



Research Digest

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The RRN Research Digest provides a synopsis of recent research on refugee and forced migration issues from entities associated with the RRN and others.

NEW RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Balakian, S. (2025). [*Unsettled Families: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and the Politics of Kinship.*](#) **Stanford University Press.** Against the backdrop of the global refugee crisis, *Unsettled Families* is a book that investigates the parameters that Global North governments and international humanitarian organizations use to classify most displaced families—more than 99% globally—as ineligible for resettlement, and often as fraudulent. But "fraud" as a category is not as self-evident as it may first appear. Nor is "the family." Based on long-term fieldwork between Nairobi, Kenya and Columbus, Ohio, Sophia Balakian tells stories of Somali and Congolese refugees navigating a complicated global assemblage of humanitarian organizations, immigration bureaucracies, and national security agencies as they seek permanent, new homes. Viewing the concepts of "fraud" and "family" from different vantage points in this context, Balakian shows how the categories begin to blur out of focus, sometimes to evaporate altogether; what seems to be contained within them scatter outside their received boundaries. Practices that resettlement organizations deem fraudulent are often understood by people living as refugees to be moral actions in an unequal world. Such practices allow them to fulfill obligations to kin—kin defined expansively, in ways that at times exceed the boundaries of normative, US frameworks. Bringing questions of kinship into current discussions on humanitarianism, Balakian locates "the family" as a crucial category in processes of producing, policing, and contesting the boundaries of nation-states in the 21st century.

Benhabib, S., & Shachar, A. (Eds.). (2025). [*Lawless Zones, Rightless Subjects: Migration, Asylum, and Shifting Borders.*](#) **Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.** Responding to ever-increasing pressures of migration, states, supranational, and subnational actors deploy complex moves and maneuvers to reconfigure borders, rights, and territory, giving rise to a changing legal cartography of international relations and international law. The purpose of this volume is to study this new reconfiguration of rights, territoriality, and jurisdiction at the

empirical and normative levels and to examine its implications for the future of democratic governance within and across borders. Written by a diverse and accomplished group of scholars, the chapters in this volume employ legal, historical, philosophical, critical, discursive, and postcolonial perspectives to explore how the territoriality of the modern states – ostensibly, the most stable and unquestionable element undergirding the current international system – has been rewritten and dramatically reimagined. This title is available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

Aksit, D., & Laenen, T. (2025). [Settlement deservingness perceptions of climate change, economic, and political migrant groups across partisan lines.](#) *Frontiers in Sociology, 10*.

International migration is a prevailing issue of our times. With opponents of multicultural societies becoming more vocal across Europe, it is pivotal to strengthen our knowledge of how migrants are popularly perceived in receiving countries. Prior research suggests that there is remarkable agreement within different countries as to which types of migrants are seen as deserving of settlement, cutting across deep-rooted partisan divides. Building on the CARIN deservingness theory, this article sheds new light on this so-called “hidden immigration consensus” by investigating Americans’ original perceptions of different migrant groups rather than following the standard practice of assessing how they react to a set of pre-defined migrant characteristics in a conjoint experiment. Based on a split-sample experiment, the results show that liberals and conservatives significantly differ in their perceptions of political, economic, and climate change migrants on four of the five CARIN criteria. Liberals differentiate between migrants on control, attitude, and identity criteria, whereas conservatives only distinguish on the control criterion. Liberals rate all migrant groups twice as deserving as conservatives. The implications for the settlement deservingness model and the hidden consensus hypothesis are discussed. This article is open access.

Oberman, K. (2025). [Enough spurious distinctions: Refugees are just people in need of refuge.](#) *Law and Philos.*

What makes refugees different to non-refugee migrants? A plausible answer is that refugees need refuge. Within their home state, they fall below some threshold. To fulfil their basic human needs, they must migrate elsewhere. Non-refugee migrants might be badly off in relative terms, but they don’t fall below this threshold. It is because refugees need refuge that they have a claim to refuge. States are obligated to admit them at least when they can do so without severe cost. Call this the “Needs Account” of refugeehood – it combines a needs-based definition of a refugee with a needs-based argument for refugee protection. This article defends an unadulterated needs account. It is because they are in need that refugees have a claim to refuge. When politicians and the media brand asylum applicants “bogus” and “fraudulent” for failing to fit the narrow Convention definition of a refugee, they draw a morally spurious distinction between Convention-definition refugees and other people in need of refuge. Someone can fall outside the Convention definition and yet have an equally strong claim to refuge. Scholars who oppose the Needs Account do not all support the Convention definition, but they too draw questionable distinctions. They offer various reasons why the term “refugee” should be reserved for only a subset of those in need of refuge. As we shall see, none of these reasons prove persuasive. This article is open access.

Openshaw, K., Atem, A., & Phillips, M. (2025). [Beyond the demands of integration: African refugee resettlement in contemporary multicultural Australia](#). *Genealogy*, 9(1), 11. This paper uses the example of negatively racialised refugees from the African continent to reiterate the racialised nature of migrant and refugee experiences in Australia. This is a context that remains deeply influenced by a violent history of British colonisation and racist migration laws, including the restrictive White Australia Policy (1901–1973). Drawing on the authors’ research and personal experiences of working with, and navigating, the Australian resettlement system this article examines the racialised violences inherent in expectations of ‘integration’ for (former) African refugees in a settler colonial country. This paper proffers a principle level re-imagining of refugee resettlement in Australia that challenges patriarchal white sovereignty. It proposes a meaningful consideration of resettlement practices that are community-led, localised, relational and that recognise the agency of refugees who settle in Australia. This open access paper disrupts dominant tropes of refugees as perpetually vulnerable and deficit, by centering the agency, needs and expectations of a good life as it is lived in community, rather than dictated by the state.

REPORTS AND POLICY BRIEFS

[A humanitarian trap? Navigating neutrality, relief and rights in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Syria and Guatemala](#) by Zainab Moallin, Leen Fouad, & Dustin Barter. (2025). ODI **Global.** This scoping study examines the ever present but intensifying tensions between the provision of humanitarian relief and advancement of rights. While not mutually exclusive, the foregrounding of humanitarianism often comes at the expense of social justice. This can be seen, for example, when social movements are redirected to providing relief, as humanitarian funding gradually distorts the shape of civil society. The Humanitarian Policy Group’s (HPG’s) research examines these different tensions through country studies in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Syria and Guatemala. A scoping study by design, the research sets the scene for issues that HPG intends to grapple with in coming years, and that the humanitarian sector cannot afford to ignore.

[Regional Refugee Response Plan 2025-2026](#). (2025). UNHCR. The war in Ukraine has been the fastest growing and largest displacement crisis in Europe since World War II and has precipitated a regional refugee response of commensurate scale. Following the Russian Federation’s large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the flow of refugees into neighbouring countries, and beyond, has been met by a remarkable mobilization of assistance – by national and municipal authorities, civil society actors, local volunteers, and refugees themselves, all contributing to ensure protection and meet the essential needs of those fleeing violence. The refugee response continues to address significant needs in host countries. Notably, the 2025-26 iteration of the plan reflects the increased national and local ownership of the response and greater investment by host governments and national civil society in the socio-economic inclusion of refugees.

[Smuggling dynamics on the Eastern Route through Yemen.](#) (2025). **Mixed Migration Centre. This report focuses on the nature and dynamics of human smuggling along this Eastern Route from the Horn of Africa across the Red Sea between locations of origin in Ethiopia and points of arrival along the coast of Lahj Governorate in Yemen. It examines the role of smugglers, the services they offer, the financial aspects of the journey, and how migrants perceive their smugglers. The study is based on 346 surveys with migrants in Lahj, Yemen and 16 with smugglers in Ethiopia.**

[UN agencies warn of worsening humanitarian and human rights crisis in eastern DR Congo.](#) (2025). **United Nations. United Nations agencies called for an end to the violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as fighting between Government forces and the Rwandan-backed M23 armed group expands. The rebels have already seized the provincial capital, Goma, and reports indicate that they are closing in on the key city of Bukavu, capital of South Kivu province. The hostilities are occurring in a mineral-rich region that has been volatile for decades amid a proliferation of armed groups, which has forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes over the years and seek safety in displacement camps.**

[UNHCR Operational Framework Voluntary Return of Syrian Refugees and IDPs 2025.](#) (2025). **UNHCR. Following the collapse of the Assad government in Syria in early December 2024, many among the 5.5 million Syrian refugees in Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt have expressed elation and hope about the prospect of returning to their homes, together with caution. This Operational Framework projects up to 1.5 million Syrians to return in 2025. It covers UNHCR's engagement from preparations in host countries, counselling, and other protection services. It further includes the provision of return grants that will aid refugees to organize their return, and additional requirements for reintegration programmes for both returning refugees and IDPs inside Syria. This Framework equally covers the return of IDPs, of which there are currently an estimated 7.4 million displaced inside Syria. UNHCR is projecting up to 2 million IDPs to return in 2025.**

NEWS AND BLOG POSTS

[Are Asylum Seekers Safe from ICE?](#) by Jason Dzubow, Esq, January 29, 2025. **The Asylumist. There are probably 4+ million asylum seekers in the United States. These are people who filed an application for asylum, form I-589, with the USCIS Asylum Office or with the Immigration Court, and their dependents. Under the new Trump Administration, are such people safe from detention and deportation by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement)? The short answer seems to be: Mostly. Here, the author discusses what protections asylum seekers have and what they can do to be ready if they encounter an ICE agent.**

Canada intercepts people trying to cross border in ‘incredibly cold’ conditions by **Leyland Cecco, February 7, 2025. The Guardian.** More than a dozen people have been caught making the hazardous crossing into Canada, renewing focus on the closely watched – and seasonally perilous – border with the United States. Police in Alberta intercepted two groups attempting to cross into Canada illegally, including one which included five children who were ill-prepared for the cold which can plunge as low as -30C (-22F) at this time of year.

Donald Trump’s suggestion of ‘clearing out’ Gaza adds another risk to an already fragile ceasefire by **Karin Aggestam, January 27, 2025. The Conversation.** Donald Trump’s recent statement describing Gaza as a “demolition site” – and his suggestion to “evacuate” Palestinians in Gaza to Egypt and Jordan to “clean out that whole thing” – has sent shockwaves across the region. Israel’s extreme ultra-nationalist parties, both in and outside of the Israeli government, are thrilled by the idea. It’s one they have long advocated. But it has been widely criticised across the region as a potential “second Nakba” – referring to the violence and displacement of Palestinians after Israel’s unilateral declaration of statehood in 1948. The proposal has also been outright rejected by Egypt and Jordan. It has also been strongly condemned by the Palestinians.

Germany: Are conservatives' plans on immigration legal? by **Nina Werkhäuser, January 30, 2025. Deutsche Welle.** Germany's center-right bloc led by the Christian Democrats (CDU) is calling for stricter immigration law following a knife attack in the city of Aschaffenburg that left two people dead. After it came to light that the assailant was an Afghan national who was slated for deportation, CDU leader Friedrich Merz has presented a five-point plan to curb irregular migration. Merz has said that should the CDU bloc emerge victorious in Germany's federal election on February 23, he will work to implement his plan as quickly as possible. However, questions remain about whether his proposals are legal under German and European Union law.

Inside the Chaos, Confusion, and Heartbreak of Trump’s Foreign-Aid Freeze by **Belinda Luscombe, February 1, 2025. Time.** The dominoes fell really fast. On Monday, Jan. 20, shortly after his inauguration, President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order that called for a 90-day pause on new foreign-aid programs for efficiency and "consistency with U.S. foreign policy." The order got less attention than some of the others he signed that day but may have much more far-reaching effects. By the evening of Friday, Jan. 24, Secretary of State Marco Rubio had issued a directive that went even further, effectively freezing operations at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. government's lead provider of nonmilitary foreign aid. No new projects were to be started, no contracts were to be extended, and work was to be stopped on most existing programs. By Monday, Jan. 27, at least 56 of USAID's top brass were sent home on paid administrative leave for 90 days, reportedly cut off from their email, and, in case the message was not clear, the photos from the walls of their office were removed.

EVENTS, RESOURCES, DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA

[Call for Paper Abstracts - Special Issue: Who is a Refugee in the 21st Century?](#)

University of British Columbia. This call for paper abstracts invites paper abstracts that focus on the empirical bottom-up experiences of individuals and groups who have been (internally or internationally) displaced from their recent or original place of residence due to factors such as armed conflicts, persecutions, and natural disasters. How do these groups refer to themselves, and which political, racial, gendered, socioeconomic, and age-related factors shape their self- and other-ascriptions as refugees or otherwise? How do subjective understandings and self-descriptions vary situationally and over time? Authors are encouraged to reflect on the impact of (inter)national definitions of “refugee” but prioritize empirical and on-the-ground experiences including feelings of shame and honor, financial (in)dependence, temporal aspects of displacement, legal possibilities of return, relations to other migrants, and trust in the receiving societies. Abstract submissions from around the world, particularly from outside of Europe and North America, are highly encouraged. Please submit your 400- to 500-word abstracts by March 31st, 2025, to aryan.karimi@ubc.ca. Authors of selected abstracts will be notified by April 25th, 2025. The abstracts and the Special Issue proposal will be submitted to the *Journal of Refugee Studies* for publication consideration.

[CRS Seminar: Refugee Protection in Japan and Canada: Some Musings on Sovereignty, Borders and Human Rights.](#) **Centre for Refugee Studies.**

While Canada is widely considered a nation of immigrants and a leading country for protecting refugees, Japan is infamous for its strict social ordering and non-acceptance of immigrants and refugees. These respective national ideologies or narratives, however, are profoundly shaken by the contemporary political dynamics. As Canada is developing into a cohesive nation wherein new Canadian ethnicity emerges (on dispossession of Indigenous Peoples), its asylum system is increasingly loaded with measures for unrecognizing refugees ostensibly to maintain fraud/danger-free communal solidarity. Interestingly, Japan seems to be opening up its otherwise closed national border for foreigners and refugees as it aims to build a ‘multicultural convivial society’, thus making the post-war myth of a monolithic nation a thing of the past. The ongoing developments in both countries indicate that refugee protection/acceptance is fundamentally immigration-based and that it is directly relevant to the sovereign scheme of nation-building/maintaining. The focus of this small talk is on the practice of Refugee Status Determination in Japan as it is compared with that of Canada. It is intended to show how refugees have been excluded from (and recently are selectively integrated into) our nation-building/maintaining scheme. It also critically analyzes how international human rights/refugee law has been domesticated and emaciated in the staunch administrative and judicial processes to sustain fortress Japan. This is a hybrid event on February 25, 2025, 11:30 AM - 12:30 PM EST, Room 626 Kaneff Tower, York University. Virtual - Zoom: <https://yorku.zoom.us/meeting/register/7fa6mhMgTeCiQD12Z413cA>

Food as a tool of oppression - Podcast episode. The Conversation. Food is so much more than what we eat. It is, of course, nourishment — the food we put into our body to fuel ourselves. It can be joyful, like the the smell of pancakes wafting through the house on a Sunday morning, or when loved ones gather around a feast at the dinner table. It can also be deeply personal and defining, connecting us to ancestral history, and cultural and racial identities. And it is also political — especially in the United States — which is the key takeaway in a new book by law scholar Andrea Freeman.

Refugee and Im/Migrant Youth Conference. Centre for Refugee Children, FCJ Refugee Centre, and 54 Collective. This event will bring together organizations and youth to showcase projects focused on supporting refugee and migrant youth and minors. It's a fantastic opportunity to connect, share knowledge, and work toward creating a better system for the youth we serve. Highlights of the Event: Presentations by youth working on impactful projects across three organizations: Centre for Refugee Children, FCJ Refugee Centre, and S4 Collective, A panel discussion for audience engagement and Q&A, and Opportunities for networking and knowledge-sharing. This event will be in Toronto, Canada at Innis Town Hall, on February 21, 2025, 2:00 PM - 5:30 PM EST.

Refuge-Making: Stories from Iraq. Refugees Studies Centre. This recording is of a talk by Dr Sana Murrani, who presented her book, Rupturing Architecture, the first to critically and visually examine the spatial practices of refuge in response to war, violence, and displacement in Iraq from 2003 to 2023. The talk explored the methods used in the book, including creative deep mapping, memory work, storytelling, and case studies, and focus on the lived experiences of 15 Iraqis. Their resilience underscores broader themes of spatial justice and feminist spatial practices. Dr Murrani examined rupturing as both a mark of trauma and an act of resistance, shaping spaces of refuge. The talk concluded with a manifesto for spatial justice, advocating for integrated approaches to place, memory, and trauma that resonate globally.

Women, Life Freedom, Exhibiting Art by Afghan Women ARTivists. Eleanor Winters Gallery, York University. The exhibition Women, Life, Freedom presents artwork by Afghan women ARTivists associated with the Art of Freedom collective. Within the context of escalating restrictions on women's rights in Afghanistan, particularly since the resurgence of the Taliban, Afghan women are utilizing their art to as a form of social and political activism. Through their visual art, women aspire to challenge oppressive regimes and raise awareness about critical issues, advocating for social change. Through this exhibition, we demonstrate the role of art and creative expression in amplifying the voices of suppressed communities as well as highlight their agency and resilience. The exhibition will be held at the Eleanor Winters Gallery at York University's Keele Campus on March 27 (11am – 4pm) and March 28 (12pm – 5pm).