
RISE OF CONSERVATISM VS. PLIGHTS OF DISPLACED PEOPLE: A GLOBAL RECKONING

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the rise of conservative ideologies across the globe has significantly influenced immigration policies, humanitarian aid, and public perception of displaced people. As nationalist movements gain momentum, governments have increasingly adopted restrictive immigration policies, closed borders, and reduced asylum protections, often framing migration as a threat to national security and cultural identity. At the same time, millions of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) continue to flee war, persecution, and climate-induced displacement, only to face growing hostility in their host countries. This paper critically examines the intersection between the resurgence of conservative policies and the worsening plight of displaced populations, highlighting the legal, political, and social ramifications of this dynamic. Through case studies from the United States, Europe, and Asia, this research explores how populist rhetoric has shaped refugee policies and the broader discourse surrounding migration. In countries like the U.S. and the U.K., for instance, right-wing parties have pushed for stricter border controls, deportation policies, and reductions in refugee quotas, citing economic and security concerns. Similarly, European nations have witnessed rising nationalist sentiments that have fuelled anti-immigration legislation and xenophobic movements. Meanwhile, in Asia, governments such as India and Myanmar have adopted exclusionary policies that further marginalize vulnerable communities. The role of media and political propaganda in shaping public attitudes toward displaced populations is also analysed, demonstrating how fear-driven narratives contribute to policy stagnation and social division. This paper further evaluates the ethical and legal implications of such policies, questioning whether national security concerns should override humanitarian obligations under international law. It argues that while states have the right to enforce sovereign borders, they must also adhere to global human rights frameworks, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. By proposing alternative policy frameworks that balance national interests with international responsibilities, this research calls for a more equitable approach to refugee management—one that acknowledges the dignity and rights of displaced people while addressing legitimate

security concerns. In an era of rising conservatism, rethinking global refugee policies is not just a necessity but a moral imperative.

Keywords: Conservatism, Refugee Policy, Displacement, Nationalism, Immigration Law, Human Rights, Populism, Sovereignty

1. Introduction

The 21st century is defined by a paradox: while the scale of global displacement continues to reach unprecedented levels, political responses in many parts of the world are becoming increasingly insular and restrictive. This tension—between a growing humanitarian need and a rising tide of nationalist conservatism—sits at the heart of the contemporary refugee crisis¹.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 100 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide as of 2023². This historic figure is driven by a convergence of protracted conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the accelerating impacts of climate change³. Despite the existence of robust international legal protections—such as those enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol—the implementation of these obligations is increasingly being undermined by domestic political agendas⁴.

In recent years, the global political landscape has veered sharply to the right, with conservative and populist movements rising by capitalizing on public fears around economic instability, terrorism, and cultural change⁵. Migration has become central to this discourse, with refugees increasingly depicted not as vulnerable individuals fleeing danger, but as threats to national security, cultural identity, and economic well-being⁶.

This ideological shift has fuelled the adoption of exclusionary laws, weakened asylum protections, and prompted withdrawal from key international commitments. More than just

¹ Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System* (Penguin Allen Lane 2017) 1–5.

² UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023* (UNHCR 2024) <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2023> accessed 6 April 2025.

³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2023* (IDMC 2023) <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2023> accessed 6 April 2025.

⁴ Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137; Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 31 January 1967, entered into force 4 October 1967) 606 UNTS 267

⁵ Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Polity Press 2019) chs 1–2.

⁶ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (2nd edn, Sage 2021) 112–130.

policy change, it reflects a deeper transformation in how states understand their moral and legal duties. The securitization of migration has normalized the denial of fundamental rights and human dignity to displaced individuals⁷.

Media and political rhetoric have reinforced these narratives, shaped public perception and justifying restrictive measures⁸. This article critically explores the connection between the global resurgence of conservatism and the worsening conditions faced by refugees. Through case studies from the United States, Europe, and Asia, it examines the legal frameworks, political motivations, and rhetorical strategies behind anti-immigration policies⁹.

It further interrogates the ethical and legal tensions between national sovereignty and international humanitarian responsibility, asking whether refugee rights can truly be protected in an era defined by exclusion and securitization¹⁰. Ultimately, it advocates for a reimagined approach to refugee governance—one that balances legitimate national concerns with a steadfast commitment to international law and universal human rights¹¹.

2. Global Trends in Conservative Migration Policy

Over the past decade, conservative and populist movements have reshaped global politics, particularly in the realm of immigration and refugee policy. Across regions, these ideologies have driven a shift toward nationalism and protectionism, prioritizing national sovereignty and domestic interests over international humanitarian obligations¹². This section examines how this trend has taken shape in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and Asia.

2.1 The United States and the United Kingdom

In the United States, the conservative turn in migration policy reached its apex during the Trump administration (2017–2021). Campaign slogans like “Build the Wall” and executive actions

⁸ Teun A van Dijk, *Ideology and Discourse* (Cambridge University Press 2009); Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (2nd edn, Sage 2021) ch 3.

⁹ Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System* (Penguin Allen Lane 2017); Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Polity Press 2019).

¹⁰ James C Hathaway, *The Rights of Refugees under International Law* (2nd edn, Cambridge University Press chs 2–4

¹¹ UNHCR, *Global Compact on Refugees* (UNHCR 2018) <https://www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html> accessed 6 April 2025

¹² Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2016); David Miller, *Strangers in Our Midst: The Political Philosophy of Immigration* (Harvard University Press 2016)

such as the “Muslim Ban” (Executive Order 13769) exemplified a dramatic shift from America’s self-image as a nation of immigrants to one of fortified borders and ethno-nationalist exclusion¹³. Refugee resettlement quotas plummeted from 110,000 in 2016 to a mere 18,000 by 2020¹⁴. Simultaneously, punitive policies at the U.S.–Mexico border, such as the Migrant Protection Protocols (“Remain in Mexico”), exposed asylum seekers to precarious conditions in border towns, undermining legal and humanitarian norms¹⁵.

In the United Kingdom, similar trends unfolded in the context of Brexit and its accompanying nationalist rhetoric. The “hostile environment” policy, spearheaded by then-Home Secretary Theresa May, sought to make life untenable for undocumented migrants through increased surveillance and restrictions on housing, employment, and healthcare. The controversial Rwanda asylum plan—proposing the offshore deportation of asylum seekers—further demonstrates the UK government’s willingness to embrace deterrence over protection, consolidating migration control as a central tenet of conservative statecraft. Both cases reflect a broader impulse to reassert national sovereignty at the expense of refugee rights.

2.2 Europe’s Nationalist and Anti-Immigration Surge

On the European continent, the 2015–2016 refugee crisis catalysed a surge in nationalist and anti-immigration sentiment. The arrival of over a million refugees, primarily fleeing conflict zones in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, prompted public unease that was quickly weaponized by far-right political actors¹⁶.

Hungary, under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, became emblematic of this shift. The government constructed razor-wire fences and enacted laws criminalizing assistance to undocumented migrants, framing refugees as cultural invaders¹⁷. Orbán’s rhetoric positioned migration as a

¹³ Exec Order No 13769, ‘Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States’ (27 January 2017) 82 Fed Reg 8977

¹⁴ Migration Policy Institute, ‘U.S. Annual Refugee Resettlement Ceilings and Number of Refugees Admitted, 1980–2020’ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-refugee-resettlement> accessed 6 April 2025.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, US: “Remain in Mexico” Program Harmful (HRW, 2021) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/22/us-remain-mexico-program-harmful> accessed 6 April 2025.

¹⁶ European Commission, European Agenda on Migration COM(2015) 240 final, 13 May 2015; UNHCR, Europe Situation: Refugees and Migrants Emergency Response (2016) <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean> accessed 6 April 2025.

¹⁷ Hungarian Act LXXVI of 2017 on the “Transparency of Organisations Receiving Support from Abroad”; see also Human Rights Watch, ‘Hungary: Bill Makes Helping Migrants a Crime’ (HRW, 13 June 2018) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/13/hungary-bill-makes-helping-migrants-crime> accessed 6 April 2025.

civilizational threat, allowing for authoritarian consolidation under the guise of national defence¹⁸.

Italy also saw the rise of hardline migration policies, particularly under Matteo Salvini's tenure as Minister of the Interior. Salvini closed ports to humanitarian rescue vessels and defied international maritime obligations, prioritizing domestic political gain over international law¹⁹. Similar dynamics have played out in Poland and Austria, where ethnonationalist narratives have driven increasingly restrictive asylum regimes²⁰.

At the EU level, migration management has trended toward externalization—outsourcing border enforcement to third-party states such as Libya and Turkey via contentious agreements. While these deals aim to limit arrivals, they often place vulnerable populations in environments rife with human rights abuses, raising ethical and legal concerns.

2.3 Asia: Ethno-Religious Nationalism and Exclusion

In Asia, conservative responses to migration and displacement are frequently rooted in ethno-religious nationalism rather than formal asylum policy. In India, the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) marked a significant departure from secular legal frameworks by offering fast-tracked citizenship to non-Muslim minorities from neighbouring countries. When combined with the National Register of Citizens (NRC)—particularly in Assam—the CAA has generated widespread concern over the marginalization and potential statelessness of Muslim communities.

Myanmar offers a particularly stark example. The Rohingya Muslim minority, long denied citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law, were subjected to systematic persecution culminating in the 2017 military-led campaign of violence, widely condemned as ethnic

¹⁸ Kim Lane Scheppele, 'Orbán's Emergency Powers and the Abuse of Constitutionalism' (2020) 18 International Journal of Constitutional Law 690.

¹⁹ Lorenzo Piccoli, 'The Political Cost of Migration Control in Italy: Salvini's Closed Ports and the 2018–2019 Stand-offs at Sea' (2021) 23 European Journal of Migration and Law 94; see also Amnesty International, Italy: Migration Policies in 2018–2019 (AI Report, 2019)

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur30/0074/2019/en/> accessed 6 April 2025

²⁰ Marta Pachocka, 'Poland's Approach to Refugee Protection: Between National Interests and European Solidarity' in Michela Ceccorulli and Enrico Fassi (eds), *The EU's External Governance of Migration* (Routledge 2021); Judith Kohlenberger, 'Narrating Crisis: The Austrian Refugee Discourse in the Long Summer of Migration' (2020) 24 Journal of Refugee Studies 552.

cleansing, if not genocide. These actions were underpinned by a nationalist ideology that framed the Rohingya as interlopers threatening Buddhist-majority identity.

China's approach in Xinjiang similarly exemplifies authoritarian conservatism fused with ethno-nationalist control. While not characterized by traditional refugee displacement, the mass internment, forced assimilation, and pervasive surveillance of Uyghur Muslims reflect a state-driven effort to suppress dissent and homogenize cultural identity under the banner of national unity.

2.4 Patterns and Implications

Despite regional divergences, a global pattern emerges: the redefinition of migration as a crisis rather than a humanitarian issue. Displaced individuals are routinely dehumanized in public discourse—depicted as criminals, cultural threats, or economic burdens²¹. This rhetorical shift erodes public support for asylum protections and paves the way for policies that often violate international norms²².

The growing securitization of migration—marked by fortified borders, militarized patrols, detention regimes, and offshore processing—signals a transition from legal governance to coercive control²³. These measures represent not just policy tools, but ideological statements: that the protection of national identity supersedes humanitarian duty²⁴.

At its core, the conservative response to displacement is as much about managing domestic anxieties as it is about controlling borders. Economic insecurity, cultural dislocation, and political alienation are channelled into anti-migrant sentiment, allowing populist leaders to externalize blame and consolidate power. In doing so, refugees become the collateral damage of broader ideological and systemic crises²⁵.

²¹ Teun A van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* (Palgrave Macmillan 2008) ch 6; Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (2nd edn, Sage 2021) 45–70.

²² James C Hathaway, *The Rights of Refugees under International Law* (2nd edn, Cambridge University Press 2021) 149–165

²³ Alison Mountz, *The Death of Asylum: Hidden Geographies of the Enforcement Archipelago* (University of Minnesota Press 2020); Michael Flynn, 'There and Back Again: On the Diffusion of Immigration Detention' (2014) 33 *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 124

²⁴ Didier Bigo, 'Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease' (2002) 27 *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 63

²⁵ Alexander Betts, *The Wealth of Refugees: How Displaced People Can Build Economies* (Oxford University Press 2021) ch 1.

3. The Role of Media and Political Rhetoric

In today's digital age, media and political rhetoric play a powerful role in shaping migration discourse. Conservative and populist actors have used these platforms to promote fear-based narratives that portray refugees not as victims, but as threats to national security, identity, and economic stability.

3.1 Framing Refugees as Security Threats

Right-wing populists often "securitize" migration, depicting refugees as inherently dangerous²⁶. Isolated incidents are exaggerated to paint entire communities as violent or incompatible. In the U.S., Donald Trump labelled immigrants as "invaders" and "criminals," justifying policies like the Muslim ban and border wall²⁷. Similarly, Hungary's Viktor Orbán described migration as a "Muslim invasion," echoing far-right rhetoric across Europe despite evidence disproving claims of migrant-driven crime²⁸.

3.2 Media Amplification

Mainstream and social media reinforce these narratives through sensationalist reporting and selective imagery²⁹. Refugees are often portrayed as disorderly masses, while algorithms amplify divisive, emotional content³⁰. Misinformation—like false crime statistics or welfare abuse stories—spreads rapidly, shaping public opinion and elections³¹. In countries like India, digital platforms have been weaponized to link migrants with terrorism, fuelling communal tension³².

²⁶ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner 1998) ch 2

²⁷ Executive Order 13769 (2017); Dara Lind, 'Trump's "Invasion" Rhetoric and the Long History of Immigrant Criminalization' Vox (30 October 2018) <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/10/30/18038452/trump-immigration-invasion-history> accessed 6 April 2025.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch, 'Hungary: New Law Targets Migrants, Civil Society' (HRW, 21 June 2018) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/21/hungary-new-law-targets-migrants-civil-society> accessed 6 April 2025.

²⁹ Teun A van Dijk, 'Mediating Racism: The Role of the Media in the Reproduction of Racism' in *Language, Power and Ideology* (John Benjamins 1989) 199–226.

³⁰ Whitney Phillips and Ryan M Milner, *You Are Here: A Field Guide for Navigating Polarized Speech, Conspiracy Theories, and Our Polluted Media Landscape* (MIT Press 2021).

³¹ Kalina Bontcheva and Julie Posetti (eds), *Balancing Act: Countering Digital Disinformation While Respecting Freedom of Expression* (UNESCO 2020) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377381> accessed 6 April 2025.

³² Shilpa Vasudevan, 'India's Digital Propaganda and Its Impact on Refugee Communities' (2022) 15 *Global Media Journal – Indian Edition* 27.

3.3 The Populist “Us vs. Them”

Populist rhetoric builds a binary: the “native” citizen versus the foreign “other.” This appeals to those facing economic or cultural insecurity, redirecting frustration toward migrants and allowing leaders to deflect from systemic issues while gaining political capital.

3.4 Silencing Opposing Voices

Efforts to counter these narratives—by NGOs, journalists, and academics—are often suppressed. In Hungary, aiding migrants has been criminalized³³, while in Italy, humanitarian missions are obstructed. Such actions shrink democratic space, limit informed debate, and favor fear over empathy³⁴.

3.5 Policy and Social Impact

These distorted narratives influence policy, erode social cohesion, and hinder refugee integration. They also undermine international law and human rights institutions. Combating toxic rhetoric is essential—not just for accuracy or ethics, but for defending democracy, dignity, and global responsibility.

4. Legal and Ethical Considerations

The global shift toward conservative migration policies presents serious legal and ethical questions. While sovereign states have the right to control entry into their territories, this power is not absolute—it operates within a global legal framework that prioritizes the protection of displaced individuals³⁵. The ongoing challenge lies in reconciling national interests with international responsibilities and moral imperatives³⁶.

³³ Amnesty International, Italy: “Closed Ports, Broken Laws” – The Human Cost of Salvini’s Migration Policies (2019) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur30/0042/2019/en/> accessed 6 April 2025.

³⁴ Judith Sunderland, ‘Shrinking Space for Civil Society: Refugee Assistance Under Fire in Europe’ Human Rights Watch Dispatches (2019) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/28/shrinking-space-civil-society-refugee-assistance-under-fire-europe> accessed 6 April 2025.

³⁵ James C Hathaway, *The Rights of Refugees under International Law* (2nd edn, Cambridge University Press 2021) 87–110.

³⁶ David Owen, ‘Refugees, Fairness and Taking Up the Slack: On Justice and the International Refugee Regime’ (2016) 14 *Moral Philosophy and Politics* 141.

4.2 International Legal Frameworks

The foundation of refugee protection rests on the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which define refugee status and enshrine the principle of non-refoulement—the obligation not to return individuals to places where they risk persecution³⁷. These protections are reinforced by broader human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ICCPR, and regional treaties like the ECHR.

Despite their broad adoption, many states have increasingly sought to bypass these obligations through legal manoeuvres: outsourcing asylum processing (as seen in Australia and the UK), labelling displaced persons as “economic migrants,” or imposing arbitrary designations of “safe” third countries. These strategies dilute the intended protections of international law and threaten its credibility.

4.3 Sovereignty vs. International Obligations

National sovereignty is often cited by conservative governments to justify restrictive asylum policies. However, sovereignty comes with responsibilities—especially for countries that have ratified binding international treaties. The principle of *pacta sunt Servando* obliges states to honour their legal commitments in good faith³⁸.

Ethically, this argument is even stronger. Many countries in the Global North have historically contributed to the root causes of displacement—through colonialism, armed conflict, and climate emissions³⁹. This global interdependence creates a moral duty to share responsibility for those forced to flee⁴⁰.

4.4 Legal Regression and Policy Backsliding

Domestically, many governments have weakened asylum systems through restrictive legislation. For instance, the U.S. used Title 42 during the pandemic to expel asylum seekers

³⁷ Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137 (Refugee Convention) art 33; Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 31 January 1967, entered into force 4 October 1967) 606 UNTS 267.

³⁸ Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (adopted 23 May 1969, entered into force 27 January 1980) 1155 UNTS 331, art 26.

³⁹ Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System* (Penguin 2017) 88–90

⁴⁰ David Miller, ‘Justice and Global Inequality’ in Andrew Hurrell and Ngaire Woods (eds), *Inequality, Globalization and World Politics* (Oxford University Press 1999) 187–210.

without due process⁴¹, while Hungary's Stop Soros law criminalized aid to migrants⁴². These policies not only breach international standards but also contribute to the erosion of human rights norms globally⁴³.

Such legal regression undermines the principle of universality in refugee protection and creates uneven and unpredictable outcomes for vulnerable populations.

4.5 Human Dignity and Moral Responsibility

Beyond legality, migration governance is a test of our ethical values. Philosophers like Kant, Nussbaum, and Rawls argue that justice requires treating all individuals with dignity—not as tools for political agendas⁴⁴. From a cosmopolitan perspective, our obligations extend beyond borders, particularly when exclusion causes harm or denies basic human rights.

Even within nationalist or communitarian thought, moral duties persist toward those whose suffering is visible and whose vulnerability is profound. Policies that lead to indefinite detention, family separation, or statelessness cannot be ethically justified.

4.6 Balancing Security and Humanitarian Needs

Conservative discourse often frames refugees as security threats, but these narrative lacks empirical support. Refugees are among the most vetted populations and consistently contribute to host societies when given the opportunity.

States can safeguard their borders while still meeting humanitarian commitments. Integration programs, fair vetting systems, and international cooperation can ensure that national security is preserved without compromising the rights and dignity of those seeking protection.

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, 'US: Title 42 Expulsions Trap People in Danger' (HRW, 19 July 2022) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/07/19/us-title-42-expulsions-trap-people-danger> accessed 6 April 2025.

⁴² European Commission, 'Infringement Procedure Against Hungary Concerning the "Stop Soros" Legislation' (Commission Press Release, 25 July 2019) https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_4260 accessed 6 April 2025.

⁴³ Thomas Spijkerboer, 'Structural Instability: Strasbourg Case Law on Migration Law' (2018) 31 Leiden Journal of International Law 315.

⁴⁴ Martha C Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Harvard University Press 2006); John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Harvard University Press 1999); Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795).

5. Toward Equitable Refugee Governance

The global refugee regime is under growing pressure—not only from escalating displacement but also from waning political commitment to uphold international obligations. In a climate of rising nationalism and securitized migration policies, equitable refugee governance demands a paradigm shift: from reactive, exclusionary approaches to proactive, inclusive, and rights-based frameworks. Such governance must reconcile state sovereignty with humanitarian responsibility, promote the social and economic inclusion of refugees, and tackle the root causes of displacement through coordinated multilateral action.

5.2 Reaffirming Legal Commitments and Strengthening Accountability

At the foundation of equitable governance lies the reaffirmation of international legal norms. States must be held to their obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention, its 1967 Protocol, and associated human rights instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

These commitments must transcend rhetoric and be embedded in domestic legislation that enshrines the principle of non-refoulement, guarantees fair and efficient asylum procedures, and ensures substantive access to protection. Accountability should be reinforced through active judicial oversight at national and regional levels, as well as by international monitoring mechanisms.

To restore public trust and institutional legitimacy, states must ensure transparency in migration enforcement, enable judicial review of asylum decisions, and conduct independent human rights impact assessments of immigration laws and practices.

5.3 Regional and Global Responsibility-Sharing

A fundamental shortcoming of the current system is the disproportionate burden borne by developing countries, which host over 75% of the world's refugees⁴⁵. Meanwhile, wealthier states have increasingly externalized their responsibilities through restrictive policies and

⁴⁵ UNHCR, Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023 (UNHCR, 2024) <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2023> accessed 6 April 2025.

bilateral deterrence agreements⁴⁶.

An equitable framework must be grounded in genuine responsibility-sharing and international solidarity⁴⁷. Key measures include:

- Expanding resettlement programs in high-income countries to alleviate pressure on frontline states.
- Developing robust regional frameworks, such as an improved Common European Asylum System (CEAS), with clearly defined responsibilities and enforcement mechanisms.
- Investing in host country infrastructure, including education, healthcare, and livelihoods, to support both refugees and local populations.
- Establishing predictable emergency response mechanisms, such as refugee compacts and regional contingency plans, to respond effectively to sudden displacements caused by conflict or climate events.

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), adopted in 2018, offers a practical roadmap by emphasizing burden-sharing, refugee empowerment, and inclusive development.

5.3 Integration and Inclusion: From Survival to Contribution

Equitable refugee governance recognizes refugees not as passive recipients of aid, but as active agents of development⁴⁸. True integration requires more than legal recognition; it necessitates economic opportunity, cultural inclusion, and full access to rights and services.

Core elements of successful integration include:

- Legal status and work rights, enabling self-reliance and economic participation⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Catherine Costello and Michelle Foster, Responsibility Sharing and the Rights of Refugees: The Case of the EU (EUI Working Papers RSCAS 2016/20) 3–5.

⁴⁷ UN General Assembly, New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, A/RES/71/1 (3 October 2016).

⁴⁸ UNHCR, Integration of Refugees: A Gateway to Development (UNHCR 2021) <https://www.unhcr.org/integrationgateway> accessed 6 April 2025.

⁴⁹ Khalid Koser and Richard Black, 'The Role of Employment in Refugee Integration' (2008) 21(4) Int J Refugee Law 1.

- Inclusive education systems that support refugee children and youth in acquiring the skills necessary for long-term integration⁵⁰.
- Accessible healthcare, particularly mental health services attuned to the trauma of displacement⁵¹.
- Civic and political inclusion, including pathways to citizenship and platforms for refugee participation in policymaking⁵².

Countries such as Canada and Germany have demonstrated effective integration through holistic programs focused on language acquisition, vocational training, and community-building initiatives that benefit both refugees and host societies.

5.4 Combating Xenophobia and Misinformation

Legal reform is insufficient without societal acceptance. Public attitudes shape the success of refugee policies, and as such, efforts to counter xenophobia and misinformation are integral to equitable governance.

States must invest in:

- Public education campaigns to dismantle stereotypes and promote solidarity.
- Curriculum reforms that integrate global citizenship and human rights education.
- Media literacy initiatives to help the public critically assess narratives surrounding migration.

Political leaders bear a responsibility to model inclusive and fact-based discourse, rejecting scapegoating and fostering empathy. Equally, the inclusion of refugee-led organizations in decision-making processes ensures that policy is grounded in lived experience and responsive to community needs.

⁵⁰ OECD, Education for Inclusive Societies: Integrating Refugees and Migrants (2020) <https://www.oecd.org/education/refugee-education.htm> accessed 6 April 2025.

⁵¹ WHO, Mental Health of Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants (2022) <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240053109> accessed 6 April 2025.

⁵² T Alexander Aleinikoff, The Arc of Protection: Reforming the International Refugee Regime (Stanford University Press 2019) 145–149.

5.5 Addressing the Root Causes of Displacement

Sustainable refugee governance cannot ignore the structural drivers of displacement—armed conflict, political repression, poverty, and environmental degradation⁵³.

Key strategies include:

- Strengthening conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts, led by the UN and regional bodies⁵⁴.
- Redirecting development aid toward institution-building and long-term resilience in fragile states⁵⁵.
- Integrating climate justice into migration policy, including the recognition of climate-induced displacement and the creation of protection frameworks for climate refugees, who currently fall outside the scope of international law⁵⁶.

5.6 The Path Forward: From Protection to Empowerment

A genuinely equitable refugee governance system moves beyond mere protection to one of empowerment. It understands displacement not just as a humanitarian crisis, but as a complex global reality—and refugees not only as rights-holders but as innovators, workers, and citizens-in-the-making.

Rather than viewing migration as a systemic failure, we must recognize it as an enduring aspect of human resilience. If governed ethically and collaboratively, it can serve as a force for social enrichment, mutual growth, and global solidarity.

⁵³ UNHCR, Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023 (2024) <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends> accessed 6 April 2025.

⁵⁴ United Nations, A New Agenda for Peace: Preventing Conflict and Sustaining Peace (2023) <https://www.un.org/en/new-agenda-for-peace> accessed 6 April 2025.

⁵⁵ OECD, States of Fragility 2022: Conflict, Climate and Context (OECD Publishing 2022) <https://www.oecd.org/dac/states-of-fragility-2022> accessed 6 April 2025.

⁵⁶ Walter Kälin and Nina Schrepfer, Protecting People Crossing Borders in the Context of Climate Change: Normative Gaps and Possible Approaches (UNHCR 2012) <https://www.unhcr.org/4f33f1729.pdf> accessed 6 April 2025; IOM, Institutional Strategy on Migration, Environment and Climate Change 2021–2030 <https://www.iom.int/strategy/migration-climate-change> accessed 6 April 2025.

Conclusion

The current global landscape reflects a troubling contradiction—while the number of displaced people continues to rise due to war, persecution, economic instability, and environmental crises, many nations are turning inward. Rather than meeting these challenges with empathy and cooperation, a growing number of states have responded by embracing conservative and nationalist ideologies, erecting both literal and ideological barriers.

This paper has explored how such ideologies have reshaped refugee governance. In countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, restrictive laws and policies have become the norm. Across Europe, nationalist movements fuel anti-immigrant sentiment, while in parts of Asia, exclusionary practices rooted in ethno-religious majoritarianism have taken hold. Refugees are increasingly seen not as rights-bearing individuals in need of protection, but as burdens or threats to national identity and security.

Compounding this is the role of political rhetoric and media narratives, which have distorted public perception and amplified fear-based responses. International legal frameworks designed to safeguard refugees are being ignored, reinterpreted, or weakened to suit domestic political interests. Ethical considerations that once guided humanitarian action are now often overshadowed by electoral strategies and nationalistic posturing.

Yet, amid these challenges, the values of dignity, solidarity, and justice persist. International law still offers a vital foundation for refugee protection, and civil society groups, refugee-led initiatives, and progressive governments continue to show that humane, effective refugee policies are not only possible but beneficial. These efforts prove that refugee governance can prioritize both protection and societal well-being.

To deny safety to those fleeing persecution is to deny a shared humanity. As history has shown, how societies treat the most vulnerable reveals their true moral and political character. In this era of rising conservatism, the real measure of strength lies not in closing borders, but in opening systems, institutions, and hearts. Let this global turning point be defined not by fear and exclusion, but by courage, compassion, and a collective commitment to justice and human dignity.