



Reinclusion Instead of Irregular Migration, a New Geneva Convention?

Luckily, not all [84](#) million currently forcibly displaced people worldwide require assistance. But [UNHCR resettlements](#) and [Complementary Pathways](#), the organized relocation options, are presently only able to [address](#) a tiny fraction of the formal [requests](#) received.

This lack of legal options forces many refugees to migrate [irregularly](#) and [numbers](#) are unfortunately not getting any lower. The international community therefore urgently needs to make a shift from treating symptoms, to finding a structural cure.

Functioning Effectively?

Circumstances change, and the question is whether the Geneva Refugee Convention, which was designed for Europe in the aftermath of WWII, is still future-proof. In my opinion, it is unfortunately not, and it will need a very drastic overhaul of its basis to become effective again.

This is important because policies, such as the [European migration pact proposal](#), assume a properly functioning international refugee system to build upon. However, this assumption of a well functioning system is very [questionable](#). When yearly [4](#) million additional people worldwide are forcibly displaced, of which [1](#) million are new refugees on top of the already existing [26](#) million, are we really sufficiently addressing the issues?

Times they are a-Changin'

Looking at life 70 years ago, things are quite different today. Although in 1967 the geographical scope of the convention was expanded by an [additional protocol](#) beyond European refugees in order to cover refugees worldwide, a country like Turkey, for example, has never signed this addition. Whilst treating hosted people well, Turkey does not grant official refugee status to its [4](#) million Syrian “non-European” guests, and can therefore theoretically send them back at any time.

Further, although millions of people [lost](#) the roof over their heads in the Second World War and often became *Internally Displaced People (IDPs)*, they could in principle go “home” and make a [new start](#) once the war was over. By 1951 the position of European IDPs was thus a [relatively](#) minor issue to address. However, the group of IDPs nowadays represent [58%](#) of all forcibly displaced people worldwide.

Likewise, the convention does not take into account the currently [minimally 44 million](#) “[climate refugees](#)” expected by 2050; neither does it have any answers to the [widespread criminality](#) that [surrounds](#) migration. These issues did not really exist when the convention was signed.

Looking at these changes, we have to guard the convention from becoming a straitjacket, unable to adapt.

What is a Refugee?

My analysis starts with an evaluation of the very basis of the convention, namely its [definition](#) of what a refugee is:

A refugee is someone “who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion”.

The above definition is unfortunately extremely limiting under today’s reality of internal displacement and climate change, I therefore propose to replace it by a much broader, simpler, and more holistic definition. A definition that does not imply crossing borders. But one that includes the incentive to become proactive in relocating people. My definition is:

A refugee is “anyone in acute or foreseeable need of refuge”.

This definition deals with all people who for whatever reason are excluded from their society and as a result of such exclusion are, or may become forcibly displaced soon. They will have to relocate in order to survive or escape threats or dangers. Nothing is voluntary in these cases.

Besides the current refugee group, it also covers IDPs, climate refugees, and those living in [extreme poverty](#) and who are lacking any economic future at their current location. To find refuge means to be no longer excluded, but to have found new permanent durable inclusion. As mentioned in the beginning, luckily, not everyone needs assistance in accomplishing this.

The word “foreseeable” is also a key word in my definition: no one should be forced to flee. With around [10](#) trillion passenger kilometers of yearly airplane capacity available, it should be possible to handle proactively in most cases. The target of this is also to reduce the dependence of refuge seeking people on [criminal smugglers](#) by offering legal alternatives to them.

However, my definition clearly does not cover those who are able to currently live a self-sustainable [dignified](#) life, but who nevertheless would [like](#) to voluntarily migrate to improve their opportunities. As such, searching for a better life is a fully legitimate reason to migrate. Still, this does and should not entitle people to depend on welfare systems elsewhere.

Temporality

Other than the current convention, which assumes temporality, I propose to be more realistic and consider a refugee’s displacement situation to be permanent in most cases, and make this the rule instead of the exception. Therefore we have to think about offering structural solutions and not “only” temporary ones. Displaced people often stay, being stuck in limbo, deprived for [decades](#) (or permanently) and are frequently not able to reboot their lives during this time. If they can and want to go home, this is actually more of a bonus. What I propose is to use another, more stable, basis to address displacement type of exclusion, namely reinclusion.

Reinclusion

The core goal of reinclusion is to offer durable solutions and to optimize renewed inclusion of displaced or soon to become displaced people. Wherever possible, their relocation should offer the possibility to become permanent. It means finding or creating a new home and a dignified life for individuals or groups in need of refuge.

The ultimate target is to strongly reduce the number of refugees. However, only after successful reinclusion, a refugee is considered no longer in need of refuge.

Prevention of Exclusion

Of course it is better to prevent forced displacement than to cure it. Depending on the type of root-causes, this often starts with diplomacy in order to avoid or mediate in violent conflicts between or inside groups or countries.

Simultaneously, as a fully interdependent globalized civilization, we must take measures to cope with global issues like climate change and pandemics.

Instabilities leading to displacement are further very frequently related to [inequalities](#) and [poverty](#), meaning that these factors must be urgently addressed as well.

Finally, [demographics](#) must not be ignored, if one improves healthcare and the final result is a population growth which is not supported by the locally available resources, birth control is required to reach a maintainable equilibrium.

Investing in People

Employment is crucial to reinclude refugees. However, looking ahead, application of artificial intelligence and robotization can, on any type of society level, easily lead to [labor market friction and job insecurity](#). Looking towards the future of communities worldwide from the perspective of a shifting role of employment and the necessary skills development to fulfill future jobs, these factors can easily lead to increased forced migration in future. This must thus be prevented.

A way to address this type of exclusion by unemployment and to optimize every person's individual role in society is the provision of "[Universal Basic Employment](#)". [UBE](#) is an approach in which every contribution to society, including raising children and people educating themselves, is considered to be employment. Other than with Universal Basic Income ([UBI](#)), it is this effort that is rewarded with a basic income.

Being Proactive

Although prevention is very important and in a way a form of macro proactiveness, most of the processes are quite slow, often taking decades to show any effect and thus as such unable to address current calamities. In this context I therefore use proactive in a more limited micro sense: namely to resettle people before they become displaced.

Looking for example at the case of Afghanistan, it shows that the international community [is able to evacuate](#) a relatively large amount of people in a short period of time, if required.

Since most cases of displacement are foreseeable and therefore no direct unexpected emergencies, it should be realistically possible to avoid such forced movements and to relocate people early enough.

To be clear, relocation destinations are in this case neither selected or depending on already available Diasporas nor on personal wishes, but solely on the potential to become reintegrated and find a new home.

Therefore, people can theoretically be spread over many (willing to take their international share and thus voluntary welcoming) countries and areas. This approach helps to avoid large groups [clustering](#) at a few destinations, such as this is now mostly the case. The total global refugee absorption capacity would substantially increase this way.

With vast [depopulating](#) regions available worldwide, it should be possible to create space for relocation of refugees and [revitalize](#) such areas though.

Money would be spent much more properly. Not on smugglers or fighting criminality, but on investing it in the refugees themselves. The pressure on the borders would likely be strongly reduced and, because of the available legal options, one could become even stricter to those who still want to cross illegally. For genuine refugees, there would no longer be any need to do so.

How to move Forward?

First, we must achieve agreement on the basic definitions and modernize the Geneva Refugee Convention. Next, we have to change the migration system from insufficient resettlement and legal pathways to a foundation of proactively relocating and reintegrating entitled people.

In case the definition of the word refugee is changed and broadened in meaning, many [current](#) irregular migrants will become genuine refugees by definition. For them, a system of durable solutions should be in place, with policies or measures to be executed to achieve the goal of converting forced displacement into reinclusion of people.