

Global Solutions to Host, Protect and Resettle Refugees

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1. Introduction

There are more refugees in the world than at any other time in history. Without taking into consideration the recent migration crisis in Venezuela, the UNHCR estimates that there are over 25.9 million refugees across the world (UNHCR, 2019). Neighboring countries - which are often developing nations - typically bear the burden of hosting and protecting these refugees. While wealthy nations contribute to the global effort to host, protect and resettle refugees, their efforts are not harmonized, and the system as a whole is grossly underfunded. This is an unjust and unstable arrangement, and we are witnessing the impacts of this flawed system with increases in fatalities from refugees taking unsafe migration journeys. High, low and middle-income nations need to pool their resources together to develop transnational solutions to fund programs and host displaced persons. The goal of this paper is to explore funding gaps in the refugee protection system, and provide evidence-based policy recommendations for how the global community can work multilaterally to fill gaps and improve the system.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Positive Macroeconomic Effect of Asylum Seekers

In order to provide evidence-based policy recommendations for how the global refugee system can be improved, it is first necessary to review some of the key pieces of literature on this topic. The first piece of literature which informed our research is a 2017 study by Hippolyte d'Albis, Ekrame Boubtane, and Dramane Coulibaly. In "Macroeconomic evidence suggests that asylum seekers are not a "burden" for Western European countries", the authors evaluate the economic and fiscal effect brought onto host nations in Europe from the influx of asylum seekers from 1985 to 2015. Leveraging a panel vector autoregressive (VAR) model, the authors analyze economic and immigration data from 15 Western European countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, and the UK.

The study results debunk the theory of a "refugee burden" and find that the effects of a shock on the flow of asylum seekers have an overall positive economic impact on European economics. For one, the additional public expenditures taken on by a host country would be more than outweighed by the increase in tax revenues. Furthermore, these economies experience significant increases to their per capita GDP, as well as lower unemployment rates. The positive impact on countries' GDP, however, are not immediate; rather, they are observed from 3 to 5 years after the shock (d'Albis, 2018).

2.2 Improving Public Attitudes in Host Nations

In "The Global Refugee Crisis: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications for Improving Public Attitudes and Facilitating Refugee Resettlement", Victoria M. Esses et al. examine the factors impacting the psychological and emotional well-being of refugees in their host countries. One important factor is the

attitude of the country's citizens towards refugees, which directly impact the psychological and mental well-being of refugees, as well as their chances for success. The authors cite numerous public opinion polls that document the prevalence of prejudiced views and negative attitudes of refugees in Western nations (Esses, 2017). The authors outline four types of intergroup threats which form the bases of prejudicial attitudes: realistic threats (i.e. a threat to their nation's economy); symbolic threats (i.e. feeling as if one's beliefs are threatened); negative stereotypes (i.e. the belief that immigrants are lazy); and intergroup anxiety (i.e. feeling personally threatened) (Esses, 2017). These perceived threats, in combination with nationalistic sentiments, result in discriminatory and fearful views of refugees among citizens in host countries.

Another contributing factor to the rise of these xenophobic sentiments is an increasing trend of dehumanizing refugees in public discourse, as well as the rise of islamophobia. Many politicians and media today portray refugees with these prejudices, advocating for anti-immigrant policies and tighter border restrictions. There is a correlation between anti-refugee sentiments and the views expressed by politicians and the media. The authors use the example of Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau's 2015 election to highlight the positive influence politicians can have in changing attitudes and perceptions amongst citizens. Trudeau ran a campaign based on messages of inclusivity and diversity and included a pledge to settle 25 000 Syrian refugees within his first year in office. Not only did he execute this mass asylum program, but he also shifted the nation's attitude towards a positive understanding and sense of dutifulness for accepting more refugees. National surveys conducted pre- and post-election confirm that the positive impact on Canadians' view of refugees mirrored that of the policy changes in government (Esses, 2017).

2.3 Developing Transnational Solutions

In "A Global Solution to a Global Refugee Crisis", James C. Hathaway stresses the importance of staying true to the essence of the Refugee Convention. Despite over 65 years passing since its inception, the international community has failed to move in the right direction of integrating refugees into their host country's economic systems. Instead of providing refugees the freedoms and opportunities to provide for themselves and their families, the UNHCR runs more refugee camps than any nation. 1 in 4 refugees does not have freedom of movement and the majority cannot provide for their own needs (Hathaway, 2016). While UNHCR refugee camps is a easy "one-size-fits-all" solution that can be implemented across the world, by restricting refugees' right to mobility we deny them the chance for economic success and self-sufficiency.

Hathaway offers a five-point solution to this crisis. Firstly, reforms must address the circumstances of all states, not just the powerful ones. Current refugee reform efforts are spearheaded by powerful Western nations. There needs to be a concrete effort to involve middle-income and low-income nations when developing solutions to reform the refugee system. Secondly, we must plan refugee movements instead of only reacting to them. Hathaway proposes a system with pre-determined financial sharing and responsibility (human) sharing quotas. The third proposal is to embrace common but differentiated state responsibility. The state of arrival does not need to mean this where a refugee must reside; a predetermined but differentiated, system of shared State responsibility allows nations to be flexible with how they are willing to contribute to the system. There also needs to be a fundamental shift away from national to international administration of refugee protection. The UNHCR should administer quotas, with authority to allocate funds and persons. Lastly, refugees deserve not only access to protection, but also to a solution. If refugees

cannot return home after a certain period of time or find a different society they would like to reside, they must be guaranteed residual resettlement.

Hathaway further explores the shortcomings of the current State-by-State approach to refugee protection in “The Global Cop-Out on Refugees” (2018). Not only are there a lack of resources, existing resources are grossly misallocated and responses to crises are chaotic. Hathaway argues that a strong central actor is needed to harmonize protection efforts, perhaps through administering quotas to more evenly distribute responsibility sharing. Countries who are not doing their fair share to fund or host refugees, must be pressured to contribute to the system. For those countries who already host large populations of refugees in camps, the focus must shift to resettling these refugees.

3. Methodology and Research Questions

3.1 Research Questions

The scope of this paper focuses on addressing three key research questions. First, how much do countries contribute to the global effort to protect, host and resettle refugees? For this, we look at both who is hosting and providing asylum to refugees, as well who is financially contributing the most. Secondly, can funding gaps in the UNHCR budget be addressed? If so, what realistic targets can be set? Lastly, we look at what improvements can be made to transnational refugee policy and programs based on evidence-based research.

3.2 Methodology

Our methodology involves linking global datasets - from UNHCR, UN DESA, and the World Bank. This paper focuses on leveraging the power of data science and data visualizations to explore global migration trends and funding data. This analysis enables us to provide evidence-based policy recommendations for how the global community can work as one to share the burden of the global refugee crisis and move beyond the short-sightedness that plagues the current system.

4. Overview of Data

Migration data used in this paper is primarily from UN agencies. We analyze data from the 2018 UNHCR Global Trends data sets; UNHCR Donor Contributions (2017 - 2020); and the 2019 UN DESA Migrant Stock Total. The economic data used in our analysis is from the World Bank’s Gross Domestic Product data set (2019), as well as the World Bank’s Current classification by income (2019).

5. Data Analysis

5.1 The Global Refugee System in Numbers

To better understand the inequalities and gaps in the refugee protection system, it is first necessary to establish a macro-level picture of the current asylum landscape. Presently, 4 out of 5 refugees are living in countries neighboring their country of origin (UNHCR, 2019). Over two-thirds of refugees are from 5 countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Somalia (UNHCR, 2019). Figure 1 below shows the 10 largest refugee host nations. Jordan, on the low end of this spectrum hosted over 715 000 refugees in 2018. Turkey, with the largest refugee population, hosted over 3.68 million refugees in 2019. Turkey’s

refugee population swelled during the Syrian civil war, with Syrians accounting for the vast majority of this total.

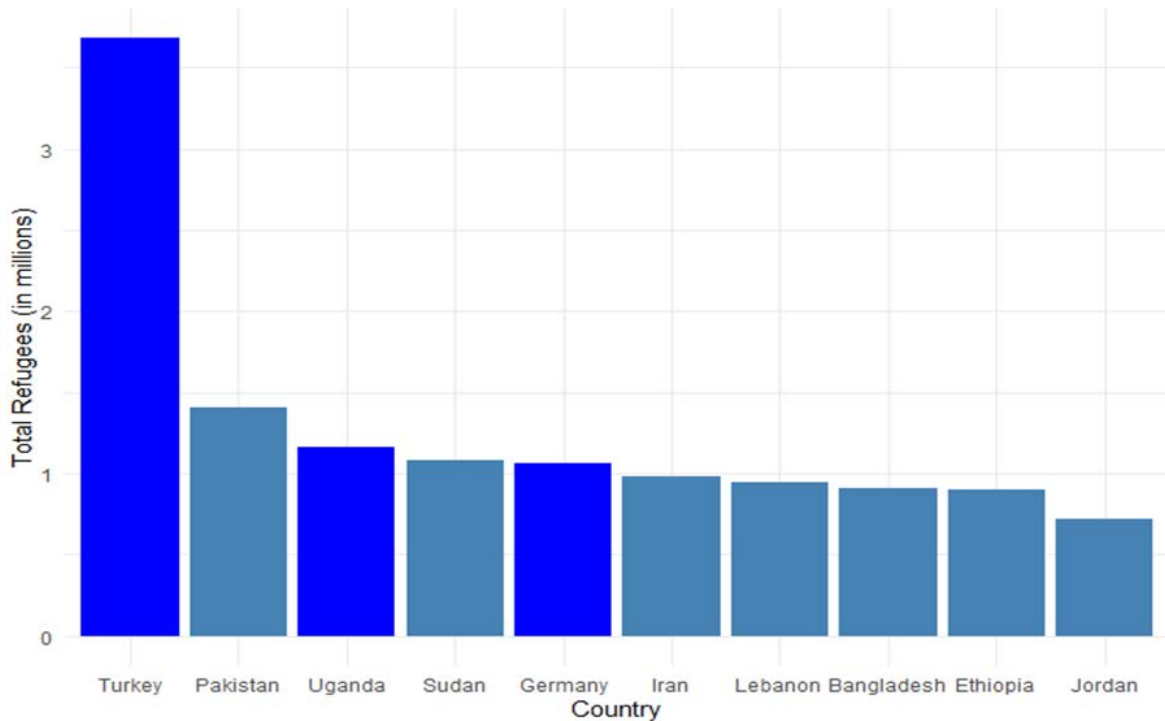


Figure 1: Host Nations with the Largest Refugee Populations.

Data source: UNHCR Global Trends (2019).

These 10 nations are primarily low and middle income nations. In an effort to determine the underlying reasons for why these countries are compelled to share the responsibility to protect millions of displaced persons while other richer nations are not, we analyzed global migration data from UNHCR and UN DESA. First, we examine the flow of refugees to and from different regions of the world. Figure 2 visualizes this comparison.

The vast majority of refugees are both fleeing, and seeking asylum, in Africa or Asia. Over 33% of refugees sought asylum in Africa, and 37% of refugees were fleeing an African nation. Similarly, 50% of refugees sought asylum in Asia, and 60% were fleeing an Asian nation. There is a clear correlation between one's nation of origin and one's nation of asylum; most refugees seek asylum in the region they are from.

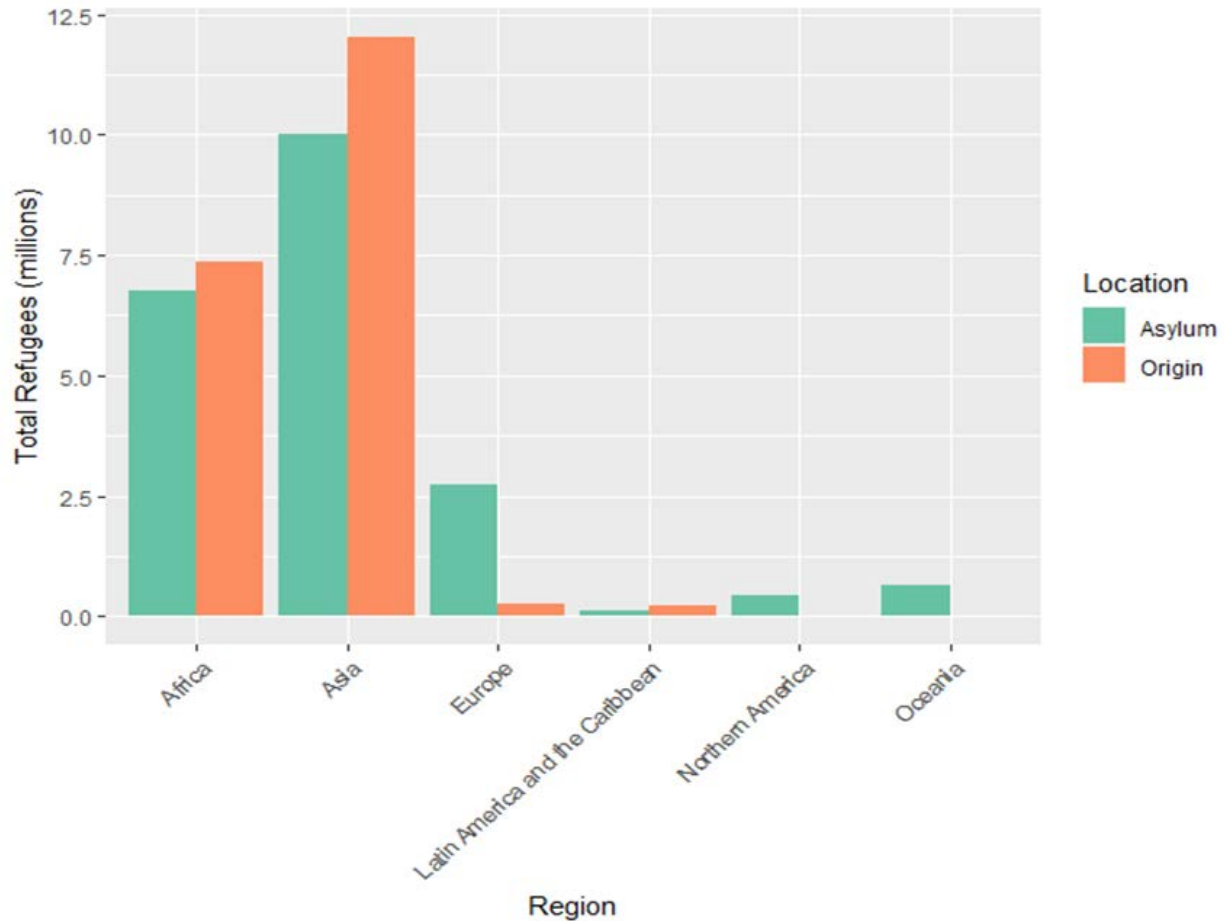


Figure 2: Total Refugees by Region of Asylum and Origin.

Data source: UNHCR Global Trends (2019).

In one regard, this makes sense pragmatically. A close proximity to their home country means that if the conditions that caused them to flee improve, these refugees can return home. Additionally, a nearby country is more likely to have similarities in culture and language, which makes the integration process much easier. On the other hand, it is completely unjust and unstable to place the responsibility of hosting the majority of displaced persons on developing nations without providing the funding and resources needed to support these programs.

While developing nations in Asia and Africa continue to host the largest number of refugees, many high-income nations have begun accepting more refugees. In fact, the total amount has doubled in the past three decades. Figure 3 shows this trend temporally over the past three decades.

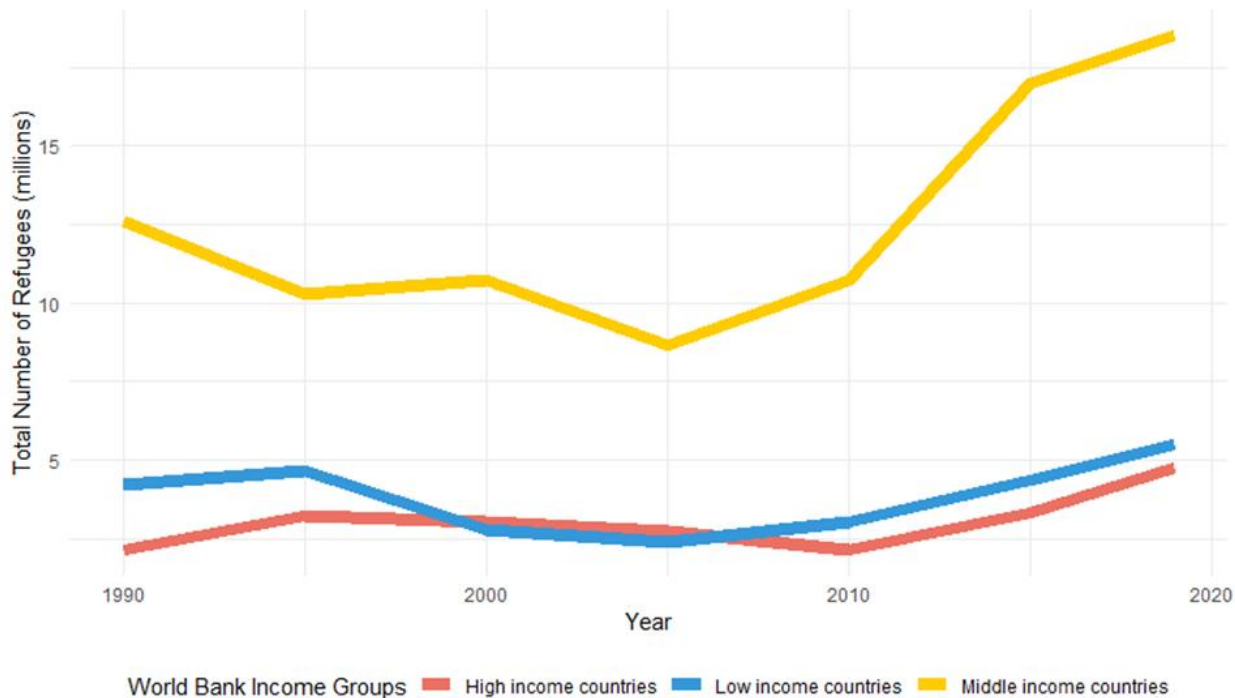


Figure 3: Country of Asylum over the Years by World Bank Income Group.

Data source: UN DESA 2019 Migrant Stock Total.

Despite this increased effort on the part of some high-income nations, this amount is dwarfed by the increasing amount of refugees settled in middle-income and low-income nations. As shown in Figure 3, over 23 million refugees were settled in middle or low-income nations in 2019 compared to only 4.7 million by high-income nations.

5.2 Proposed Solution to Address Funding Gaps

In 2019, UNHCR had a funding gap of 44% totaling \$3.8 billion. Meeting this target funding level is not an impossible task; in fact, it is a prerequisite for the UNHCR to be able to devote resources beyond the short-term solution of setting up refugee camps and lead the global effort to resettle displaced persons. One solution would be to implement a minimum annual contribution threshold based off of countries' GDP levels. If all high-income nations contributed at least 0.0125% of their GDPs towards the UNHCR, this funding gap would be filled.

Figure 4 shows the 20 highest GDPs of countries classified as "high-income" nations by the World Bank and what increased funds are needed to meet our proposed threshold. Presently, only 5 of these high-income nations are contributing at least 0.0125% of their GDP: Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Kuwait, and Luxembourg. If we apply the minimum contribution of 0.0125% of GDP to all high-income nations, it would generate an additional \$3.8 billion in funding to cover this gap. This includes 62 independent nations with GNI (Gross National Income) per capita of at least \$12 535 (\$US). This alone would fill the entire funding gap of the UNHCR for 2019.

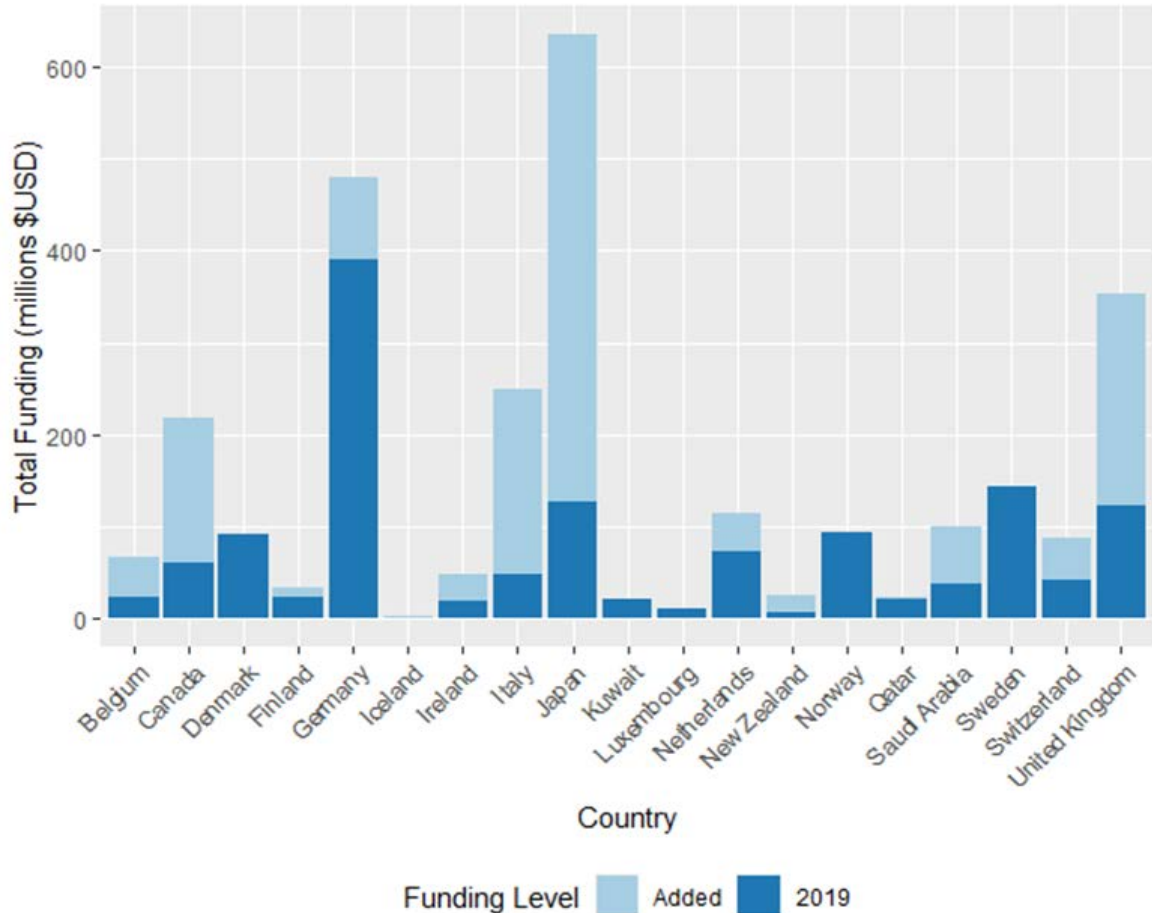


Figure 4: 2019 Funding to the UNHCR by High Income Nations.

Data sources: UNHCR. Donor Contributions (2019)

World Bank. Gross domestic product (2019).

6. Conclusion

High-income nations must step up to financially contribute their fair share to the global refugee system. We've provided one example of how this could be done. While financial constraints are an immediate concern to address shortcomings in the current refugee system, unleashing the economic potential of refugees, by developing transitional solutions to get refugees out of camps and integrated into local economics, must become the top priority of the UNHCR and the global community as a whole.

While covering the funding gap through increased contributions by wealthy nations will cover financial constraints, increased funding into the UNHCR must be devoted to improving refugees' self-sufficiency and increasing their economic opportunities. Of equal importance, a mental shift in the way we view refugees is needed. Refugees do not have to be a burden on host countries, and host countries should not feel they bare the sole responsibility to economically support refugees.

Further research on the economic outcomes of refugees who have integrated into a host country is needed. This will facilitate the development of evidence-based integration policies and programs and, equally important, improve knowledge sharing amongst nations so that we can learn from the successes and failures

of integration programs around the world – i.e. cash injection programs, subsidies, food vouchers, welfare cheques, etc.

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