

Policy Brief

**NEW APPROACHES TO REFUGEE CRISES
IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE ROLE OF
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

By Kathleen Newland

NEW APPROACHES TO REFUGEE CRISES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The Role of the International Community

Policy Brief

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Executive Summary

The movement of more than 1 million refugees across the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 brought long-needed attention to the inadequacy of the global humanitarian system. As the number of refugees and displaced people reached levels not seen since World War II, the need for new approaches became undeniable. The worldwide sense of crisis gave rise to an extraordinary series of international conferences and meetings in 2016, capped by the first United Nations (UN) summit meeting to specifically address the movement of refugees and migrants. These international events produced some practical, concrete outcomes, such as new funding for humanitarian relief, new resettlement places for refugees, and new approaches to development projects that include migrants and refugees. They also promoted broader rethinking of the relationship between development, mobility, and protection. The New York Declaration, the outcome of the UN summit, set out a broad set of commitments on responsibility sharing, protection of refugees, and orderly and safe migration. Turning these commitments into reality presents a major challenge for international cooperation.

I. Introduction

Refugees in the second decade of the 21st century have little to look forward to. Repatriation is a distant dream for most, as the number able to return safely to their homes in 2015 reached the lowest level in more than 30 years.¹ Countries of first asylum, with a few notable exceptions, are reluctant to allow refugees to integrate permanently. And fewer than 2 percent of refugees are selected for a regular resettlement program in a third country where they can make a new home.² With these three classic “durable solutions” unable to match the growing needs of displaced populations, the vast majority of refugees remain in countries of first asylum, often for decades, usually living in poverty and insecurity.

Seeing no national or international actors able or willing to remedy their unsatisfactory present conditions, a record number of refugees have taken matters into their own hands in 2015 and 2016, moving from countries of first asylum to Europe or to more prosperous and stable countries in their regions of origin. Often, they move along the same routes and by the same means as other migrants who do not qualify for refugee status, as defined by international and national laws, even as some travel to escape corrupt and dysfunctional government authorities, environmental catastrophes, or grinding poverty. These clandestine journeys, and the suffering and exploitation associated with them, pose extraordinary challenges for the countries and regions receiving refugees without the opportunity to plan for their arrival, and for the transit countries through which they pass. Reception capacities are overwhelmed, costs mount, and the public comes to doubt the competence of authorities as events spin out of control.

If there is a bright spot in this picture, it is that the global refugee crisis has finally started to get the attention it deserves. As Metin Çorabatır notes, “In the summer of 2015, the Syrian refugee crisis became a European humanitarian crisis.”³ And the attention was not solely focused on Syrian refugees; arrivals also poured into Europe from most of the other top refugee-producing countries, including Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia, and more. Traveling on the same routes were migrants and asylum seekers from fragile and failing states afflicted by poverty, inequality, violence, and poor governance.

1 Filippo Grandi, *Every Life Matters* (Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015), www.unhcr.org/574ed44c4.pdf.

2 The 1.7 percent figure is an optimistic one that assumes states will be able to deliver on the pledges they made at the United Nations (UN) Leaders’ Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis convened by U.S. President Barack Obama on September 20, 2016.

3 Metin Çorabatır, *The Evolving Approach to Protection in Turkey: Assessing the Practical and Political Needs* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/evolving-approach-refugee-protection-turkey-assessing-practical-and-political-needs.



More than 1 million refugees and migrants came to Europe across the Mediterranean in 2015,⁴ dwarfing the record set the previous year for unauthorized arrivals. Another roughly 300,000 people came by land from the Balkans or further east. Scale matters. European leaders could no longer turn their backs on the global refugee crisis as it turned up on their doorstep; their concerns were shared by the other Western states that are the primary funders of the international humanitarian protection system. Even though the number of arrivals subsided dramatically in 2016,⁵ it has become clear that cracks in the system can no longer be papered over, and that the connection of prolonged displacement to violence, instability, and economic breakdown cannot be denied. It has become inescapably clear that the current system is not fit for the tasks before it: it is providing neither solutions nor adequate protection to refugees, and is even failing in the stop-gap task of basic care and maintenance of displaced populations. A system cannot be called humanitarian if it leaves millions of people trapped in a state of protracted dependency for years if not decades, resulting in a tragic waste of human potential.⁶

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The scale and the intractable nature of the crisis have generated the will to try new approaches. Policy silos are crumbling—particularly those that isolate humanitarian from development policies, but also the boundaries between domestic integration, national security, and public safety issues. As a result, 2016 has seen an extraordinary series of international conferences and meetings that could have a cumulative impact and change the international system of response to refugee outflows (see Table 1). These international events have reached for practical, concrete outcomes, such as new funding for humanitarian relief as well as pledges for new resettlement places and development projects. This conference cycle has also promoted broader rethinking of the relationship between development, mobility, and protection. While these are broad, ambitious goals that will be challenging to implement, there is some reason for optimism in the medium to long term. First, the international community has a track record of success with past summits on refugee protection (or summit processes, which may involve a series of high-level meetings and follow-up activities).⁷ Second, there is a stronger sense of urgency surrounding global humanitarian crises today than at any other time in recent history. This policy brief aims to outline these opportunities, first examining existing interventions that are in place and then exploring the potential of international conferences to elevate—or even transform—these efforts.

4 According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 1,014,836 migrants arrived in Europe by sea in 2015, more than 4.5 times the total number of arrivals in 2014. See UNHCR, “Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response – Mediterranean,” accessed January 14, 2016, <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>.

5 Ibid.

6 As Karen Jacobsen and Susan Fratzke point out, citing a study by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) that examined 91 large-scale refugee crises between 1978 and 2014, less than one in 40 refugee crises have been resolved within three years; 80 percent have lasted ten years or more, and 40 percent have lasted 20 years or more. See Karen Jacobsen and Susan Fratzke, *Building Livelihood Opportunities for Refugee Populations: Lessons from Past Practice* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/building-livelihood-opportunities-refugee-populations-lessons-past-practice. For the original study, see Nicholas Crawford, John Cosgrave, Simone Haysom, and Nadine Walicki, *Protracted Displacement: Uncertain Paths to Self-Reliance in Exile* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2015), www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9851.pdf.

7 See Section III for a description of these past summits.

**Table 1. Major International Humanitarian Events in 2016**

| Name, Location, and Date | Organizers | Goals and Outcomes |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Syria Crisis Conference (aka “Syria IV”)</p> <p>London, February 4</p> | <p>Co-hosted by the UN Secretary General and the governments of Germany, Kuwait, Norway, and the United Kingdom</p> | <p><i>Goals:</i> Raise new funds to meet immediate needs inside Syria and support neighboring countries; support schooling and job creation for those affected by the crisis; identify long-term funding solutions.</p> <p><i>Outcomes:</i> Participating states pledged more than U.S. \$11 billion in humanitarian aid, divided between 2016 and the 2017-20 period, and multilateral development banks announced U.S. \$40 billion in loans to the affected countries. Support for improved access to employment for refugees and host communities included commitments to greater access to external markets, concessional financing, and job-creation programs. Participants pledged to get 1.7 million refugee children in school by the end of the 2016–17 school year, but without specific funding commitments.</p> |
| <p>High-Level Meeting on Global Responsibility Sharing through Pathways for Admission of Syrian Refugees</p> <p>Geneva, March 30</p> | <p>Under aegis of the UN Secretary General and led by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)</p> | <p><i>Goals:</i> Generate pledges for resettlement or other legal pathways to protection for Syrians (e.g., humanitarian, labor, student, family visas), as well as consideration of other resettlement methods (e.g., private sponsorship). Through a combination of pathways, UNHCR called for 480,000 places to be made available for Syrian refugees over three years.</p> <p><i>Outcomes:</i> Representatives of 92 countries added only 6,000 places to the 179,000 previously pledged places for Syrians via resettlement and other forms of legal admission.</p> |
| <p>Forum on New Approaches to Protracted Forced Displacement</p> <p>Winston, United Kingdom, April 4–6</p> | <p>World Bank, UNHCR, and the UK Department for International Development (DFID)</p> | <p><i>Goals:</i> To build agreement among key stakeholders on a new approach to protracted displacement and put in place pilot projects to test this approach.</p> <p><i>Outcomes:</i> The elaboration of five core principles for the new approach: 1) work through national and local systems, 2) support host communities and build social cohesion, 3) enable economic participation and stimulate growth, 4) provide impactful and innovative financing, and 5) improve the data and evidence base.</p> |
| <p>World Humanitarian Summit</p> <p>Istanbul, May 23–24</p> | <p>An initiative of the UN Secretary General managed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).</p> | <p><i>Goals:</i> To make the global humanitarian system more responsive, robust, efficient, and accountable by addressing financing and humanitarian challenges in the context of armed conflict, epidemics, and natural disasters; refugees/displaced persons were prominent in the agenda.</p> <p><i>Outcomes:</i> A “grand bargain” among the 30 major donors and aid agencies to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance through flexible, multiyear funding, greater transparency, more use of cash assistance and less burdensome reporting; a “global partnership for preparedness” to help vulnerable countries prepare for climate-related and other disasters; a fund to prioritize education in humanitarian response; and a Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. These commitments were nonbinding, however, and many observers found the summit too broad to be convincing.</p> |

**Table 1. Major International Humanitarian Events in 2016 (continued)**

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| High-Level Plenary Meeting on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees & Migrants New York, September 19 | Special session of the UN General Assembly | <i>Goals:</i> A new “global agreement” on responsibility sharing in the context of refugees and vulnerable migrants. |
| | | <i>Outcomes:</i> The New York Declaration, adopted at the summit, included sweeping commitments to strengthen international cooperation on refugee and migration policies. The discussion of specifics was postponed, however, to 2018. The only concrete outcome of the summit was the decision by the General Assembly to bring the International Organization for Migration (IOM) into the UN system as a “related agency.” |
| Leaders’ Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis New York, September 20 | A meeting parallel to the UN General Assembly, convened by U.S. President Barack Obama and co-hosted by Canada, Ethiopia, Germany, Jordan, Mexico, and Sweden | <i>Goals:</i> To secure new commitments and sustained support for UN humanitarian appeals; expand resettlement opportunities; and increase opportunities for refugee self-reliance, including through access to education and legal employment. |
| | | <i>Outcomes:</i> The 52 countries and international organizations that attended made commitments to increase 2016 humanitarian contributions by U.S. \$4.5 billion over the amount for 2015, nearly double refugee admissions through resettlement or other channels, and improve access to education and legal work. A platform for concessional finance to refugee-hosting countries and a mechanism to give financial and technical assistance to countries interested in initiating or expanding refugee resettlement were also announced. However, because commitments made earlier in the year were counted toward these totals, it is unclear what proportion of those announced at the summit were new. |

Sources: Supporting Syria and the Region Conference, “Co-Hosts Declaration from the Supporting Syria and the Region Conference, London, February 4, 2016” (news release, February 4, 2016), www.supportingsyria2016.com/news/co-hosts-declaration-of-the-supporting-syria-and-the-region-conference-london-2016; Human Rights Watch, “UN Meeting Ducks Syria Refugees Responsibility” (news release, March 31, 2016), www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/31/un-meeting-ducks-syria-refugee-responsibility; World Bank Group, DFID, UNHCR, “Forum on New Approaches to Protracted Forced Displacement” (co-hosts summary statement, April 4-6, 2016), www.wiltonpark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WP1461-Wilton-Park-Principles.pdf; the White House, “Fact Sheet on the Leaders’ Summit on Refugees” (press release, September 20, 2016), www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/20/fact-sheet-leaders-summit-refugees; United Nations General Assembly, “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants,” September 13, 2016, www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/L.1.

II. Existing Interventions

Even before the 2016 conference cycle got underway, new approaches were being tested to compensate for the inadequacies of traditional approaches. These nascent efforts focused on ways to bridge the long-standing divide between development and humanitarian programs, to incorporate mobility as a means of humanitarian response, and to open more labor-market opportunities to refugees.

A. Development Interventions and Humanitarian Response

One common thread that runs through most international debate of new approaches, including at the high-profile events of 2016, is the intention to build synergies between development and humanitarian policies. Most of these discussions focus on creating development opportunities in countries of first asylum in refugees’ regions of origin. Diplomatic pressure and financial incentives are used to create partnerships in hosting countries such as Ethiopia and Jordan to allow refugees to enter local labor



markets and improve their living conditions, thus reducing their dependency on international assistance; Cameroon and Turkey have followed this path independently. It is hoped that countries of first asylum might be more willing to integrate refugees once they have proved their ability to contribute to the local economy as well as their own subsistence. At the same time, it is hoped that if refugees have access to such opportunities in first-asylum countries, they might be more willing to stay rather than risk the dangers of onward movement.

As Karen Jacobsen and Susan Fratzke point out, there are two ways to incorporate refugees into the labor market. A supply-side strategy boosts refugees' employability (through education, language training, and vocational training, for example) and fosters entrepreneurship. By comparison, a demand-side approach attempts to help refugees, even those without formal educational or professional qualifications, respond to existing labor market openings.⁸ Turkey, for example, is said to have a shortage of shepherds as well as other forms of agricultural labor—vacancies that can be filled by newcomers. Access to education is uneven and inadequate for most refugees, even at the primary school level—much less the secondary, tertiary, and vocational levels that would equip refugees for medium- or high-skilled jobs. A major campaign for refugee education could spur an important level of investment in the human capital of refugees and ease their transition to work in new labor markets.

But it must be recognized that the absorptive capacity of many countries of first asylum is limited. In a country such as Lebanon, where one in every four residents is a Syrian refugee, the strains are felt not only in terms of the size of the economy, but politically, as the delicate power balance among religious communities is threatened by the inflow of mostly Shi'a refugees. And although refugees may actually represent an economic stimulus, as new consumers and potentially as entrepreneurial employers of other refugees or members of the host community, they also exert pressure on housing, infrastructure, natural resources, and social services. Recognizing this, donor assistance programs in Jordan and Lebanon focus on improving the availability of resources and services for local residents as well as refugees. A different approach has been taken in Turkey, where financial assistance from the European Union is being used to provide direct subsidies to refugees, thereby reducing poverty and making it possible for the refugees to stimulate local economies.⁹

B. Incorporating Mobility into Humanitarian Response

The constraints that limit the ability and willingness of countries of first asylum to integrate refugees, even with donor assistance, push the international debate to consider an even more ambitious range of solutions: that is, to incorporate not only development strategies but also mobility strategies into humanitarian response. UNHCR noted in its *State of the World's Refugees* report in 2012 that “the durable solutions framework does not currently take account of refugee mobility, and international actors have approached solutions for refugees with a sedentary bias.”¹⁰

The only part of conventional humanitarian response that centers on mobility is resettlement, but the scale of regular resettlement programs is inadequate to significantly transform most refugee situations.¹¹ Fewer than 200,000 places are available for resettlement in most years, and although pledges of up to 360,000 were made in 2016, worldwide there are more than 21 million refugees. While an expansion

8 Jacobsen and Fratzke, *Building Livelihood Opportunities*.

9 Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC), “Turkey,” in *A Study on Forced Migration in OIC Member Countries: The Policy Framework Adopted by Host Countries* (unpublished report prepared by the Migration Policy Institute on behalf of the COMCEC Coordinating Office for the 8th meeting of the COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group, forthcoming).

10 UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees: In Search of Solidarity* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2012), 13, www.unhcr.org/en-us/publications/sowr/4fc5ceca9/state-worlds-refugees-2012-search-solidarity.html.

11 In a few cases, refugee situations have been brought to an end by resettling almost all members of a persecuted group—Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, for example, or the hill tribe refugees from Myanmar in Thailand. This strategy only works for refugee populations that are limited in number and not likely to expand significantly.



of resettlement was one outcome of the conferences of 2016, the scale of the increase was not enough to make a game-changing difference in the overall picture of available solutions. Much larger increases are not unprecedented: in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, more than 1 million refugees were resettled from countries of first asylum and, later, directly from Vietnam. However, with rising concerns about national security and public safety in the West, the approach taken to the crisis in Indochina seems unlikely to be repeated for Syria. It is particularly hard to imagine European countries that are already receiving large numbers of spontaneous asylum seekers expanding their resettlement programs substantially. Despite increases in the number of places offered by traditional countries of resettlement (Australia, Canada, and the United States),¹² which provide more than 90 percent of all resettlement places, most planned additions are modest compared to the need.¹³ However, if governments take steps to limit sharply the spontaneous arrival of asylum seekers, they might then have the capacity and political will to expand planned resettlement.

Allowing reunification with members of the extended family increases the pool of eligible refugees considerably.

The limited scope of resettlement has led to a search for alternative channels of mobility for refugees, including through access to labor migration programs, study abroad, and extended-family reunification. The last of these have been used quietly and effectively, although for limited periods, by several countries—notably Ireland, Germany, and Switzerland. Most family unification channels for refugees can be used only for immediate relatives, typically spouses and minor children. The German system of private sponsorship at the *Länder* level, for example, required a family connection. Allowing reunification with members of the extended family increases the pool of eligible refugees considerably.

Several scholarship programs for refugee students have also been created, but their capacity is typically very small. For a time, Canada permitted universities to act as private sponsors of refugees; it is worth exploring the lessons of this program, for either potential revival or replication in other countries. Access to education is a key motivation for refugees to move on from countries of first asylum to a place where they can envision a better future for the next generation.

C. Use of Labor Migration Channels for Humanitarian Response

The greatest potential for expanded refugee mobility lies in labor migration opportunities.¹⁴ However, considerable barriers remain: many refugees do not have travel documents, have no access to consulates where they might apply for a work visa, cannot afford the processing fees, or simply lack information about job opportunities in other countries. Access to temporary work abroad is also constrained by the need to have a country to which one can be guaranteed readmission, which can complicate or even block refugees from leaving countries of first asylum to work elsewhere. Refugees who travel on a temporary contract risk being returned, when the contract ends, to the country from which they fled. Mobility must be reconciled with the need for consistent protection if refugees are to use these channels safely.

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- 12 This expansion was led by Canada, which successfully met its pledge of admitting 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of February 2016. See Government of Canada, “#WelcomeRefugees: The First 25,000,” updated May 18, 2016, www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/first.asp.
- 13 The U.S. government, for example, pledged to accept 10,000 Syrian refugees in fiscal year (FY) 2016, meeting this goal in late August 2016. See International Organization for Migration, “US Exceeds Resettlement Target of 10,000 Syrian Refugees” (news release, August 30, 2016), www.iom.int/news/us-exceeds-resettlement-target-10000-syrian-refugees.
- 14 For a detailed analysis of ways to overcome both administrative and practical barriers to labor mobility for refugees, see Katy Long and Sarah Rosengaertner, *Protection through Mobility: Opening Labor and Study Migration Channels to Refugees* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/protection-through-mobility-opening-labor-and-study-migration-channels-refugees.



Mobility is not only physical and geographical. In a world where much work is done remotely, training and hiring refugees to work via electronic means could be a ticket to upward mobility even if the refugee remains in a country of first asylum. Enlisting the corporate sector to work with refugees in countries of first asylum could overcome some of the travel restrictions refugees face and help them achieve greater self-sufficiency. Such programs may even help host countries fill labor market gaps with needed skills. That was certainly the case in pre-war Syria, when a training institution for Palestinian refugees supplied technicians for Syrian hospitals, labs, and businesses. Of course, host-country sensibilities should be taken into account in implementing any such plans; offering programs that serve both refugee and host-country national can help avoid the impression that refugees are getting privileged access to opportunities not available to locals.

The increasing physical mobility for refugees puts a premium on documentation. This begins with the registration process, which needs to be greatly improved, standardized, and fully digitalized. Collecting detailed information about refugees at registration would simplify many downstream processes such as applying for a visa. Individual records should include both biometric and biographical data, as well as a record of the refugee's education, language, skills, work experience, professional or trades accreditation, family composition, and family ties abroad. This record could be the basis for issuing identity cards and matching skills with potential employers. Meticulous documentation would also be helpful for security screening and fraud prevention. Every refugee has a right to a documented identity—but only one.

Increasing opportunities for mobility would help compensate for the radically unequal distribution of refugees around the world. Eighty-six percent of refugees live in low- and middle-income countries.¹⁵ The need to cross an international border to claim asylum and the subsequent lack of opportunities for onward movement from first-asylum countries result in refugees being distributed mostly according to accidents of geography. Territorial asylum as a way of assigning responsibility for refugee protection has perverse, unintended consequences; it puts secondary movement in the hands of organized crime, concentrates the burden of protection on front-line states, and exposes refugees who move onwards to the dangers of clandestine travel. The task in the coming years must be to build better ways for refugees to reach places of safety and opportunity in an orderly manner, as well as ways for them to participate in building and using their human capital in the most productive manner possible. The September 19, 2016 UN summit outcome endorsed such opportunities, but specific commitments are few. A broadly agreed upon approach is not likely to emerge before 2018 at the earliest, when the “global compacts” on refugees and migration are to be reviewed and, perhaps, adopted.

The countries that receive refugees have a vital interest in and obligation to invest seriously in integration. The most effective engines of integration are not necessarily government programs, essential though they are. Refugees integrate most successfully when there is a compact between government and civil society to foster social inclusion and create ties between refugees and the people and institutions of their new communities. When those ties are lacking, fear and antagonism can grow. When they are strong, refugees can contribute to the creation of vibrant communities.

III. The Role of International Cooperation

The year 2015 was marked in Europe by a series of emergency summits among EU Member States that were notable for how little change they brought about. Governments made agreements but then could not muster the resources or, in some cases, the will, to implement them. Is there any reason to suppose that the follow-up to the international conference cycle of 2016 will be different?

¹⁵ Adrian Edwards, “Global Forced Displacement Hits Record High” (news release, UNHCR, June 20, 2016), www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html.



There are at least two reasons for some optimism. One lies in the past: major international conferences on refugees in Southeast Asia in 1979 and 1989, Africa in 1981 and 1984, and Central America in 1989 produced serious commitments that were carried out—commitments for rescue at sea, first asylum, resettlement, direct departures from country of origin, humanitarian assistance, and return without punishment of rejected asylum seekers.¹⁶ Moreover, the African and Central American conferences extended the concept of international protection beyond the definition of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which promises protection only to people with a well-founded fear of persecution on one of five specific grounds. The frameworks that emerged from the African and Central American conferences extended protection to people affected by war, massive human rights violations, and generalized violence. These criteria have been widely, if not formally, incorporated into the humanitarian system. Indeed, most of the 21 million refugees today are displaced by these phenomena rather than individualized persecution.

This is truly a systemic, global crisis that calls for a systemic, global response.

The second reason for optimism is the pervasiveness of a sense of humanitarian crisis. Although the crises in Europe and the Middle East get the most headlines, governments in Africa, Southeast Asia, and North and Central America have also been dealing with large flows of refugees and asylum seekers over the last two years. This has led in many corners to the realization that this is truly a systemic, global crisis that calls for a systemic, global response.

Both specific commitments and broader issues of coverage and institutional responsibility were on the agendas of the 2016 conferences. Some focused on specific issues, such as funding and resettlement places—the Syria Crisis conference in London was a classic pledging conference for money and placements; the UNHCR high-level meeting in March focused on Syria but expanded the framework of mobility beyond resettlement to elicit commitments for access to labor, student, and family reunification channels. The April forum on new approaches to forced displacement introduced some pilot projects that illustrate the possibilities of innovative policies to allow displaced people to contribute to economic growth. Of the year's meetings, the World Humanitarian Summit had the broadest agenda: although refugees and other forcibly displaced people were prominent in discussions, other humanitarian issues such as responses to health crises, the impact of climate change, and challenges to international humanitarian law were also discussed.

The UN summit on the large-scale movement of refugees and migrants, held on September 19, was the most ambitious of these efforts, and the culmination of the cycle. It generated a broad global agreement incorporating both new frameworks for humanitarian response and specific, innovative mechanisms to help displaced people achieve greater self-sufficiency, more secure protection, and wider opportunities for mobility. One important area of emphasis was the need to broaden responsibility for responding to these global challenges beyond the narrow group of current donors and front-line states. The need to recognize and respond to the protection needs of migrants who are compelled to leave their homes for a wider set of reasons than those outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, or even the frameworks created by the African and Central American conferences of the 1980s, was also acknowledged. Though the New York summit yielded limited concrete outcomes, it set a framework for negotiations on broad global commitments to improving international responses to the needs and rights of both refugees and migrants, to be delivered in the form of two global compacts (one on refugee movements and one on migration) by 2018. Finally, the summit took on the question of institutional capacity for coping with large-scale movements of people at the international level. Its most concrete outcome was to fill a major gap in the United Nations system, which up until the time of the summit did not include an institution responsible

¹⁶ See Alexander Betts, *Protection by Persuasion: International Cooperation in the Refugee Regime* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).



for the movement of people who are not refugees. By bringing the International Organization for Migration (IOM) into the UN system, as the leading agency on international migration, the summit created new and real capacity for multilateral action on mobility issues.

IV. Conclusion

This is a moment of opportunity as well as crisis for international cooperation. The intense array of international meetings in 2016 opened the prospect of finding better ways of responding to people moving because of the huge pressures they face at home from conflict, persecution, corruption, lack of opportunity, or grinding poverty—or a toxic combination of some or all of these. There is progress, at last, on aligning and interweaving development assistance and humanitarian response. Even more innovation and experimentation are needed now to insert mobility more effectively into the policy mix. If the effort is sustained and the ideas it produces implemented, it may succeed in bending the arc of the prevailing narrative about the world's displaced people, from bearers of needs and risks to bearers of talents, skills, and energies from which all can benefit.

This is a moment of opportunity as well as crisis for international cooperation.



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About the Author



Kathleen Newland is Co-Founder of the Migration Policy Institute (MPI). She is also the Founding Director of the International diaspora Engagement Alliance (IdEA) during its incubation phase at MPI from 2011–13; IdEA was established as a partnership among MPI, the U.S. Department of State, and U.S. Agency for International Development. She is a Member of the MPI Board of Trustees.

Previously, at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, she was a Senior Associate and then Co-Director of the International Migration Policy Program (1994–2001). She sits on the board of overseers of the International Rescue Committee and the boards of directors of USA for UNHCR, the Stimson Center, Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), and the Foundation for The Hague Process on Migrants and Refugees. She is a Chair Emerita of the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

Prior to joining the Migration Program at the Carnegie Endowment, Ms. Newland worked as an independent consultant for such clients as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Bank, and the office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. From 1988–1992, Ms. Newland was on the faculty of the London School of Economics. During that time, she also cofounded (with Lord David Owen) and directed Humanitas, an educational trust dedicated to increasing awareness of international humanitarian issues. From 1982 to 1988, she worked at the United Nations University in Tokyo as Special Assistant to the Rector. She began her career as a researcher at Worldwatch Institute in 1974.

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The Migration Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national, and international levels. It aims to meet the rising demand for pragmatic and thoughtful responses to the challenges and opportunities that large-scale migration, whether voluntary or forced, presents to communities and institutions in an increasingly integrated world.

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