Likewise, the U.S. Refugee Advisory Board brings advisors with lived experience of forced displacement into policy conversations, and has successfully worked with the State Department to place a refugee advisor on every significant U.S. delegation to UNHCR in the previous two years.¹¹⁶

The committee also heard criticisms of certain aspects of the U.S. immigration system. Andrew Selee discussed the difficulties that exist with regard to protecting migrant children by expediting their transition out of border control stations and into families, while ensuring that they are not being trafficked or put into dangerous

¹¹¹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (John Slocum, Executive Director, Refugee Council USA).

¹¹² RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (Jennifer Bond, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Pathways International and Chair, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative – As an individual).

¹¹³ RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (John Slocum, Executive Director, Refugee Council USA).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Matthieu Kimmell, Director, Humanitarian Policy, Global Affairs Canada).

¹¹⁶ RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (John Slocum, Executive Director, Refugee Council USA).

situations.¹¹⁷ The committee was concerned to hear about other weaknesses of the U.S. asylum system, particularly pertaining to the treatment of gender-based asylum claims and the application of the *Canada-United States Safe Third Country Agreement*. These matters are discussed further in the next section.

¹¹⁷ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023 (Andrew Selee, President, Migration Policy Institute).

Canada's Role as a Global Leader on Forced Displacement

Canada's Role as a Receiving Country

In light of the scale of global crises, Canadian leadership is vital. Canada's migration policy contains various pathways to protection and resettlement for refugees and refugee claimants, including the Government-Assisted Refugees Program, the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, the inland asylum claim system, and the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot. Several witnesses spoke positively of this framework. Irena Vojácková-Sollorano, for example, praised Canada's migration policy for providing several legal migration pathways, as she said that most countries around the world do not have such a policy framework and instead focus on border management.¹¹⁸

Bill Frelick said that although factors such as language abilities and likelihood of finding employment are valid considerations when selecting refugees for resettlement, he emphasized the importance of "ensuring that the most vulnerable people are identified and that priority is given to them," including, for example, "LGBTI refugees in camps and women and children who have no say whatsoever in their lives."¹¹⁹

Julie Young (Canada Research Chair, Tier 2, in Critical Border Studies, and Associate Professor, University of Lethbridge) was critical of restrictive border control and "the externalization of asylum," wherein countries enact policies aimed at preventing migration before it begins or while it is in progress. Professor Young argued that such policies "contradict the commitments Canada has made to refugee protection. Moreover, such policies do not stem migration. Instead, people desperate for protection simply take more dangerous routes, which can lead to loss of life, broken families and lifelong trauma."¹²⁰

Witnesses also raised concerns about the needs of refugees once they have arrived in Canada. Kathy Sherrell (Director, Settlement Services, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia) spoke about the physical and mental health needs of many

¹¹⁸ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Irena Vojácková-Sollorano, Deputy Director General for Management and Reform and interim, International Organization for Migration).

¹¹⁹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Bill Frelick, Director, Refugee and Migrant Rights Division, Human Rights Watch).

¹²⁰ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (Julie Young, Canada Research Chair, Tier 2, in Critical Border Studies, and Associate Professor, University of Lethbridge – As an individual).

refugees, and how they may differ from those of other Canadians. She noted that refugees in Canada have access to the Interim Federal Health Program, which offers temporary basic health coverage prior to provincial eligibility, as well as supplemental and prescription coverage for one year. However, she also informed the committee that access to specific treatments or medications varies significantly between and within provinces, emphasizing the need for dialogue between federal, provincial and territorial governments. She recommended that all refugee claimants be provided with health services and other settlement programming “given long-term economic and social scarring that can result from delayed access to those critical services.”¹²¹

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada work with its provincial and territorial counterparts to address gaps in refugee services, including health care and other settlement programming. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

Government-Assisted Refugees Program

Through the Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) Program, refugees who are outside of Canada are referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or another referral organization based on their objective need for resettlement. Those selected receive government resettlement support for up to one year after their arrival in Canada, which is administered by service provider organizations.

In recent years, Canada has repeatedly been the leading country in the world in terms of refugee resettlement, with the GAR program representing a critical component. For example, Shauna Labman (Executive Director and Associate Professor, Global College, University of Winnipeg) pointed out that Canada’s successful 2015 commitment to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees was through the GAR program. However, Professor Labman observed that since that time, the GAR program has not kept pace with private sponsorship.¹²²

¹²¹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 11 December 2023 (Kathy Sherrell, Director, Settlement Services, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia).

¹²² RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (Shauna Labman, Executive Director and Associate Professor, Global College, University of Winnipeg – As an individual).

Indeed, The Honourable Robert Rae, P.C. explained that Canada's current target of 136,000 resettlements between 2024 and 2026 includes 83,000 private sponsorships.¹²³ Gauri Sreenivasan (Co-Executive Director, Policy and Advocacy, Canadian Council for Refugees) criticized this target as a decline from previous years, at a time when international solidarity and Canadian leadership are needed.¹²⁴

The committee shares this concern. A robust GAR program remains critical to ensuring that refugees are selected based on need. At the same time, there is room for innovation and flexibility. New programs within Canada's GAR program such as the human rights defenders stream, through which up to 500 human rights defenders will be eligible for resettlement annually, highlight the value and workability of centering human rights within an overarching government strategy.

Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

Established in 1979, Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSR) allows private organizations and groups of individuals in Canada to sponsor refugees for resettlement. Under the PSR, sponsors agree to provide care, lodging, settlement assistance and support for 12 months following the refugee's arrival in Canada, or until the refugee becomes self-sufficient (whichever comes first).¹²⁵

Private sponsorship applications can be submitted by different categories of private sponsor groups, including Sponsorship Agreement Holders (such as religious and humanitarian organizations that have a formal agreement with the federal government), Groups of Five (i.e., five or more adult Canadian citizens or permanent residents who live in the expected community of settlement), and Community Sponsors (i.e., an organization, association or corporation located in the expected community of settlement).¹²⁶ Since 2013, the Blended Visa Office–Referred Program has facilitated shared sponsorship between the federal government and private sponsors.

¹²³ RIDR, *Evidence*, 3 June 2024 (Hon. Robert Rae, P.C., Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York, Global Affairs Canada).

¹²⁴ RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (Gauri Sreenivasan, Co-Executive Director, Policy and Advocacy, Canadian Council for Refugees).

¹²⁵ Government of Canada, "[2. Private sponsorship of refugees program](#)," *Guide to the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program*.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Between 1979 and 2020, 327,000 people came to Canada under the PSR, including more than 60,000 people from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in the first two years, and more than 60,000 Syrian refugees since 2015.¹²⁷

The UNHCR cites the PSR as a model with clear benefits, including increasing global responsibility sharing, improving integration prospects for refugees, and facilitating their access to international protection.¹²⁸ However, some scholars and advocates are critical of the PSR, arguing that it offloads government responsibility and, in some cases, allows private citizens to handpick candidates for sponsorship.¹²⁹

The committee heard that Canada is a world leader in terms of the private sponsorship of refugees. John Slocum described private sponsorship as “a wonderful complement to a traditional resettlement system” so long as it “goes hand in hand with a strong and well-resourced government-led resettlement system.”¹³⁰

Other witnesses shared this perspective. For example, the Honourable Allan Rock, P.C. praised private sponsorship as a means of engaging communities in assisting newcomers, citing examples of providing snowsuits for children, and helping families get into English as a second language courses. He stated that private sponsorship “breaks through the barrier of the myth that [refugees are] here to undermine our security, to take our jobs and to destroy our culture. When you see the person as a human being, it makes a world of difference.”¹³¹

Kathy Sherrell observed that roughly 90% of private sponsorships are family reunifications, and explained that this comes with many benefits, including providing early social and economic networks, while alleviating the mental health impacts of family separation in the context of a crisis. However, she also stressed that private sponsorship should not come at the expense of government-assisted refugees and inland protection, stating that, “we need to know that we still, as a country, are not

¹²⁷ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *By the numbers – 40 years of Canada’s Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program*; and Audrey Macklin et al., *A Preliminary Investigation Into Private Refugee Sponsors*, 2018.

¹²⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Private Sponsorship Pathways*.

¹²⁹ See for example, Emine Fidan Elcioglu, *Neoliberal Fatigue: The Effects of Private Refugee Sponsorship on Canadians’ Political Consciousness*, 16 December 2021.

¹³⁰ RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (John Slocum, Executive Director, Refugee Council USA).

¹³¹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (the Honourable Allan Rock, P.C., Council Member, World Refugee and Migration Council and Canada’s Former Ambassador to the United Nations – As an individual).

selecting individuals based on their family, not based on connections in Canada, but based on the need for protection.”¹³²

For decades, Canada had the only private sponsorship program in the world. Jennifer Bond spoke about her experience leading the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI), which was formed in 2017 to help governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) outside of Canada develop their own private sponsorship programs. The GRSI’s partners include the Government of Canada and the UNHCR. Professor Bond highlighted success stories from the GRSI’s work in more than 20 countries, citing broad local support for such programs, particularly when they avoid unnecessary bureaucracy and empower sponsors, including by allowing them to name the person they wish to sponsor.¹³³

Professor Bond also spoke about the “urgent need for ongoing Canadian leadership in the global refugee system” and warned about the limitations of the current system.¹³⁴

“Today’s system is not built for our current challenges. It isn’t serving governments, NGOs and communities, and it certainly is not serving refugees. Canada is a critical actor, in part because of our willingness to lead and to innovate. We need Canada to pioneer new programs and pathways and take bold new ideas here at home and then share those experiences honestly – the good, the bad and the failures too – with others. We need Canada to keep pushing the envelope about what kinds of public-private partnerships are possible and that will allow us to maximize the impact.”

*Jennifer Bond, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Pathways International and Chair, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative*¹³⁵

¹³² RIDR, *Evidence*, 11 December 2023 (Kathy Sherrell, Director, Settlement Services, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia).

¹³³ RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (Jennifer Bond, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Pathways International and Chair, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative – As an individual).

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Professor Labman agreed that the refugee system is not functioning well right now, but warned about potential “unintended consequences and ethical dilemmas”¹³⁶ stemming from overreliance on private sponsorship. In particular, Professor Labman underscored the importance of additionality – meaning that private sponsorship should not come at the expense of government sponsorship.

“Government resettlement referrals come primarily from the UN and are of Convention refugees prioritized for resettlement. Sponsorship may fall within these priorities but also expands admissions beyond the Convention refugees to a broader category of humanitarian protected persons. So government-led protection-based resettlement ensures protection exists for those most in need.”

Shauna Labman, Executive Director and Associate Professor, Global College, University of Winnipeg¹³⁷

Professor Labman also stressed that the refugee system, the principle of non-refoulement and the Refugee Convention are not merely a system, but rather a legal obligation to protect people when they need protection. Speaking about the process for selecting refugees, she noted that “discretion can absolutely open more doors, but it can just as easily close doors.”¹³⁸

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada increase private sponsorship and expand its support for the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative and the Resettlement Diplomacy Network, while advocating for the principle of additionality. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

¹³⁶ RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (Shauna Labman, Executive Director and Associate Professor, Global College, University of Winnipeg – As an individual).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

The Safe Third Country Agreement and Irregular Migration

Since 2004, the *Canada–United States Safe Third Country Agreement* (STCA) has required most asylum seekers to make their claim in the first of the two countries in which they arrive. Proponents of the agreement argue that it would be inefficient for countries with similar legal systems to separately evaluate the same claims, while opponents argue that the U.S. asylum system is not equivalent to Canada’s and is not safe for refugees.

In March 2023, the STCA was expanded to apply to the entire land border, rather than just to official ports of entry. Individuals who cross the border between official ports of entry are now ineligible to apply for asylum during the first 14 days after their arrival. They may be returned to the U.S. during this period unless they qualify for an exception (such as unaccompanied minors and family members of Canadian citizens or permanent residents).

In its Regulatory Impact Analysis Statement, the Government of Canada argued that these changes would bring several benefits, including supporting the standardized treatment of arrivals, increasing public confidence in the integrity of the asylum system, and “potentially reducing the volume of irregular arrivals” by deterring individuals from crossing irregularly. However, the statement also acknowledged that these changes could create incentives for asylum seekers to cross the border in remote areas, increasing risks to their physical safety, including risks of human trafficking and sexual violence.¹³⁹

In June 2023, the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the constitutionality of Canada’s designation of the U.S. as a safe third country, based on an analysis of arguments relating to the rights to life, liberty and security of the person under section 7 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (the Charter). The Court found that Canada’s legal framework has sufficient safety valves to ensure that deprivations of liberty are not fundamentally unfair, even where there are differences between U.S. and Canadian laws and practices. However, it sent the issue of whether the STCA breaches equality rights under section 15 of the Charter back to the Federal Court for

¹³⁹ Regulatory Impact Analysis Statement, *Regulations Amending the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (Examination of Eligibility to Refer Claim)*, SOR/2023-58, 23 March 2023, in *Canada Gazette*, Part II, 12 April 2023, p. 978.

determination, leaving factual and legal questions relating to section 15 unresolved.¹⁴⁰

Moreover, the committee agrees with the Supreme Court of Canada that the factual findings of the lower court remain concerning. Identified issues in U.S. detention facilities included abnormally cold conditions, the use of solitary confinement, violations of religious dietary restrictions, and inadequate medical care – including evidence that medical staff ignored Black detainees.¹⁴¹

The committee heard that the STCA, and the 2023 Additional Protocol, put asylum seekers at greater risk and undermine Canada’s commitment to refugees. Several witnesses advocated for Canada to withdraw from the STCA.

“Canada is, in a sense, protected by its geography from confronting large-scale movements of refugees and is therefore able to be highly selective about who can enter the country. Crucially, externalization practices contradict the commitments Canada has made to refugee protection. Moreover, such policies do not stem migration. Instead, people desperate for protection simply take more dangerous routes, which can lead to loss of life, broken families and lifelong trauma.”

Julie Young, Canada Research Chair (Tier 2) in Critical Border Studies and Associate Professor, University of Lethbridge¹⁴²

Gauri Sreenivasan explained the distinction between people who receive refugee status overseas and those who claim asylum after arriving in Canada, noting that the latter group is framed as a crisis, despite the fact that the vast majority of refugee claimants are found to be refugees in need of protection. Gauri Sreenivasan further lamented that “[i]n a country that prides itself on its leadership and know-how in welcoming and settling refugees from abroad ... we see a policy approach that is focused either on futile attempts to stop refugees from seeking safety here – such as

¹⁴⁰ *Canadian Council for Refugees v. Canada (Citizenship and Immigration)*, 2023 SCC 17.

¹⁴¹ *Canadian Council for Refugees v. Canada (Citizenship and Immigration)*, 2023 SCC 17, paras 91-94, 116.

¹⁴² RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (Julie Young, Canada Research Chair (Tier 2) in Critical Border Studies and Associate Professor, University of Lethbridge – As an individual).

the Safe Third Country Agreement – or costly and ineffective short-term emergency responses that serve neither the public nor refugees.”¹⁴³

The Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, P.C. was similarly critical of efforts by governments to derogate from the right of asylum, noting that even Canada – a relatively compassionate country – brushes off people who seek asylum by virtue of the STCA, and often puts asylum seekers in provincial jails.¹⁴⁴

Similarly, Gauri Sreenivasan warned that the Additional Protocol to the STCA has prompted concerns that people trying to cross the border are in greater danger, citing the example of a pregnant 30-year-old Mexican woman who died trying to reach her husband.¹⁴⁵

Efrat Arbel (Associate Professor of Law, University of British Columbia) explained that while the 2023 Additional Protocol may appear neutral on its face, it “operates to close the Canadian border to some of the world’s most vulnerable refugees, particularly refugees who are racialized and refugees who are already marginalized.”¹⁴⁶ Professor Arbel explained the disproportionate impact of the Additional Protocol’s 14-day- restriction on the most highly vulnerable refugees within racialized populations, for whom other routes to protection may not be accessible – such as women, sexual minorities, people with disabilities, people who are pregnant, the elderly or parents of young children.

More broadly, Professor Arbel emphasized that rather than preventing refugees from entering the country, the Additional Protocol will simply make it more difficult for refugees to avail themselves of safe, organized and lawful modes of entry, putting the lives and safety of refugees at greater risk while simultaneously making the border more costly and challenging to manage. As a result, in Professor Arbel’s view, the Additional Protocol has the effect of weakening – not strengthening – the integrity of the Canadian border.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, Professor Arbel noted that in its decision on the STCA, the Supreme Court of Canada sent the arguments regarding

¹⁴³ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 8 April 2024 (Gauri Sreenivasan, Co-Executive Director, Policy and Advocacy, Canadian Council for Refugees).

¹⁴⁴ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2023 (the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, P.C., Chair, World Refugee and Migration Council).

¹⁴⁵ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 8 April 2024 (Gauri Sreenivasan, Co-Executive Director, Policy and Advocacy, Canadian Council for Refugees).

¹⁴⁶ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 8 April 2024 (Efrat Arbel, Associate Professor of Law, University of British Columbia – As an individual).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, specifically pertaining to gender equality rights, back to the lower courts for redetermination. She highlighted the “fundamental discrepancies in how Canada approaches gender-related claims as compared with the United States,”¹⁴⁸ arguing that as a result, the STCA is at odds with Canada’s commitments to gender equality and the rights of LGBTQ individuals.

Jamie Chai Yun Liew (Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa) spoke about the insufficiency of the “safety valves” that the Supreme Court of Canada identified in its decision on the STCA. Professor Liew explained that options such as pre-removal risk assessment applications, permanent residence applications on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, temporary resident permits and deferred removals are exceptional and discretionary remedies.¹⁴⁹

“For those who do not speak English or write in English or French and for those who are unfamiliar with our legal system and have no legal support, these avenues are unreachable. Many of the remedies sought are discretionary and rely heavily on the whim of an individual officer. Success rates are dismal for some of these applications. The reality is that these so-called safety valves are illusory and do not provide the checks and balances we think they do. ... We cannot rely on the fact that some mechanisms exist on paper to justify a system that is counter to our international obligations under refugee law, including the right to non-refoulement.”

*Jamie Chai Yun Liew, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa*¹⁵⁰

The committee is concerned that the STCA and its Additional Protocol may be at odds with Canada’s legal and moral obligations to refugees. While constitutional challenges to the STCA remain before the courts, the committee wishes to highlight Cabinet’s legal obligation under section 102(3) of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* to continually review the policies, practices and human rights record of the United States to verify its status as a safe country for refugees.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 8 April 2024 (Jamie Chai Yun Liew, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa – As an individual).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada craft public policy exceptions to the *Canada–United States Safe Third Country Agreement* based on a principled evaluation of how United States refugee law differs from Canadian refugee law, including with respect to gender, disability, and the treatment of unaccompanied minors. In addition, the federal Cabinet must ensure that it meets its legal obligation to continually review the policies, practices and human rights record of the United States to verify its status as a safe third country, and to withdraw from the agreement if doing so is supported by evidence that it is not a safe country for refugees. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

Recommendation 14

That the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada address lengthy delays and backlog by accelerating its modernization of technology to increase efficiency while safeguarding the rights of all claimants, including those who face particular vulnerabilities based on their gender, gender identity, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, or other intersecting factors. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

Economic Pathways for Refugees

The Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP), first launched in 2018, is a program that facilitates skilled refugees' admission to Canada's economic immigration programs based on their work experience and education, with or without a job offer.¹⁵¹ As Michelle Mascoll explained, the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot allows refugees and displaced persons to enter Canada as economic immigrants, "recognizing that refugees are more than their vulnerability and that they do have skills that can benefit the Canadian labour market."¹⁵² Applicants may apply through the federal EMPP or through one of three regional EMPPs: the Atlantic Immigration Program, Provincial Nominee Program or Rural and Northern Immigration Program.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Government of Canada, "[Backgrounder: Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot](#)."

¹⁵² RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Michelle N. Mascoll, Director General, Resettlement Policy Branch, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

¹⁵³ Government of Canada, "[Immigrate through the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot: How the pilot works](#)."

Bahati Maganjo (Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot Consultant and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada) recounted her experience as a refugee, stating that she felt dignified by coming to Canada through an economic pathway. She stressed that “[w]ork is central to who we are as human beings. ... It is something that refugees have not been allowed to do – to work, earn a living and just have that pride in making their own money. Refugees have been denied that for a very long time.”¹⁵⁴ She further stated that “labour opportunities for refugees are a way to restore refugees’ dignity while also giving them human rights to earn their basic needs.”¹⁵⁵ As such, she recommended that Canada work to support training for people in camps in countries such as Kenya, ensuring that refugees “don’t need to go through the endless years and finances of getting credentials on the other end.”¹⁵⁶

The committee welcomes the government’s pledge at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum to make the EMPP a permanent immigration program.¹⁵⁷

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada expand the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot internationally and that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada continue to innovate new pathways for refugees, bearing in mind the importance of retaining a robust government-assisted refugee program. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

Canadian Leadership in Multilateral Institutions

Funding

Canada has a proud history of contributing to multilateral institutions. In 2023, Canada ranked thirteenth in total contributions to the UNHCR,¹⁵⁸ and ninth in total

¹⁵⁴ RIDR, *Evidence*, 27 November 2023 (Bahati Maganjo, Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot Consultant and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada – As an individual).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *Canada builds on pledges and partnerships at the Global Refugee Forum*, 15 December 2023.

¹⁵⁸ UNHCR, *Donor Ranking*, database, accessed 15 July 2024.

contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).¹⁵⁹

Matthieu Kimmell (Director, Humanitarian Policy, Global Affairs Canada) explained that at the time of his testimony in 2023, Canada had allocated more than \$900 million to humanitarian assistance, almost \$80 million of which was contributed to the UNHCR. He also explained that Canada's investments through the World Bank's Global Concessional Financing Facility grant low-cost loans to countries like Jordan, Lebanon and Ecuador "in recognition of the global public interest they serve by welcoming refugees."¹⁶⁰

William Deere pointed out that Canada has a multi-year funding agreement with UNRWA and stated that such agreements, without too many limiting earmarks, help the organization to deploy resources where and when they are needed.¹⁶¹

Global Compact on Refugees Pledges

Michelle Mascoll relayed various actions taken by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) in support of the *Global Compact on Refugees* (GCR). She discussed the expansion of the Human Rights Defenders program, and noted Canada's membership in advocacy groups such as the Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility.¹⁶²

The committee is aware of Canada's 54 pledges under the GCR, which are extensive and commendable. Among other measures, the committee particularly welcomes Canada's support for: education in refugee camps and host communities; women-led organizations working on gender equality and protection from sexual and gender-based violence; asylum capacity-building efforts in the Americas; specific measures to welcome human rights defenders, Rohingya, and LGBTQI+ refugees; and the World Bank's Global Concessional Financing Facility, which helps support host countries.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ UNRWA, *2023 Confirmed Pledges to UNRWA's Programmes (Cash and In-kind) – Overall Donor Ranking*, 31 December 2023.

¹⁶⁰ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Matthieu Kimmell, Director, Humanitarian Policy, Global Affairs Canada).

¹⁶¹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 May 2024 (William Deere, Washington Representative Office, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East).

¹⁶² RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Michelle N. Mascoll, Director General, Resettlement Policy Branch, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

¹⁶³ Global Compact on Refugees, *Pledges & Contributions*, "Government of Canada," database, accessed 15 July 2024.

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada make forced displacement a top foreign policy priority and adjust its international efforts to align with this objective. In addition, the Government of Canada must ensure that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Global Affairs Canada coordinate their efforts globally, regionally and domestically. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

Canadian Leadership in the Americas

As part of its announcement of an Additional Protocol to the STCA in March 2023, Canada committed to accept 15,000 migrants from the Western Hemisphere on a humanitarian basis between 2023 and 2024. On 10 October 2023, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship announced that as part of this commitment, “Canada will welcome up to 11,000 Colombians, Haitians and Venezuelans through a new humanitarian permanent residence pathway.”¹⁶⁴

Jose Samaniego praised Canada’s engagement in regional processes in the Americas, such as the *Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection*, the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework, and the Group of Friends of the Quito Process. He went on to say that “Canada’s support was essential to strengthening the asylum system in the region, building efficient and fair processes for seeking safety”¹⁶⁵ through support provided by IRCC to various Latin American countries. He also spoke positively of Canada’s commitment to expanding resettlement and complementary legal pathways for migration. Eduardo Stein echoed appreciation for Canada’s participation in the Group of Friends of the Quito Process.¹⁶⁶

Several witnesses advocated for Canada to assume greater leadership on displacement issues in the Western Hemisphere. Fen Hampson (Chancellor’s Professor, Carleton University, and President, World Refugee and Migration Council) drew the committee’s attention to the issues of gang violence and organized crime as drivers of migration. Professor Hampson spoke about how cartels are changing

¹⁶⁴ Government of Canada, [Statement from Minister Miller on Canada’s commitment to support migrants in the Americas](#), 10 October 2023.

¹⁶⁵ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 May 2024 (Jose Samaniego, Regional Director for the Americas Bureau, United Nations Refugee Agency).

¹⁶⁶ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 6 May 2024 (Eduardo Stein, Joint Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, United Nations Refugee and United Nations Migration Agencies – As an individual).

their business models to focus more on human smuggling and trafficking and that “Mexican gangs, like the Sinaloa cartel and Los Zetas, are finding Canada to be a hospitable place to do business.”¹⁶⁷ Professor Hampson called for stronger Canadian leadership in pursuit of a comprehensive regional approach to human smuggling, engaging all levels of government as well as civil society organizations.

Andrew Selee argued that Canada should exercise greater leadership on displacement issues in the Western Hemisphere, arguing that while it does not have the same resources as the U.S. in terms of personnel and intelligence, it is often a more trusted partner. In particular, he highlighted the importance of safe mobility offices, and the Protection Transfer Arrangement, in which Canada, the U.S., the UNHCR, and local NGOs identify people in Central America who have protection needs either before they have to flee, before they become refugees or in the first country they get to. He argued that this “is one of the models that we should be thinking about in the rest of the hemisphere.”¹⁶⁸

Craig Damian Smith (Co-Founder, Executive Director and Principal Investigator, Pairity) emphasized that “Canada is already a global policy leader in terms of per capita refugee settlement, community sponsorship, and complementary pathways,”¹⁶⁹ as well as the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot. However, he was critical of the focus of Canadian efforts in Central America and Latin America, arguing that Canada largely “just keeps sending [Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada] decision makers to help Mexico’s asylum system instead of helping refugees get here. That, in itself, works as a kind of containment policy.”¹⁷⁰

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada take a leadership role in crafting regional responses on displacement issues in the Americas, including through the sharing of infrastructure and resources, increased commitments to protection pathways, and

¹⁶⁷ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 May 2024 (Fen Hampson, Chancellor’s Professor, Carleton University, and President, World Refugee and Migration Council – As an individual).

¹⁶⁸ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (Andrew Selee, President, Migration Policy Institute).

¹⁶⁹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023 (Craig Damian Smith, Co-Founder, Executive Director and Principal Investigator, Pairity).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

pursuit of a Canada–United States–Mexico regional framework on human smuggling. (See [full list of recommendations](#).)

Canada’s Role in Supporting Host Countries

Over the course of the study, the committee heard various recommendations about how Canada and the international community could better support countries that host refugees. Most of the world’s refugees (approximately 75%) are hosted in low- and middle-income countries, largely due to their proximity to significant countries of origin such as Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia.¹⁷¹ Ukrainian refugees are a significant exception to this trend, with most hosted in high-income countries such as Germany, Poland and the Czechia.¹⁷² Globally, the host countries with the largest refugee populations are currently Iran, Türkiye, Germany, Colombia and Pakistan, which host between 2.1 million and 3.4 million refugees each.¹⁷³

Janemary Ruhundwa urged Canada to invest in local actors to address poverty and promote human rights at their root. She highlighted the fact that refugees in protracted situations often lack opportunities to rebuild their lives and become self-reliant due to restrictions on their freedom of movement and right to work. As a result, humanitarian support alone is often insufficient.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, Bahati Maganjo encouraged Canada to consider investing more in supports for host countries, particularly in Africa, asserting that “most countries hosting refugees are not rich countries; they don’t have a lot of resources.”¹⁷⁵

The Honourable Allan Rock, P.C. offered a possible solution to help address this issue, highlighting the power of international financial institutions and international trade to advance human rights for refugees in host countries. For example, he noted that the EU made a deal with Jordan to reduce tariffs on goods manufactured by refugees. This encouraged Jordan to issue 100,000 work permits to refugees. Similarly, he suggested that international financial institutions such as the World

¹⁷¹ United Nations Development Programme, [Increased support to refugee-hosting countries key to addressing rising displacement](#), News Release, 12 December 2023.

¹⁷² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), [Ukraine Refugee Situation](#), Refugee Data Portal, accessed 24 April 2024.

¹⁷³ UNHCR, [Refugee Data Finder](#), accessed 24 April 2024.

¹⁷⁴ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 11 December 2023 (Janemary Ruhundwa, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Dignity Kwanza).

¹⁷⁵ RIDR, [Evidence](#), 27 November 2023 (Bahati Maganjo, Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot Consultant and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada – As an individual).

Bank and the International Monetary Fund should consider preferential treatment to reduce the economic burden on countries hosting significant numbers of refugees.¹⁷⁶

In a brief submitted to the committee, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies recommended another solution to support host countries, stating that Canada should “advocate for amendments to Official Development Assistance eligibility criteria to enable support to countries facing large-scale population movements along migratory routes.”¹⁷⁷

Irena Vojácková-Sollorano emphasized that regional arrangements to host refugees are preferable. The goal should be to help the countries in the region of displacement to stabilize migrant communities and create opportunities for integration, which benefits the region as well as the migrants. However, she also explained that such regional solutions are much more challenging to achieve, or even impossible, in some cases.¹⁷⁸

Finally, noting that the principle of non-refoulement is often at risk in host countries, Bill Frelick recommended that Canada link its humanitarian assistance, development and resettlement efforts in host countries “with close monitoring of collective expulsions or repatriation programs that purport to be voluntary.”¹⁷⁹

It is clear from the range of recommendations from witnesses that multifaceted efforts are required to respond effectively to the displacement crisis. Whether through creative immigration policy that provides layered pathways to protection, or through international trade agreements that incentivize economic opportunities for migrants, global forced displacement calls for pragmatic and innovative approaches to manage migration while centring human rights and development.

¹⁷⁶ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (the Honourable Allan Rock, P.C., Council Member, World Refugee and Migration Council and Canada’s Former Ambassador to the United Nations – As an individual).

¹⁷⁷ RIDR, *Brief*, 5 December 2023 (International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies).

¹⁷⁸ RIDR, *Evidence*, 15 April 2024 (Irena Vojácková-Sollorano, Deputy Director General for Management and Reform ad interim, International Organization for Migration).

¹⁷⁹ RIDR, *Evidence*, 30 October 2023 (Bill Frelick, Director, Human Rights Watch).

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada increase its support to countries that host refugees, including for education and training in refugee camps, and encourage other countries to do the same. (See [full list of recommendations.](#))

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada work with likeminded partners to leverage the role of international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, as well as regional institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank to reduce the burden on host countries. (See [full list of recommendations.](#))

Conclusion

Global forced displacement is a complex and rapidly developing series of interwoven crises. The overlapping nature of the drivers of displacement – including persecution, state failure, conflict, climate change and poverty – requires comprehensive strategies that not only address the short-term accommodation of migrants, but also take meaningful action towards addressing underlying issues relating to human rights, development, and peace and security.

Throughout this study, it was evident that the burden of global forced displacement is not shouldered equally. Displacement poses a heavy logistical and financial burden on host countries, particularly in those situated near refugee-contributing countries. Increasingly, emergencies causing displacement become long-term, protracted situations, requiring new levels of development resources and support. Responsibility-sharing, therefore, is a critical aspect of the global refugee regime, in order to provide durable support to host and transit countries and sustainable funding to international humanitarian organizations. While there are no easy solutions, millions of the world's most vulnerable people require a more effective global framework to ensure the realization of their basic human rights. In these efforts, Canada is well positioned to play a greater leadership role.

As outlined in the committee's recommendations, Canada can do more to bolster international institutions, support host countries that are on the front lines of crises, and ensure that our own refugee protection framework is efficient and proportional to the scale of global challenges. In all of these efforts, human rights must be centered. Innovative approaches to the management of migration flows may be necessary to improve efficiency and effectiveness, but must neither diminish nor replace the fundamental human right to asylum.

APPENDIX A – Witnesses

Monday, October 30, 2023

The Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, P.C., Chair, World Refugee and Migration Council

Mary Da Costa Lauzon, Director, Migration Policy Branch Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Bill Frelick, Director, Refugee and Migrant Rights Division, Human Rights Watch

Rema Jamous Imseis, Representative to Canada, United Nations Refugee Agency

Matthieu Kimmell, Director, Humanitarian Policy Global Affairs Canada

Michelle N. Mascoll, Director General, Resettlement Policy Branch Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

The Honourable Allan Rock, P.C., Council Member, World Refugee and Migration Council and former Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations – As an individual

Monday, November 6, 2023

Camila Bustos, Assistant Professor of Law, Pace University - As an Individual

James C. Hathaway, Professor of Law, Founding Director of the Program in Refugee and Asylum Law, University of Michigan - As an Individual

Monica Iyer, Clinical Fellow, International Human Rights Clinic, Duke Law School - As an Individual

Andrew Selee, President, Migration Policy Institute

Craig Damian Smith, Co-Founder, Executive Director and Principal Investigator, Parity

Julie Young, Canada Research Chair (Tier 2) in Critical Border Studies and Associate Professor, University of Lethbridge - As an Individual

Monday, November 27, 2023

Naika Foroutan, Director, German Center for Integration and Migration Research and professor, Integration Research and Social Policy, Humboldt University - As an Individual

Bahati Maganjo, Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot Consultant and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada - As an Individual

Alissa Pavia, Associate Director, Atlantic Council's North Africa Program

Melissa Siegel, Professor and Head of Migration Studies, United Nations University-MERIT & Maastricht University - As an Individual

Jessie Thomson, Head of Delegation for Türkiye, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Monday, December 11, 2023

Abdulla Daoud, Executive Director, The Refugee Centre

Muzna Dureid, Advocacy and Partnership Manager, Nobel Women's Initiative and Member, Refugee Advisory Network of Canada - As an Individual

Janemary Ruhundwa, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Dignity Kwanza

Kathy Sherrell, Director, Settlement Services, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia

Dana Wagner, Co-Founder and Managing Director, TalentLift

Monday, April 8, 2024

Efrat Arbel, Associate Professor, Peter A. Allard School of Law, University of British Columbia - As an Individual

Jennifer Bond, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Pathways International and Chair, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative - As an Individual

Jamie Chai Yun Liew, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa - As an Individual

Shauna Labman, Executive Director and Associate Professor, Global College, University of Winnipeg - As an Individual

John Slocum, Executive Director Refugee, Council USA

Gauri Sreenivasan, Co-Executive Director, Policy and Advocacy Canadian Council for Refugees

Monday, April 15, 2024

Jason Nickerson, Humanitarian Representative to Canada, Doctors Without Borders

Kelsey Norman, Fellow for the Middle East, Director, Women's Rights, Human Rights and Refugees Program, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy - As an Individual

Irena Vojácková-Sollorano, Deputy Director General for Management and Reform ad interim, International Organization for Migration

Monday, May 6, 2024

Payam Akhavan, Professor of International Law and Chair in Human Rights, Massey College, University of Toronto - As an Individual

Diego Beltrand, Special Envoy of the Director General for the Regional Response to the Migrant and Refugee Flows from Venezuela, International Organization for Migration

William Deere, Director, Washington Representative Office, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Fen Hampson, Chancellor's Professor, Carleton University, and President, World Refugee and Migration Council - As an Individual

Rema Jamous Imseis, Representative to Canada, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Jose Samaniego, Regional Director for the Americas Bureau, United Nations Refugee Agency

Eduardo Stein, Joint Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, United Nations Refugee and United Nations Migration Agencies - As an Individual

Monday, June 3, 2024

The Honourable Robert Rae, P.C., Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York, Global Affairs Canada

Ripped From Home: The Global Crisis of Forced Displacement

Matthieu Kimmell, Director, Humanitarian Policy Global, Affairs Canada

Manon Brassard, Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Roger Ermuth, Executive Director, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Oleksandra Matviichuk, Chairwoman, Center for Civil Liberties

APPENDIX B – Briefs and Supplementary Evidence

Camila Bustos (as an individual), Assistant Professor of Law, Pace University, [brief](#), 22 December 2023

Civil Society Submission on Climate Displacement for the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion on Climate Change, this [brief](#) has been recorded by the ICJ under letter No. 16177, 22 March 2024

Dignity Kwanza, Janemary Ruhundwa, [brief](#), 24 January 2024

Doctors Without Borders, Jason Nickerson, [executive summary](#), 16 April 2024

Global Affairs Canada, Matthieu Kimmell, Humanitarian Policy, [follow-up to testimony](#), 23 February 2024

Human Rights Watch, Bill Frelick, Refugee and Migrant Rights Division, [follow-up to testimony](#), 27 November 2023

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, [follow-up to testimony](#), 11 December 2023

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Jessie Thomson, [brief](#), 27 November 2023

Jamie Chai Yun Liew (as an individual), Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa, [brief](#), 4 April 2024

Jennifer Bond (as an individual), Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Pathways International and Chair, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, [charts](#), 4 December 2023 and [follow-up to testimony](#), 25 April 2024

Melissa Siegel (as an individual), Professor and Head of Migration Studies, United Nations University-MERIT & Maastricht University, [brief](#), 27 November 2023

Naika Foroutan (as an individual), Director, German Center for Integration and Migration Research and professor, Integration Research and Social Policy, Humboldt University, [follow-up to testimony](#), 4 December 2023

TalentLift, Dana Wagner, [follow-up to testimony](#), 16 January 2024

The Refugee Centre, Abdulla Daoud, [follow-up to testimony](#), 16 January 2024

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, William Deere, Washington Representative Office, [brief](#), 6 May 2024

World Refugee and Migration Council, Allan Rock, P.C. and Lloyd Axworthy, P.C.
[follow-up to testimony](#), 22 January 2024



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