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Refugees in the Global North: dynamics, dilemmas, and constructive engagement

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ABSTRACT

The movement of refugees across borders has become a persistent feature of contemporary global society. Despite the protections offered by the 1951 Refugee Convention, which has been ratified by some 146 states, countries in the Global North have adopted a variety of contradictory and incoherent policy responses to refugees and migrants. These responses have been influenced by anti-immigrant public sentiment and growing popular demands to restrict and manage cross-border movements. The dynamics and dilemmas of contemporary refugee movements and policy responses create challenges for advocates and practitioners. Refugee policies have been complicated by the phenomenon of '*mixed migration*', where migratory patterns reflect the intersection of economic choices and forced migration. Within this context, we propose that policies of many prosperous countries, which thus far focus almost exclusively on restriction, be guided by considerations of shared responsibility and human dignity.

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Introduction

Today over 1% of the world's population has been forcibly displaced, and numbers have steadily increased from about 40 million in 1990 to over 100 million in 2022 (UNHCR 2023a). Of these, about one-third are refugees, asylum seekers and other people needing international protection, and the rest internally displaced (UNHCR 2023a, 2023b). Most refugees originate from very few states, and about 76% are hosted in low- to middle-income countries. While many refugees move to bordering countries, others seek out destinations based on historical social networks due to colonial ties or more recent family or other connections (Williams 2006).

In recent years, various countries have struggled to manage the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers. First time European asylum applications peaked

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at over 1.2 million in 2015, fell to 400,000 during the pandemic, and now have risen again to over 800,000 per year (Statistics Explained 2023). Following the Russian invasion of the Ukraine, Eastern European countries welcomed displaced Ukrainians, and local resources in countries such as Poland, which has hosted around 1.5 million people, have been stressed (European Commission 2023; Eurostat 2023; Kraszewska et al. 2020; Statista Research Department 2023; Stierl 2023; World Bank 2023). The number of asylum seekers crossing the US–Mexico border has significantly increased in recent years, and the United States now hosts some two million asylum seekers. Canada received more than 90,000 refugee claims in 2022, up from less than 30,000 during each of the two previous years (UNHCR 2023c).

Aside from this irregular flow of asylum seekers, many countries in the Global North participate in refugee burden sharing through government-managed programmes of refugee resettlement. The United States has traditionally been the leading country of resettlement, often accepting between 50,000 and 100,000 refugees per year. The US commitment to resettlement significantly declined during the Trump Administration to levels in absolute numbers less than Canada with 1/9th its population (G. Cameron and Labman 2024), and though it has since been re-established, Canada and Australia remain leaders in this area, particularly relative to their population size (CBC News 2019; Pew Research Center 2019).

Nonetheless, refugees constitute only a relatively small portion of the millions of people who have migrated from poorer countries to more prosperous countries in the 'Global North' after the Second World War (De Haas 2023). In Canada, the number of migrants under the family reunification, study and economic categories is three times the number of humanitarian migrants (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2022).

Causes and dynamics of refugee movements

The main causes of refugee movements today are armed conflicts and political instability, which displace people from their homelands because of insecurity. In recent years, major countries of origin include Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Venezuela, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia, with major hosting countries being primarily neighbouring countries including Türkiye, with more than 4 million, Colombia, Pakistan, and Uganda as well as Lebanon (with up to 14% of its population as refugees), Jordan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malaysia, Thailand, and Kenya (UNHCR 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). At the end of 2022, of the 29.4 million under the UNHCR mandate (UNHCR 2023b), 52% of these refugees came from three countries, the Syrian Arab Republic (19%), Ukraine (16%), and Afghanistan (16%). All three countries have been destabilized by domestic and international conflict, and most of those fleeing the country have sought international protection because of pervasive

violence and physical insecurity in their countries of origin. Looking further into recent history reveals a similar pattern. In 1980, millions of Afghans and Ethiopians fled to neighbouring countries because of violent conflict, 1.4 million Iraqis left for Iran in 1991, 2.3 million Rwandans moved to neighbouring countries in 1994, and so on (UNHCR 2023b).

As governments, particularly in the Global North, erect new barriers and obstacles to asylum-seeking, the movement of refugees is also becoming increasingly complex. Some asylum seekers from Africa travel to Brazil, moving north through Colombia and Panama, joining Central and South Americans attempting to make their way to the United States. Those seeking passage to Europe commonly converge on Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya, while those from Afghanistan, Syria and Pakistan often strive to get to Europe overland through Türkiye. Those from Myanmar wishing to go to Australia often come through Malaysia and Thailand by land before venturing by sea, where they may be joined by Afghans and Iranians (Adams 2015; Weller 2017). As more traditional pathways are shut off, refugees seeking protection in the Global North increasingly choose even more dangerous routes.

Over the last few decades in the post-Cold War era however, the primary drivers of refugee flows have been changing. While some refugees continue to flee persecution as dissidents or persecuted minority groups, the overwhelming majority of refugees have been leaving countries in the throes of armed conflict (Crisp 2003, 76). The UNHCR (2022) has reported that '*ongoing and new conflicts have driven forced displacement across the globe*'. The Russian invasion of Ukraine led almost 6 million people to flee the country as refugees, contributing to a dramatic rise in the global refugee population. A similar number of Ukrainians were internally displaced – moving elsewhere within Ukraine away from the centres of conflict. Since 2014, the ongoing conflict in Syria has also prompted a growing movement of refugees out of the country. War and conflict in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have also generated significant flows of refugees.

The dislocating influence of social and economic transformations and the globalization of migration have led more people to move from a growing diversity of countries (De Haas, Castles, and Miller 2019). However, people's reasons for moving do not always easily fit policy labels (Zetter 2007). The asylum-seekers of the post-Cold War era may be fleeing situations of precarity and vulnerability, while not always meeting, or being perceived to meet, the definition initially set out by the Refugee Convention described in the next section (Hamlin 2021).

Countries in the Global North are also destinations for a comparatively small fraction of the world's displaced population (only Germany figures in the top 10 of receiving countries), yet these unmanaged arrivals have caused significant policy challenges for receiving states. People sometimes move via

government resettlement programmes, but more frequently they seek asylum upon arrival in the country, or soon thereafter. One of the primary challenges is the adjudication of refugee claims; until a claim is finalized, the state cannot apply normal immigration law to accept or reject a new arrival. In most cases, adjudication is complicated by the fact that people move for many reasons, which may include economic reasons in addition to others that are recognized under the Refugee Convention. Therefore, refugee status determination can take months or years.

Many seeking their way to the US and Europe may not be those in need of asylum fleeing war and political persecution, but young healthy men seeking better economic prospects (Koopmans 2023). Some residents of the countries to which they move express concerns that they are '*queue jumpers*', who skip waiting periods for legal entry but also cannot be deported before their refugee claims are considered. In Europe, it often turns out to be difficult to deport some of those whose asylum applications are denied. Yet, European countries tend to only accept applications for asylum from those appearing on their borders and all countries in the Global North only accept a limited number for immigration, often prioritizing those with university credentials. There are fewer pathways to legal immigration for people without university credentials in countries in the Global North, and seeking asylum may be the most desirable pathway to seek safety and security (Crisp 2003, 81).

Thus, the growing phenomenon of asylum-seeking in the Global North is driven by a complex interplay between political, environmental, social, and economic insecurity in countries of the Global South (considered by many to be related to past and present exploitative policies of the North), and the shifting policy environment created by liberal democratic states as they calibrate domestic political pressures with their interpretations of their international legal obligations.

Governance challenges associated with the refugee/migrant binary

The causes of refugee movements have evolved since the inception of the contemporary global refugee regime, which can be traced to the early 1950s and the establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The early conception of a refugee was an individual fleeing an authoritarian state – often a political dissident or persecuted minority. The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees set out the basic elements of the definition of a refugee as one who has a '*well-founded fear of persecution*'. It establishes the rights of individuals to be given asylum, which include protection from return to their country of origin. The corresponding duty of the state granting asylum to a refugee is informed by

the legal principle of *non-refoulement*, which says that refugees cannot be returned to countries where they are at risk of facing persecution.

The UNHCR and the 1951 Convention, therefore, were international responses to the claims of people who feared persecution in the post-World War II period, primarily at the hands of Communist states (Betts, Loescher, and Milner 2011, 18). The creation of these cornerstone elements of the global refugee regime in the context of an emerging Cold War rivalry, where Western states recognized the individual threats faced in Communist countries, may have been limiting, and it must be noted that many countries in Asia and the Middle East did not sign on, while many major African countries had not yet decolonized. Further, the 5.9 million Palestinians descendants from the 700,000 displaced in 1948 and subsequent wars remain under the mandate of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency), which provides services but no path to resettlement (UNHCR 2023b). However, most countries did sign on to the subsequent 1967 protocol guaranteeing refugees most of the same rights as citizens. Today, more than 140 countries are signatories, reflecting such rights in domestic law.

Under international law, a refugee is someone who has crossed an international border and been recognized under the terms of the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. As described above, this definition of a refugee does not include others who have been forced to flee their home, such as internally displaced people or those who are moving because of environmental disasters or economic insecurity. In other words, there are growing populations of people outside of their countries of origin who do not qualify for international protection under the post-World War Two legal framework. This framework leads states to view people who are forced to move outside their country of origin as either refugees deserving of protection, or as unauthorized migrants who need to be deterred and possibly deported. This refugee/migrant binary poses a serious challenge to the creation of humanitarian solutions to forced migration.

Another dynamic of contemporary migration is what scholars describe as '*mixed migration*' or the '*asylum/refugee*' nexus (Zetter 2007). The legal definition of a refugee was initially developed to distinguish between one category of migrants who were entitled to a set of rights and protections by destination countries and another category who were not. The policy distinction between refugee and migrant, however, is less clear in practice than in theory (Hamlin 2021). In many countries, political instability is also linked to economic and environmental conditions. In 2023 for instance, more than a million people fled their homes in Somalia due to conflict, floods, and droughts (UNHCR 2023b, 10). The instability and insecurity that lead people to move can be caused by multiple factors and does not always lead to recognition as a refugee (Schewel 2023).

Furthermore, in the case of Venezuelan asylum-seekers and refugees, the causes of mass movement can be traced to a complex set of economic and political crises. The UNHCR categorizes most Venezuelans as people in need of international protection, even though they may not all qualify as refugees according to the UN Convention definition. They constitute one of the largest populations of people who have fled their homeland, seeking protection abroad. The movement of Venezuelans is not only a result of '*push*' factors at home; it is facilitated through a thriving network of smugglers and people-movers who used social media to promote their businesses (Turkewitz and Herrera 2023). More than two million Venezuelans migrated to Colombia (which previously had a more porous border for trade, and even for those escaping security and financial challenges in the other direction), where they were supported with work visas. However, many have continued to travel north, joining Central American, African, Indian and Chinese migrants who also try to make their way across to the United States – often crossing several borders illegally.

To be legally recognized as a refugee, a person must undergo a process of Refugee Status Determination (RSD). In many countries around the world, this process is carried out by the UNHCR on behalf of the government of a destination country. However, in countries with greater levels of state capacity it is usually carried out by an institution or agency of the government itself. An individual who is undergoing a process of Refugee Status Determination may be referred to as a refugee claimant or an asylum seeker. Claimants are usually granted a provisional set of rights and entitlements, while their status is undergoing determination. These rights and entitlements can include access to social assistance, health care, education, and the labour market, although this varies from country to country. What is almost universally recognized as a core right, however, is access to a fair procedure to determine their status. According to the legal principle of *non-refoulement*, a refugee claimant cannot be returned to a country where they may face persecution. If a refugee claim is rejected, however, that individual is no longer entitled to legal protection or public benefits and may be forcibly removed through a process of deportation.

An asylum claim that is accepted grants refugee status to the migrant, which provides a degree of legal protection and access to a set of rights. In many countries in the Global North, refugees are typically able to access the labour market, education, social benefits, housing, and a path to citizenship. In countries in the Global South, refugees may instead be housed in camps where they are supported by host governments, the UNHCR and humanitarian aid organizations. In Türkiye, which hosts the largest number of refugees in the world, refugees typically have access to education and health care, but must obtain permission to travel between provinces. Some refugees await either refugee resettlement in a third country overseas, but many either integrate into their host country or wait for greater security in their country of origin so that they can safely travel home.

Migrants who cross borders without authorization and without making refugee claims undertake precarious and often dangerous journeys in order to make it to the Global North. Those who evade state authorities and make their journey safely, however, still often end up in positions of legal precarity – lacking access to many rights or social protections. A migrant without legal status is not considered a refugee, even if they are fleeing violence or insecurity. This means that they lack access to the rights and entitlements provided under international and domestic laws. Because such migrants lack documentation and try to evade contact with state authorities, their numbers are typically hard to track with any reliability. However, they can be among the most vulnerable members of society.

Cruelty, incoherence and ineffectiveness of policies and controls

Countries in the Global North, therefore, are adopting increasingly incoherent and arbitrary policies in the face of growing refugee movements. Refugee Status Determination procedures are intended to evaluate whether an individual meets the definition of the UN Refugee Convention. There is, however, significant institutional variation between similar countries when it comes to how RSD is carried out (Hamlin 2021). Furthermore, RSD often depends upon the judgement of a decision-maker, who is tasked with verifying a refugee claimant's story. The process of '*credibility determination*' relies upon a decision about whether a claimant is telling the truth and whether they are able to provide documentary or other evidence. Hilary Evans Cameron has referred to this problem as '*refugee law's fact-finding crisis*', in which seeking refugee protection has become '*a game of chance*' (H. E. Cameron 2018).

Even within a country, refugee recognition rates can vary significantly from one decision-maker to the next (Refugee Lab 2022). In Canada, for example, Refugee Protection Division decision-makers vary in their recognition rate from 95% approval to less than 10% approval, when considering cases originating from the same country (Refugee Lab 2022). Canada's designated countries of origin (DCO) policy in the early 2010s considered summary rejection of applications of claimants from countries such as Mexico and Hungary, even though when determinations were made more than 30% resulted in approval (Arya, McMurray, and Rashid 2012). Thus, although RSD is intended to evaluate the individual characteristics of a refugee claimant to determine whether they qualify for protection under the UN Refugee Convention, the outcomes of these procedures are significantly influenced by idiosyncratic characteristics of the institutions and decision-makers that administer the process.

For many asylum-seekers, their future security can be determined by the results of an RSD process. These procedures, however, produce binary outcomes: refugee or not-refugee. Refugees receive domestic and international

protection, the form of which heavily depends on the country in which they live. However, those who are disqualified by the RSD procedure can be forcibly returned to their country of origin.

These states in the Global North are obligated under international and national law to protect refugees within their borders; however, they find it increasingly challenging to administer border policies that also exclude unauthorized migrants and while many have refugee resettlement programmes and refugee status determination procedures aimed at protecting refugees, in response to significant and growing governance challenges most have adopted an expanding repertoire of laws and policies intended to deter the arrival of refugee claimants. Arbitrary barriers include the former '*wet foot, dry foot*' policy of the US, which deported sea-borne migrants from Haiti and Cuba if they did not make it to land (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2017).

Such measures include visa requirements, penalties for airlines that transport unauthorized migrants, the interdiction and mandatory detention of asylum seekers, and restrictions placed upon the activities of humanitarian organizations aiding refugee claimants. These practices are described as '*offshoring*' or '*containment*' because they are intended to prevent the arrival of refugee claimants on a state's territory (or '*offshore*'), which would in turn entitle a migrant to access a process of refugee status determination (FitzGerald 2019; Gammeltoft-Hansen 2011).

In addition, international treaties like the European Union's Dublin Regulation and the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA) between Canada and the United States aim to restrict the ability of refugee claimants to the first 'safe' country to which they arrive. Under the STCA, for instance, a refugee claimant travelling from Canada to the United States will be denied entry and directed to make their claim in Canada and vice versa (Macklin 2005). Furthermore, the EU and US both fund measures in neighbouring states to attend to the needs of migrants and asylum seekers who would otherwise travel to their borders, and to support their militaries and coastguards. The US has such agreements with Mexico and Guatemala, and Europe with Türkiye, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco for instance. Some states have enacted or proposed plans to actively move claimants to other more willing countries, temporarily or permanently, on legally dubious grounds (e.g. Australia to neighbouring islands such as Nauru and Palau and more recently Italy to Albania, and Britain to Rwanda).

Others are also erecting new physical or logistical barriers to the arrival of asylum seekers including putting up barbed wire at border crossings and preventing boats from docking in order to make it more difficult for asylum seekers to access their protection. The Greek Coast Guard has even towed rickety boats of asylum seekers to Italian waters, sometimes with tragic consequences (Horowitz, Stevis-Gridneff, and Kitsantonis 2023).

Many countries' internal practices are equally dubious, for example internal transporting of people away from cities in Britain and use of subterfuge

and coercion by state governments to move people across state lines in the US, including the separation of parents and children and the detention of unaccompanied minors.

In many cases, these are driven by domestic pressures, including nationalism, populism, and anti-immigrant sentiment, combined with statist imperatives to manage orderly cross-border movement. Unfortunately, migrants have increasingly become political pawns with countries such as Türkiye, Libya and Tunisia able to turn the flow to Europe on and off like a spigot, to gain economic support (Dixon 2023), and Belarus and Russia sending people across to Poland and Finland, respectively (Al Jazeera 2023) to put more pressure on the European Union.

Historical aspects of migration to the Global North

To understand the responses to the arrival of refugees, we have to place these reactions in the broader context of the politicization of mass immigration. Many people from the Global South want to migrate (either permanently or temporarily) to countries in the Global North. This leads to patterns of movement through policy pathways of economic migration and family reunification, but also through asylum-seeking. The governance challenges associated with asylum policy feed into public scepticism about the ability of the state to manage migration. It has also been exploited by anti-immigration actors who perpetuate false claims about '*real*' refugees arriving via resettlement and '*fake*' refugees arriving spontaneously.

Countries vary substantially in their immigration policies. Since colonization of the Americas and Oceania, countries such as Australia and Canada have traditionally been considered welcoming to migrants, especially from Europe (Shah 2023). Some of these migrants, such as prisoners and those fleeing starvation in Ireland and Scotland, were not themselves so willing. The US has a national myth of being a '*nation of immigrants*', a phrase popularized by former President John F. Kennedy in his 1958 book of that title (Kennedy 2008). However, it seems historically incorrect to say the least, as groups ranging from the Irish to Italians, Eastern Europeans, Asians, Jews were sometimes dealt with suspicion and repressive measures before they were generally accepted into the mainstream. Canada restricted immigration on the basis of race and nationality until 1962, and Australia had a White Australia policy into the 1970s. More recently, increasing numbers of migrants moving for economic reasons, study, and family reunification, contributed to greater diversity in these countries. Some workers in the agricultural, food, and service sectors have been recruited and employed without legal status. Over the years, large groups of refugees have been invited or accepted in response to emergencies; in Canada this has included Hungarians in 1956, Ugandan Asians in 1972,

Indochinese refugees in 1979–1980, and more recently 50,000 Syrians in 2015–6 and more than 90,000 Ukrainians in the year post-Russian invasion.

Mass migration to Western and Northern Europe began in the 1960s with a shortage of labour in receiving countries. Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands actively recruited migrants from Southern European countries such as Spain and Italy, and later from Türkiye and Morocco, to come as 'guest workers' to fill job vacancies that were seen as too unattractive by native citizens. This terminology of 'guest workers' implies that these people were not seen as permanent immigrants and the expectation was that after a few years, these people would return to their home country. Yet, for all kinds of reasons, many of these people decided to stay permanently, and were allowed to do so, even when an economic recession hit most of these countries in the 1970s (Van der Brug et al. 2015).

The arrival of such immigrants had some clear advantages as well as disadvantages for the countries in question. When there was almost full employment in the 1960s, employers benefited from cheap labour in the short term. Migration also contributed to cultural life. Many people, particularly in the larger cities, now enjoy the variety of restaurants and the diversity of cultural life.

However, the reception of these immigrants also caused many economic, social, and cultural tensions. Immigrants compete with native citizens for some jobs and welfare benefits such as social housing, which is why trade unions and socialist parties opposed the immigration policies in the 1960s. Moreover, much later, second and third-generation immigrants have become overrepresented in certain European criminal statistics. Even though root causes are almost certainly related to social conditions and not to the immigration background per se, many native citizens perceive this as a negative side effect of immigration. Finally, there are tensions which are caused by the fact that people with different habits and religions, who speak foreign languages, moved into concentrated areas of the larger cities. Consequently, many long-term citizens who live in those areas feel that 'their way of life' is being threatened for a more detailed discussion of the 'threats' posed by immigrants, see (Landmann, Gaschler, and Rohmann 2019).

Roots and development of anti-immigrant public sentiment and politics in Europe

While the anti-immigrant rhetoric of marginal political figures used to draw international condemnation, some of these figures now represent European political parties with widespread public support (Enderlin 2023; Van Campenhout 2023). Even in the US, political rhetoric related to refugees and migrants has become increasingly hostile. President Donald Trump talked about Mexicans bringing drugs and crime, made harsh changes to asylum policy, and sought to ban Muslims from access to refugee

resettlement (G. Cameron and Labman 2024). In Canada, the Conservative Party campaigned on preventing failed refugee claimants from getting publicly funded healthcare and proposed establishing a '*barbaric practices*' call line to report illegal cultural practices (Coyne 2016). These statements are intended to exploit the fears, assumptions and misperceptions held by some citizens about foreigners. While anti-immigrant sentiment is becoming more entrenched in European party politics and public policy, it is also increasingly present within the United States and Canada. The expansion of a border wall became accepted by the Biden Administration in the US; countries of Eastern European continue to deny status to even small numbers of refugees, even with incentives or threat of economic punishment from the rest of Europe; and actors providing basic assistance across Western Europe are criminalized (Amnesty International 2020; Banjo 2023; Gionco 2023).

In the literature, two opposing theoretical perspectives have been proposed (for more details on these perspectives see, e.g. Hooghe 2008; Van der Brug and Durmuşoğlu 2023). The first perspective is ethnic competition theory (Quillian 1995), also known as 'realistic conflict theory' (e.g. LeVine and Campbell 1972). It holds that some people are more likely to develop negative attitudes towards 'newcomers' because they feel that they need to compete with these newcomers for scarce resources, such as (social) housing and jobs. Realistic conflict theory then predicts that ethnocentrism will be high among the least educated, low-income groups, often living in deprived neighbourhoods of larger cities. Research has found support for this theory at the individual level (e.g, Ivarsflaten 2005) and at the regional level (e.g. Markaki and Longhi 2013). At the country level, there is less support for realistic conflict theory, however (Sides and Citrin 2007). Countries with greater racial tensions are not necessarily those with greater numbers of immigrants or which are lagging behind economically.

Though individual and regional level studies tend to find support for realistic conflict theory, it cannot explain why European citizens respond more negatively to immigrants from non-Western countries than to those coming from Western countries (Schneider 2007). So, ethnic competition focuses not only on material goods, but also perhaps on the feeling that one group's cultural norms and values are being challenged by outsiders (Ivarsflaten 2005; Schneider 2007; Semyonov, Raijman, and Gorodzeisky 2006). This is predicted by social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979), which holds that individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups by accentuating stereotypical similarities within these groups and differences between these groups. Individuals compare themselves and the group(s) they identify with, so-called 'in-groups', to other groups they do not identify with, so-called 'out-groups'. During this comparison, individuals engage in self-serving cognitive patterns, which lead them to evaluate their in-group positively and out-groups more negatively. To the extent that they define their in-group in ethnic terms, people are thus more likely to develop negative stereotypes of people from a different ethnic

background. This could partially explain why many people in Western Europe were more welcoming towards refugees from Ukraine than from Syria.

Realistic conflict theory and social identity theory make opposite predictions regarding the impact of interactions between the in-group and out-group, whereas realistic conflict theory predicts that ethnocentrism will increase when native citizens experience the arrival of many immigrants in their neighbourhood, social identity theory yields different predictions. Regular contact with members of the outgroup is likely to reduce stereotyping of the outgroup. So, in line with social identity theory, the 'contact hypothesis' predicts that under appropriate conditions regular contact with members of the outgroup reduces ethnocentrism (Allport 1954). Empirical tests of these opposite predictions are somewhat inconclusive. On the one hand, ethnocentrism is often quite prominent in rural areas where few migrants live (Harteveld et al. 2022), yet a large influx of many new immigrants does lead to more ethnocentrism, but probably only initially (Olzak 1994).

Responses to the arrival of refugees and other immigrants have been strongly politicized by anti-immigration parties that surged since the 1980s. Such parties' origins differed by country and their electoral breakthroughs varied in time. In Denmark and Norway, anti-tax parties formed in the late 1970s, which embraced the anti-immigration agenda later. In Switzerland and Austria, formerly conservative/liberal parties increasingly adopted anti-immigration positions in their agendas. In France, it was politicized by a new nationalist party Front National, whereas in Italy and Belgium, the anti-immigration agenda was mixed with sub-state nationalism (Flemish nationalism in Flanders and Northern Regional nationalism in Italy). In other countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and Britain, anti-immigration parties surged later and their agenda was often mixed with anti-EU sentiments. While anti-immigrant sentiments play a large role in support for parties that mobilize electoral support on the basis of an ethnic nationalist agenda, the relationship with the actual presence of immigrants is much more complex. Support for these parties and anti-immigrant sentiments are often strongest in rural regions where there are very few immigrants. Moreover, when comparing between countries, there is no clear relationship between the number of 'non-Western immigrants' and the electoral support for anti-immigration parties. Yet, there are several studies showing that far-right parties benefited from the refugee crisis of 2015, when approximately 1.2 million refugees mainly from Syria arrived in Western Europe (Dinas et al. 2019; Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Piil Damm 2018). Since left-wing citizens responded in a welcoming way to the arrival of refugees, the refugee crisis of 2015 actually polarized the left and the right (van der Brug and Harteveld 2021).

When we look at the ways in which opponents of immigration have framed their opposition to the arrival of immigrants, they mainly refer to security (crime and terrorism), cultural incompatibility and the consequences for social

security. Even if immigrants are no more likely to engage in criminal behaviour than citizens with the same socio-structural characteristics, it is relatively easy to scapegoat them on the basis of highly visible incidents. Ironically, the argument about cultural incompatibility is often combined with an appeal to liberal values. Far right leaders in the Netherlands have for instance argued that Muslim immigrants are a threat to the rights of women and homosexuals. The argument regarding social security is particularly prominent in countries with relatively generous welfare systems. The far right in Denmark claims that immigrants threaten the pension system, while the far right in the Netherlands express concern about social housing (where refugees are indeed prioritized, because they would otherwise be out on the streets) and in Britain people are concerned about the NHS which politicians know is anyway a sensitive issue. A general theme often expressed is about the loss of control, which was summarized with the successful Brexit slogan '*take back control*'. One of the reasons why the reactions to refugees are so strong in Europe, even though refugees are only a small proportion of the immigrants (De Haas 2023), is probably that their arrival appears to be beyond state control.

Though many people are in principle willing to welcome people who are in need of protection in limited numbers, there is diminishing public sympathy for those perceived as irregular immigrants who apply for asylum. Because of Europe's geographical location relative to other high-income countries, many there share a genuine concern for a system of uncontrolled migration, particularly with a perception that generous welfare state arrangements could place an undue burden on the wider society. Europe's response, as that of many other states, to make the asylum procedures increasingly restrictive, results in the cruel deaths of many en route. Moreover, the current system does not always cater to those who need asylum the most. Especially among asylum applicants from Middle East and African countries, there is an overrepresentation of relatively young men, many of whom do not leave their country to escape war or political prosecution.

In sum, we see a lot of variation in how people respond to immigration in general, as well as to refugees in particular, and confusion between the two. These differences relate to characteristics of the refugees and characteristics of citizens – especially their ideological orientations and the party-political responses to immigration. But in light of the continuous success of anti-immigration parties, it seems likely that immigration will remain a contentious issue in the foreseeable future.

Implications and way forward

The world faces critical challenges to which there are often no clear solutions. Political pressures are driving policies that fail to help those needing protection, and turn refugees and migrants into political pawns.

Erecting barriers to prevent the movement of desperate people fails to solve underlying problems, and often creates additional ones. The often arbitrary aspect of refugee status determination, the politics of interdiction and offshoring, and coordination of asylum policies in order to deter arrivals raise moral and legal problems with the current global refugee regime.

Ironically, as the EU is desperately trying to control the numbers of asylum seekers arriving, countries in the Global North are actively ramping up efforts to recruit skilled labourers and foreign students from countries in the Global South, some temporary and others permanent, sometimes contributing to a brain drain from such countries to fill economic sectors that are understaffed, partially as a consequence of declining fertility and ageing populations. An example is the European Commission's policy proposal 'Attracting Skills and Talent to the EU' (European Commission 2022).

Countries have stepped up in particular welcoming great numbers of Ukrainians in the last couple of years, as, for example Canada with Syrians in 2015–16 and Germany did with mixed migration at the same time. To manage some inconsistencies countries sometimes provide temporary status. The US has established humanitarian parole for a limited number of people from countries such as Cuba, Venezuela, Haiti and Nicaragua with sponsors, and Canada has established the CUAET system for Ukrainians to stay temporarily with almost 1 million accepted and more than 300,000 already in Canada.

While dealing with attitudes and political forces supporting restrictive, and sometimes inhumane policies is challenging and runs contrary to other needs of countries, selected local actions buck this trend and support basic humanity. In Europe, grassroots responses to the fears and needs of both refugees and host populations can lead to 'win-wins'. These range from cohabiting contact projects with university students and migrants (Mahieu and Van Caudenberg 2020; Van Der Wolf, Robbins, and Crow 2017), to co-locating migrants, students and older adults to reduce social isolation (Orange 2019), to villages depopulated by declining fertility and internal emigration in southern Europe welcoming migrants to manage their demographic crises (Besliu 2023; Burgen 2022).

The issue of human migration ultimately though, is a shared global responsibility, and yet states still mostly try to manage it through state policies and limited international cooperation. Some would question the legitimacy of measures to limit movements of peoples in the context of differential power relations, neo-colonialism and ongoing exploitation in the development of countries in the Global South within the context of capitalist, neoliberal policies. This is beyond the purview of this paper. We recognize the failure to control migration clearly plays into the hands of anti-immigrant actors leading to policy shifts in countries in the Global North that are increasingly resorting to repressive measures and assert a need for a different balance.

On the one hand, governance and social responses can, and should, be guided more by the concept of human dignity and the principle of the oneness of humankind, which implies shared responsibility towards common global challenges. States have a responsibility to determine a just and equitable governance framework for border management, and citizens, activists, and practitioners can respond to human beings who need assistance and support, regardless of legal status. On the other hand, there is a need for more management and governance of migration flows (which is different from wanting to reduce the numbers). This implies that asylum needs to be regulated in a different way. The idea that people must arrive in Europe before applying for asylum must be revamped, with European countries setting up refugee application centres outside of Europe in conjunction with UNHCR much as the US, Canada and Australia continue to do.

International cooperation needs to be strengthened in order to respond to the growing complexity of global migration and refugee movements. There has been movement in this direction under the leadership of the United Nations. In the early 2000s, the Global Forum on Migration and Development began to meet to address shared concerns. In the mid-2010s and in response to a growing number of deaths of migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean and Aegean, the United Nations adopted the New York Declaration which called on the UNHCR and states to agree to two compacts, which later became the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. These compacts did not make changes in international law, but they represent a form of soft law that can exert a normative influence on how states respond to migrants and refugees (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2019).

More can be done, however. Hansen calls the Global Compact on Refugees a '*glass half full*' (Hansen 2018). He underscores its emphasis on promoting the inclusion of refugees in host societies by expanding access to education and work. However, the aspects of the Compact which promote voluntary repatriation and third-country solutions through resettlement are given a more '*qualified endorsement*' (Hansen 2018). The urgent needs facing most refugees will be addressed by countries in the Global North making significant financial commitments that support refugee hosting countries to expand inclusion. In addition, new schemes are needed to foster cooperation on facilitating cross-border movement by creating complementary pathways to migration through private sponsorship and economic mobility, humanitarian visas, and other mechanisms that allow refugees to pursue a decent life with secure legal status.

Many of these policy solutions, however, fail to address the underlying problem of the refugee/migrant binary, whereas refugees are entitled to international protection within a global refugee regime (despite all of its limitations) migrants have virtually no protection under international law. The fact that many people on the move do not fit easily into one category or

another makes these distinctions increasingly difficult for states and international institutions to apply. It also raises the stakes of refugee status determination procedures for vulnerable populations, thereby incentivizing human trafficking and other desperate measures used to gain access to refugee protection. However, opening up the legal definition of a refugee to renewed international debate could weaken protections for vulnerable people. What is needed, instead, is a stronger set of international norms and institutions to protect all people on the move. While this was the stated goal of the Global Compacts above, more needed to be done in pursuit of this aspiration.

'*We are like travellers navigating an unknown terrain with the help of old maps*,' writes Seyla Benhabib, '*drawn at a different time and in response to different needs*' (Benhabib 2004). The world is more interdependent than ever before, and patterns of global migration reflect that interdependence. However, these transnational connections and movements are still viewed and acted upon within the framework of state sovereignty and secure borders. Despite the advances in global governance in the post-war period, to enjoy secure access to human rights requires one to have citizenship in a state willing to guarantee them. When people do not have access to a state willing to guarantee their rights, they are thrown back on the charity and goodwill of humanitarian organizations and international institutions. There are limits to what can be accomplished to protect the rights of migrants and refugees within a framework of state sovereignty. What is required is a renewed commitment and collective resolve to look at solutions within a global context, recognizing the challenge of migration as a shared regional and global responsibility.

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