



**Facilitating the Safe Return of Former Asylum Seekers, Whose Nations Are No Longer in Crisis**



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## Overview

The question of facilitating the safe return of former asylum seekers, whose nations are no longer in crisis, is a legally complex and politically sensitive issue facing the United Nations (UN) and the wider international community. Asylum systems were designed as temporary protection mechanisms during periods of war, persecution, or humanitarian collapse, however, the extent to which these mechanisms and support should last and whether they should continue after the end of such crises raises debates on repatriation, integration, and human rights guarantees. After the devastating effects of World War I & II, alongside the collapse of the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman Empires, and the resulting displaced populations, the need for international refugee law became more evident. In 1951, the Refugee Convention was held in Geneva, Switzerland, from July 2 to July 25, which aimed to establish a legal framework for protecting the millions of people displaced in Europe following World War II [1]. An amendment, the 1967 Protocol, was soon made to the original 1951 Refugee Convention [2]. The purpose of the amendment was to transform the Convention from a post-World War II European document into an international legal instrument designed to support asylum seekers worldwide.

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol allowed individuals the right to seek asylum if they have a reasonable fear of persecution. However, the Convention and Protocol only grant temporary, status-based protection that ceases when the condition causing persecution no longer exists, or if the individual re-avails themselves of their home country's protection, acquires a new nationality, or voluntarily returns. This creates tension between state sovereignty and international human rights protections, with some states arguing that protection is no longer required, as outlined in the "Cessation Clauses" [3].

In recent decades, large-scale displacement crises in Afghanistan, South Sudan, Syria, Myanmar, Ukraine, and Venezuela have led to tens of millions of people seeking asylum or refugee status abroad. Displaced populations have almost doubled in the last decade, with an estimated 123.2 million people worldwide who were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights violations [4].

The declaration that a country is "no longer in crisis" does not necessarily indicate political stability, economic independence and opportunity, rule of law, or protection of minority rights. Several post-conflict societies face weakened institutions, damages in infrastructure, high unemployment, and unresolved security risks and tensions. In these



situations, forced return can expose individuals to harm, discrimination, or degrading living conditions. The UNHRC's legal framework for governing asylum seeker returns is built on the principle of non-refoulement, or the prohibition on forcing refugees to return to a country where they are liable to be subjected to persecution [5]. The simple absence of warfare is not enough to justify the return of refugees to potentially dangerous environments. However, host countries face difficulties from long-term displacement, such as pressure on public services, labor markets, housing systems, and political cohesion. These inconveniences lead to cases in which states adopt more restrictive policies in response.

Out of the world's states, a couple stand out for their large intake and work in regards to refugees safe guarding. For instance, Germany, Turkey, Pakistan, France, and the United States have assumed substantial responsibility for displaced populations originating from prolonged crises in Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and other conflict-affected regions. According to the UNHRC, Turkey hosts around 3.2 million Syrian refugees who were forced to leave the country due to years of violent civil war [6]. Its physical location addresses the geographical limitations of the 1951 Convention, thus preserving resettlement to a third country as the most preferred durable solution for refugees.

Political, economic, and social pressures within host countries have led to reassessments of long-term protection frameworks. In response, the international community has explored several novel policy approaches, including establishing independent crisis-assessment mechanisms to determine when cessation clauses may be legitimately invoked; creating reintegration assistance funds to support sustainable return; implementing phased and monitored repatriation agreements; and strengthening post-return oversight by international bodies.

In summation, despite measures to protect returning asylum seekers and refugees that have begun to be implemented worldwide, a large portion of this population remains excluded from these protections, facing discrimination, renewed exposure to danger, and persecution [7]. To improve this situation, the international community must prioritize continuous reevaluation of safe-return conditions, ensuring that policies are grounded in thorough assessments of political, social, and economic stability. Delegates will have to navigate these predicaments under the express understanding that their proposed policies will affect the lives of tens of millions of people.



## Definitions of important terms

### Asylum Systems

The legal, administrative, and procedural frameworks established by countries to evaluate, grant, or deny protection to individuals fleeing persecution or serious harm in their home country [8].

### Asylum seeker

An individual who has had to flee their country due to war, violence, or a justified fear of persecution, often due to discrimination on the grounds of religion, political affiliation, beliefs, etc., and seeks residence in a new state or international protection.

### Refugee

According to the UNHRC, a refugee is “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. [9]” The difference between refugees and migrants is that refugees are forced to flee their country due to dangerous events such as war or persecution whilst migrants move to a country voluntarily.

### Cessation Clause

Found primarily in Articles 1C(5) and 1C(6) of the 1951 Refugee Convention, it states that international refugee protection ends when the reasons for seeking asylum no longer exist or the refugee has voluntarily re-availed themselves of their country’s protection. This clause signifies that refugee status is temporary, not permanent. The exact wording is as follows:

“This Convention shall cease to apply to any person falling under the terms of section A if:

1. He has voluntarily re-availed himself of the protection of the country of his nationality; or
2. Having lost his nationality, he has voluntarily reacquired it; or
3. He has acquired a new nationality, and enjoys the protection of the country of his new nationality; or
4. He has voluntarily re-established himself in the country which he left or outside which he remained owing to fear of persecution; or
5. He can no longer, because the circumstances in connection with which he has been recognized as a refugee have ceased to exist, continue to refuse to avail himself of the protection of the country of his nationality;



6. Being a person who has no nationality he is, because the circumstances in connection with which he has been recognized as a refugee have ceased to exist, able to return to the country of his former habitual residence;" [10]

### **Non-Refoulement**

The principle prohibiting states from returning individuals to a territory where they face serious threats to life, torture, or persecution. This is the core principle and cornerstone of international refugee protection, ensuring safety from irreparable harm. According to the UNHRC, it "prohibits States from transferring or removing individuals from their jurisdiction or effective control when there are substantial grounds for believing that the person would be at risk of irreparable harm upon return, including persecution, torture, illtreatment or other serious human rights violations." [12]

### **Integration**

A process in which refugees adjust different aspects of their lives in order to live more effectively within their host countries. This concept encompasses cultural, economic, and social integration, among others, and is a vital step in many refugees' journeys. Successful integration can often curb negative public opinion, reduce refugee fatigue, and increase a country's intake of displaced populations.

### **Repatriation**

The voluntary, safe, and dignified return of refugees and asylum seekers to their country of origin [13]. It differs from other State practices regarding transfer of refugees present on their territory to other third States on the basis of bilateral agreement. In the case that the event causing a refugee's status no longer exists, a refugee may decide to return or agree to be repatriated to their country of origin. Repatriation of refugees must always respect the mandatory principle of non-refoulement that prohibits sending people back to a place where their life and safety is in danger.

### **Host State (Country/Community)**

The nation that receives, grants asylum to, and provides protection for refugees and asylum-seekers who have crossed international borders to flee persecution or danger. Furthermore, the term host state is used regardless of an individual's legal status meaning that the term is used to refer to both legal and undocumented voluntary/unvoluntary migrants.

### **Refugee fatigue**

The diminishing willingness of host countries or communities to provide support for refugees. Refugee fatigue is often driven by the strain of prolonged crises on local resources,



economic instability, and waning public empathy. This commonly arises after years of consistently high refugee arrivals, economic strain, and shifts in cultural norms and values. Although economic downturns may result from various factors, refugees are often blamed due to their perceived impact on housing availability, employment opportunities, and national identity.



## Timeline of key events

### **1914-1918: World War I**

The First World War, caused by a combination of militarism, alliances, imperialism, and nationalism, along with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria by the Bosnian Serb nationalist Gavrilo Princip, triggered mass displacement across Europe and the Middle East [14]. This was especially true following the collapse of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, German, and Russian Empires. Millions of people were forcibly displaced due to redrawn borders, ethnic violence, and political upheaval, which eventually led to the international community coming together to create international refugee protection policies.

### **1921: The Nansen Passport: Predecessor fo the 1951 Convention**

In 1921, the League of Nations appointed Fridtjof Nansen as the first High Commissioner for Refugees. He created the “Nansen Passport,” the first internationally recognized travel document for stateless people, allowing them to cross borders to find work and safety [15]. It was initially designed for Russians, but it later covered Armenian, Assyrian, and other refugees. This allowed refugees without national documents to travel legally.

### **1939-1945: World War II**

The Second World War produced one of the largest displacement crises in history, with over 60 million people uprooted across Europe and Asia. The atrocities committed during this period, such as the Holocaust, directly led to the drafting of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the establishment of a permanent international refugee protection regime. During the war, the international community was unable to respond adequately to these atrocities and failed to assist those fleeing persecution, such as individuals targeted by the Nazis. The Convention was originally limited to individuals who became refugees due to “events occurring before 1 January 1951” in Europe, directly addressing the aftermath of the Second World War. It was later modified with an amendment to protect refugees worldwide.

### **1945-1970: Decolonization and Post-Colonial Conflicts**

After the Second World War, many colonial empires were unable to maintain control over their overseas colonies. As a result, independence and nationalist movements that had been developing for decades gained greater traction and ultimately came to fruition. This massive wave of decolonization dismantled European empires and was driven by post-war exhaustion, rising nationalism, and pressure from emerging global superpowers. Over the next few decades, the number of independent nations worldwide more than doubled. These new nations in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean faced significant challenges upon



gaining independence, as many achieved sovereignty through war with their colonial rulers, devastating populations and causing high death tolls and widespread displacement. Major conflicts associated with this period include the Vietnam War, the Indo-Pakistani War, the Korean War, the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, and the Algerian War [16][17][18][19][20]. In addition to wars of decolonization and internal disputes, the ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War fueled numerous proxy wars that further destabilized regions around the world [21]. These armed conflicts significantly increased the number of refugees and asylum seekers, highlighting the growing need for international refugee protection laws.

### **1951: The 1951 Refugee Convention**

Beginning with the League of Nations in 1921 (Nansen Passport system), the 1951 Convention consolidated and expanded on previous international instruments relating to refugees and continues to provide the most comprehensive codification of the rights of refugees at the international level [1]. The 1951 Refugee Convention, also known as the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, was held in Geneva, Switzerland, from July 2 to 25, 1951, by the United Nations (UN) Plenipotentiaries. The Convention defined a refugee as someone with a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. It also established the core principle of non-refoulement and set minimum standards for rights such as work, education, and access to courts. However, the original Convention only applied to people displaced by events occurring before January 1, 1951 and was geographically restricted to Europe.

### **1967: Adoption of the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees**

The Protocol of 1967 removed the original temporal and geographic limitations of the 1951 Convention, extending refugee protections beyond post-World War II Europe to displacement crises worldwide. This allowed the Convention to address displacement crises outside of Europe, such as those resulting from decolonization.

### **1991-2001: Balkan Conflicts**

The Balkan Conflicts, also known as the Yugoslav Wars, was a decade-long series of ethnic wars and insurgencies. Following the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, nationalist tensions intensified among the republics, leading to declarations of independence by Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992 [22]. The resulting conflicts, including the Croatian War of Independence and the Bosnian War, were marked by ethnic cleansing, mass displacement, and atrocities such as the Srebrenica massacre. Later, unrest in Kosovo led to the Kosovo War, which prompted NATO



intervention against Serbian forces. The wars formally concluded with agreements such as the Dayton Accords in 1995 and subsequent peace arrangements in the early 2000s, but they left lasting political divisions and humanitarian consequences across the region.

### **1994: Rwandan Genocide**

The Rwandan Genocide was a mass slaughter that occurred in the East African nation of Rwanda over approximately 100 days in 1994 (April 7 to mid-July). During the nation's time as a Belgian colony, the colonizers favored one specific ethnic group over the other, specifically the Tutsis, who were a minority, and gave them positions of power, more benefits, and eventually introduced ethnic identity cards in 1932. Long after independence in 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel group composed of Tutsi exiles, invaded Rwanda from Uganda, sparking a civil war. On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana (a Hutu) was shot down over Kigali (speculated to be a Tutsi). As a result, the Hutu extremists seized control and launched a pre-planned campaign of extermination, also known as the Rwandan Genocide of Tutsis [23].

### **2018-Present: Reassessment of Asylum Systems**

Despite the overall expansion of international refugee protection frameworks, many states have increasingly reassessed long-term protection policies in response to domestic political and economic pressures. Since 2018, numerous states have tightened asylum systems amid record levels of displacement, introducing shorter protection periods, expanded detention, and reliance on accelerated or restrictive processing procedures. Reforms often prioritize securing external borders and controlling migration flows, as exemplified by the European Union's new Pact on Migration and Asylum, which emphasizes faster procedures and limits on family reunification rights [24]. These developments indicate a broader shift in many states from protection-oriented approaches toward more restrictive and security-centered refugee and migration policies. Whether this global trend is "right" or "wrong" remains heavily debated on the international stage, as many policymakers, scholars, and advocacy groups hold differing perspectives.



## Position of key nations

### -Germany-

Germany has for decades been a leader in refugee protection, holding the record for hosting the most asylum seekers in the EU for the past decade, especially following the 2015 European refugee influx during which it received over 1 million asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. In addition, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Germany granted temporary protection to over 1.2 million people fleeing the war. Outside of admitting refugees, Germany has been one of the world's largest donors to UNHRC and one of the architects of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), which seeks to balance global responsibility-sharing. However, during recent years, internal political shifts, integration challenges, and pressure from both federal states and the European Union have led to reforms aimed at accelerating asylum procedures and facilitating returns where protection grounds no longer apply [25]. Across the EU, resettlement pledges have collapsed by 83% from around 61,000 slots in the 2024-2025 cycle to just 10,430 in the 2026-2027 cycle, with Germany going from the top pledging country to failing to pledge at all in the new cycle. In addition to halting resettlement schemes, Germany recently implemented a two-year pause on family reunification for people with subsidiary protection, terminated BAP, and implemented new restrictions on asylum, leaving thousands of protection seekers stranded in danger.

### -Sweden-

Similar to Germany, Sweden has long been one of the main destination countries within the European Union (EU) for people seeking protection, and almost 163,000 people, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, applied for asylum in Sweden in 2015. Refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection were initially granted permanent residence, typically after four years of recognition. However, prolonged migration flows and mounting integration challenges prompted a shift toward more restrictive policies. In late 2015, the Swedish government introduced temporary residence permits for new beneficiaries, limited family reunification to the minimum required by international and EU law, and reinstated border checks at Schengen crossings [26]. Sweden's contemporary position reflects a balance between humanitarian protection and pragmatic governance: while affirming its commitment to non-refoulement and individualized status assessments, Sweden supports temporary restrictions and voluntary repatriation when objective evaluations indicate that fundamental and lasting changes have occurred in the country of origin. These policies aim to both manage domestic pressures and encourage other EU Member States to share responsibility for refugees, although some neighboring countries have pursued even stricter approaches.



#### -Türkiye-

As a geographically proximate host to major conflict zones, Türkiye has assumed responsibility in sheltering displaced populations, particularly Syrians fleeing civil war. It currently hosts a population of around 2,901,478 million refugees from neighbouring Syria and 258,416 international protection applicants and status holders, most principally originating from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and among others [27]. Türkiye maintains a geographic limitation on the 1951 Refugee Convention and applies it only to refugees originating in European countries. That said, in April 2013, Türkiye adopted a comprehensive Law on Foreigners and International Protection, which establishes a dedicated legal framework for asylum in Türkiye and affirms Türkiye's obligations towards all persons in need of international protection, regardless of country of origin.

Over time, however, protracted displacement has generated economic strain, social tensions, and domestic political debate. In response, Turkish authorities have increasingly promoted voluntary return initiatives and regional stabilization measures. Türkiye maintains that repatriation efforts are conducted in line with safety and dignity, though international observers continue to scrutinize whether conditions in certain areas meet the threshold for sustainable reintegration.

#### -Pakistan-

Despite remaining one of the world's most significant refugee-hosting nations, currently home to approximately 1.98 million Afghans, Pakistan is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol and has not enacted national refugee legislation or established procedures to determine refugee status within its territory. While traditionally providing protection, Pakistan currently operates under the 1946 Foreigners Act, with UNHCR handling status determination [28]. However, recent policy has shifted toward the mass deportation of unregistered and, increasingly, registered Afghans. These policy initiatives encouraging return have been justified by reference to perceived improvements in Afghanistan's security landscape. Nonetheless, questions persist regarding the voluntariness of returns, the adequacy of reintegration mechanisms, and the stability of political institutions within Afghanistan.

#### -Denmark-

Traditionally a relatively homogeneous and egalitarian welfare state, Denmark has shifted from a liberal approach to humanitarian protection towards a stricter policy framework, placing it among the governments most actively considering new restrictions. Under Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, the government has moved from a traditional welfare approach to a "Paradigm Shift" focused on temporary residency and a goal of "zero



asylum seekers” [29]. Recent measures, including exploring external asylum processing arrangements with Rwanda and making the status of all refugees in Denmark temporary regardless of their humanitarian protection needs, demonstrate how the country has become a leading proponent of protection-restricting policies within the European Union [30].

Denmark maintains that its policies remain consistent with international law, yet critics argue that such measures test the boundaries of non-refoulement and voluntariness standards. By emphasizing sovereignty and strict enforcement, Denmark’s approach highlights the conflict between its legal responsibilities and domestic political pressures in repatriation discussions.



## Suggested Solutions

As a consequence of protracted conflicts, political instability, economic collapse, and environmental degradation, global forced displacement has reached historically unprecedented levels. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 100 million individuals worldwide are currently forcibly displaced, including refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons [31]. Host nations, particularly those bordering conflict zones, have borne a disproportionate share of responsibility, placing significant pressure on housing systems, public services, healthcare infrastructure, and labor markets. Although humanitarian assistance has alleviated immediate suffering through the provision of food, water, shelter, and medical aid, such measures remain temporary and insufficient to address the structural causes and long-term implications of displacement. Member States must therefore determine whether to prioritize short-term humanitarian relief or pursue comprehensive frameworks centered on responsibility-sharing, sustainable integration, and long-term stabilization.

One of the most pressing structural issues is the uneven distribution of refugees among states. In 2025, UNHCR data indicated that approximately 34 percent of the world's refugees were hosted by just five countries: Colombia, Germany, Türkiye, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Uganda [32]. This concentration highlights a key cause of refugee fatigue, as decades of weak international accountability have allowed some major powers to accept relatively few refugees, while frontline states struggle to manage large inflows. To address this imbalance, the United Nations and related bodies could amend existing resolutions and multilateral agreements to promote a more equitable distribution of responsibility based on factors such as GDP, population size, and labor capacity. More coordinated resettlement frameworks would reduce pressure on heavily impacted countries and improve integration outcomes by ensuring that host governments possess sufficient resources to support newcomers.

Significant political obstacles, however, may hinder the implementation of such reforms. States with sovereignty-centered foreign policies may resist binding redistribution mechanisms, particularly if such measures conflict with domestic political priorities. In addition, public skepticism regarding refugee admissions, often linked to perceived economic and social concerns, may limit governments' willingness to ratify new accountability agreements. These political realities complicate the long-term enforcement of stronger burden-sharing frameworks.



Expanding legal migration pathways remains another essential component of reform. Humanitarian visas, family reunification programs, and regulated labor mobility agreements can provide safer alternatives to irregular migration routes and reduce reliance on smuggling networks. Expanding such pathways would preserve state sovereignty over border management while ensuring that individuals in need of protection are not forced into dangerous transit conditions. Nevertheless, growing public opposition and the rise of restrictive migration policies in several regions may constrain the political feasibility of these measures.

Reform of asylum adjudication systems is also necessary to increase efficiency and public confidence. Prolonged processing times leave applicants in extended legal uncertainty and may contribute to social tension within host societies. Reports from UNHCR and the European Union Agency for Asylum document persistent case backlogs in multiple jurisdictions. Investment in digitalized case management systems, expanded administrative staffing, and standardized evidentiary procedures would accelerate determinations while maintaining due process.

Post-arrival integration remains equally critical. The insufficiency of community assimilation programs continues to limit successful refugee adaptation in many host states. Governments should expand integration initiatives focused on language acquisition, employment access, education, and cultural orientation. Integration, however, cannot be treated solely as the responsibility of host countries; it requires coordinated international financial and technical support to prevent disproportionate burdens. National programs, local community initiatives, and non-governmental organizations can provide job training, mentorship, and social orientation programs that ease adaptation and reduce social discontent. Research from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development indicates that early labor market access significantly improves long-term economic outcomes for refugees and reduces welfare dependency [33]. When effectively implemented, these policies can shift public perception and demonstrate the economic contributions of refugee populations.

Given the financial intensity of large-scale integration efforts, cost-efficient implementation strategies should also be considered. Volunteer-supported services, public-private partnerships, and online instructional platforms may reduce operational expenses while preserving program quality. These measures can help ensure sustainability and prevent integration initiatives from becoming short-lived policy responses.

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