

Global Forced Migration: The Political Crisis of our Time

This report provides an analysis of the present global forced migration crisis, the challenges it presents to local communities, national governments, the international system, and to the vulnerable men, women, and children themselves who are forced to migrate. Taken together, these facts represent a clarion call urging for strong leadership, international solidarity, and innovation to reduce the suffering of forced migrants and effectively address the sheer magnitude of the crisis. This report makes the case for urgent and sweeping action on the global forced migration crisis and argues the need for the United States to make a dramatic course correction in leading this global response. The report also makes timely recommendations for Congress, the Executive Branch, the United Nations, and other stakeholders to improve policies on forced migration. Today, there must be a bipartisan sense of urgency for renewed U.S. efforts to reform our domestic policies and international engagement relating to migration.

Principal Findings

- **The scale of today's forced migration crisis is unprecedented and, if left unaddressed, will grow in size and complexity.** A confluence of factors, including persistent climate-related shocks and increasingly frequent, highly violent, and protracted conflicts impacting civilians have resulted in a record number of people forced to flee their homes around the globe. By the end of 2018, there were over 70 million refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs worldwide. Many forced migrants are unable to return home for decades, often live in urban environments in developing countries, and face severe restrictions to and violations of their human rights. The COVID-19 pandemic has only magnified the extreme vulnerabilities of forced migrant populations, highlighted by dangerously overcrowded settings and inadequate access to basic healthcare.
- **The international community has struggled to address drivers of forced migration and support the growing number of forced migrants worldwide.** Armed actors have increasingly failed to adhere to international law, attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure and interfering with humanitarian aid with impunity. The UN Security Council, largely due to vetoes by its permanent members, has struggled to uphold its core mandate of maintaining peace and security, and has failed to hold violators of international law accountable. Despite specific international legal conventions affording refugees protection, some countries have denied refugees basic rights and services. The situation is often worse for those without pathways for national and international protection, including IDPs and those displaced by severe climate-related events.
- **The United States' retreat from humanitarian obligations and international cooperation under the Trump administration has dealt a grave blow to the international system.** The United States has historically served as a global leader in humanitarian response, humanitarian diplomacy, and refugee resettlement. The Trump administration, by contrast, has used every mechanism at its disposal to block legal pathways for refuge, undermining longstanding U.S. policies. As global need continues to grow, major donors such as the United States have reduced humanitarian financing, and the scale of need is far outpacing available assistance. Furthermore, the United States' regressive leadership has emboldened other countries to abandon their responsibilities to protect refugees and other forced migrants, and has impaired an

already-weakened system of international cooperation for responding to global crises like forced migration.

- **A dramatic change in course is needed to address the drivers of forced migration and adequately meet the needs of today's forced migrants.** Recent efforts in humanitarian financing, aid, diplomacy, and the private sector highlight opportunities to re-invigorate forced migration responses from the top-down, although greater support is needed around the world to drive these innovations. These initiatives include new international and national compacts on refugees, the World Bank's concessional financing, and a myriad of private partnerships aimed at providing services and opportunities to forced migrants. Given the scale of today's forced migration crisis, these efforts also underscore a need for collaborative action and widespread rethinking across all sectors—government, finance, and private companies—in order to comprehensively address the crisis.

Principal Recommendations

- **The United States Government must reinvigorate efforts to uphold international humanitarian law and resolve conflict, a primary driver of forced migration.** Congress should authorize the expanded use of sanctions and other tools against perpetrators of international humanitarian law violations and those who deny aid access for life-saving assistance. The Executive Branch, including the Departments of State and Defense, should ensure U.S. military assistance, such as arms sales, military training, and other defense services, is contingent on the implementation of civilian harm mitigation policies and adherence to international humanitarian law.
- **The United States must pursue protection for all forced migrants worldwide.** Both Congress and the Executive Branch must ensure that protections afforded to refugees, IDPs, and other forced migrants by international and national laws are upheld within, at, and outside our borders. Congress should mandate regular reports from the State Department and USAID on the rights and situations of forced migrant populations, including refugees and IDPs.
- **The United States must reform and improve upon domestic efforts to address forced migration by restoring the U.S. refugee resettlement program and creating complementary pathways for protection.** Harmful Trump administration policies towards forced migrants, including the “Remain in Mexico” policy and “safe third country” agreements, must be terminated. Both Congress and the Executive Branch must take steps to ensure that the U.S. refugee ceiling is increased in line with global need. Both branches should also work to expand our understanding of U.S. refugee law based on current realities and create complementary pathways to protect other forced migrant populations. By reclaiming our reputation as a place of refuge, the United States can lead on securing global solutions.
- **The United States must promote global cooperation efforts to address the forced migration crisis.** The Executive Branch should join the Global Compact for Refugees, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, and the Paris Climate Agreement. Reinvigorating the momentum behind the 2016 New York Declaration, the United States should lead efforts convening host governments, donors, the private sector,

civil society, and forced migrant representatives to form a new compact supporting the inclusion of forced migrant populations in host countries.

- **The United Nations should take further action to enforce international humanitarian law and improve protections for forced migrants.** The UN's role in responding to and alleviating the forced migration crisis has never been more important. The UN must use its tools, including Boards of Inquiry, Commissions of Inquiry, and the International Court of Justice, to enforce international law and end rampant impunity, including by publishing findings and identifying perpetrators of violations of international law. The UN Secretary-General should call on host countries to incorporate forced migrant populations into their national action plans. Moreover, the UN Secretary-General should promote awareness and renewed responses for IDP populations by elevating the role of Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs to Special Representative on IDPs and encouraging the implementation and ratification of the UN's Guiding Principles on International Displacement.