

Recommendations on Forced Displacement for the Biden-Harris Administration

Restoring the U.S. Government's Leadership on Forced Displacement

Since the end of 2016, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide rose from 65.6 million to **nearly 80 million**. The top three countries of origin for refugees in 2016—Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan—remain among the top countries of origin today. And new displacements, notably from Myanmar and Venezuela, have amounted to the highest recorded figure of forcibly displaced people to date.

Crises today are not only more widespread but are increasingly protracted. Climate change is exacerbating conflict, food insecurity, and poverty, further driving displacement within and across borders. The COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately affecting the incomes of already vulnerable displaced persons, exacerbating xenophobia and stigma against them, and reinforcing inward-looking national policies across the globe.

It is amidst this deteriorating situation that the next administration will decide the United States Government's (USG's) role in responding to the global forced displacement crisis, including how it will deal with its own asylum system at the U.S.-Mexico border, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, and investments in humanitarian and development assistance abroad.

InterAction's **Forced Displacement Working Group** (FDWG) developed the following recommendations to urgently reverse the damage done by policies of the previous administration and restore the United States as the world's leader in addressing the global forced displacement crisis.

Recommendations

Repair the damage.

- **Rebuild the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and establish safeguards against future attempts to dismantle it.**

In just a few short years, the Trump administration has systematically dismantled the U.S. refugee resettlement system—one that had enjoyed bipartisan support since its inception in 1980 and established the U.S. as the global leader in offering the most vulnerable people safe harbor. For Fiscal Year 2021, President Trump plans to further slash resettlement spots to just 15,000, which would be a historical nadir since the program was established 40 years ago.

InterAction's FDWG is highly supportive of President-elect Biden's plan to raise the global refugee admissions goal to 125,000 annually, with an eye toward increasing it as the situation demands; safeguard against future attacks, including establishing a refugee admissions annual minimum of at least 95,000 refugees annually; and immediately end the discriminatory "Muslim Ban." However, the U.S. resettlement system will take years to rebuild, as critical infrastructure—including the capacity of NGOs delivering vital resettlement services—was eviscerated in recent years.

Beyond increasing the resettlement target this year and raising it annually in future years, the new administration must develop a **roadmap to strengthen the program significantly**. These new admissions goals must come with **appropriate funding increases** for the overseas and domestic components of the USRAP, as well as clear



messaging that bolsters public support for increased refugee resettlement. The Biden administration should conduct an immediate interagency audit to streamline existing refugee security checks for a fairer and more efficient vetting system. The USG must secure the long-term viability of the resettlement program's infrastructure and capacity to reliably respond to the world's most vulnerable refugees during future crises.

- **End restrictive asylum policies and step up U.S. investment in and leadership on the forced displacement crisis in Central America and Mexico.**

The FDWG is highly supportive of Biden's plan to end the Migrant Protection Protocols (also known as the "Remain in Mexico" policy) and other restrictive asylum policies at the U.S. southern border. NGOs also urge the Biden administration to commit to withdrawing from all Asylum Cooperative Agreements (ACAs), which prevent asylum seekers from accessing protection by expelling them to so-called "safe third countries," and thereby violating the nonrefoulement principle of international law.

NGOs support Biden's proposal for a four-year \$4 billion assistance package to the Northern Triangle to address the root causes of displacement and recommend channeling efforts through established regional mechanisms. The Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (known by its Spanish acronym, MIRPs) presents an opportunity for the U.S. to channel its diplomatic influence, including financial and technical assistance, so states can implement key national policy commitments **already made**, but which lack resources needed for implementation.

New U.S. investments should prioritize MIRPs commitments that promote humane, rights-based regional responses to counter the previous administration's policies that led to increased militarization, detention, and deportation at the borders. InterAction's FDWG also urges the Biden administration to promote a regional protection model for asylum seekers, especially for unaccompanied children. Increased U.S. leadership and assistance to the region through a **compact approach** would establish accountability and reinvigorate efforts toward making progress on lasting solutions for those forced to flee.

- **Reinstate funding for UNFPA, UNRWA, and WHO.**

NGOs support Biden's commitment to immediately reinstate U.S. support for U.N. agencies that provide critical services to displaced people who have suffered from U.S. funding cuts during the past four years. Reinstating funding for multilateral agencies, including the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), and the World Health Organization (WHO) is vital. Withdrawing resources from these agencies amid a global health crisis undermines international efforts to defeat the virus and alleviate its detrimental secondary impacts, which are felt acutely by already vulnerable displaced people.

Restore U.S. leadership in key global processes.

- **Commit to bold new pledges and leadership of the Global Compact on Refugees moving forward.**

The United States has played a muted role in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) since its adoption by the U.N. General Assembly in 2018. While the FDWG is highly supportive of the GCR's aim to provide a more effective and comprehensive response to the global refugee crisis, the state-level pledges made at the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2019—many re-packaged or vague—failed to fundamentally alter the uneven and inadequate state of responsibility-sharing for refugees.

Notably, the USG failed to make a single pledge at the GRF, taking a further step away from its historic role as the world's leading supporter of refugees and undercutting its ability to push other nations to share responsibility for refugees. It also gave cover to other states, which failed to make meaningful commitments, disproving the administration's assumption that a diminished U.S. leadership role would result in others stepping in to fill the vacuum.



To signal the United States' return as a leader on global refugee response, the Biden administration should unambiguously assert United States support for the GCR and commit to several substantial GRF pledges—including new historic levels of financial support to refugee-hosting states and numbers of resettlement spots for refugees. A stepped-up leadership role in the GCR process will provide the U.S. leverage to urge others—impoverished refugee-hosting and wealthy donor countries alike—to commit to more collaborative and sustainable solutions for the world's refugees.

- **Join the Global Compact on Migration.**

In December 2017, the Trump administration withdrew from the Global Compact on Migration (GCM), citing American sovereign interests and the Compact's undermining of current U.S. immigration policy focused on border security. The next administration should join the GCM, a non-binding agreement endorsed by 164 UN Member States, in recognition that a cooperative approach will optimize the overall benefits of migration while addressing its risks and challenges.

- **Step up U.S. support for the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement**

The FDWG commends the USG's support for standing up the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement (the Panel) and contributing funds to extend its mandate, recognizing COVID-19 delayed its work. NGOs urge the next administration to ensure the Panel's recommendations, which will be finalized in September 2021, are realized by making U.S. commitments for implementation and by encouraging other countries to do so as well. InterAction members have advocated for the Panel report to focus on preventing internal displacement by **minimizing civilian harm in military operations** and developing discrete **road maps to local integration**, both areas in which the U.S. is uniquely positioned to play a global leadership role.

Forward thinking initiatives.


- **Commit to holding Leaders' Summit on Refugees II & oversee implementation plan**

President Obama's Leaders' Summit on Refugees in 2016 was a landmark event that concretized commitments by nation states to step up their efforts to respond to global refugee needs, including increasing their total 2016 financial contributions by approximately \$4.5 billion over 2015 levels; roughly doubling the number of resettlement spots or other channels of admission; improving access to education for one million refugee children globally; and, improving access to lawful work for one million refugees globally.

Unfortunately, momentum around these pledges was lost, and their implementation status remains unknown today. NGOs urge the Biden administration to hold a Leaders' Summit on Refugees II to track the fulfillment of commitments made at the 2016 Summit, increase accountability on pledges still not met, and encourage bold new contributions.

- **Initiate policy review to inform a new USG strategy to address protracted displacement**

The COVID-19 pandemic and climate change are exacerbating the dire forced displacement trends we have witnessed over the last decade—ones characterized by conflicts dragging on for longer with fewer refugees and internally displaced people able to return home. The COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on displaced people and the compounding effects of climate change will make durable solutions more challenging to achieve. Given these troubling trends, the USG must take approaches to displacement that blend different foreign assistance tools, focus on supporting the rights of displaced people to integrate into host communities, and support countries and communities in hosting large numbers of refugees. This will require a fundamental overhaul of the U.S.'s approach and an effort to **transition from short-term solutions**. The new administration should commit to undertaking a



comprehensive review of the USG’s strategy to address protracted displacement and develop a strategy to ensure a sustainable global response to protracted displacement.

About InterAction’s Forced Displacement Working Group

InterAction’s Forced Displacement Working Group consists of international nonprofit organizations (INGOs) working to strengthen and inform the response to forced displacement through INGO collective positioning and engagement with key stakeholders.

About InterAction

InterAction is a convener, thought leader, and voice for NGOs working to eliminate extreme poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people.

