



Pathways for Protection

Promoting Sponsorship Initiatives
for Refugees

Event Report

World Refugee & Migration Council



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For a full recap of this event, you can watch the event in full on YouTube or on the [event page](#). To stay up to date with more news and events from the WRMC, subscribe to our monthly newsletter and be sure to visit our [webpage](#) on a regular basis.

This event report was produced following a virtual panel discussion held by the World Refugee & Migration Council.

Special thanks to Philip Jones for writing this report.

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► Introduction

More than 20 million people in the world are refugees, forced to flee their homes as a result of conflict or persecution - many of whom are vulnerable populations such as women and girls. While national governments work tirelessly to resettle refugees, only a small fraction of resettlement needs are met each year. On September 8, 2021, the World Refugee & Migration Council hosted a virtual panel discussion on pathways to protect and resettle Afghans and millions of other refugees around the world whose needs are not met by existing refugee resettlement systems.

During the event, panelists discussed the current situation facing millions of Afghans, how private and community sponsorship of refugee resettlement initiatives work and assist host nations to meet refugee demands, as well as their

ability to meet the unique needs of vulnerable refugee populations including women and girls.

The discussion was moderated by Canadian Independent Senator and member of the WRMC Ratna Omidvar, and included the following panelists: Jennifer Bond, Managing Director, University of Ottawa Refugee Hub and Chair, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative; Jayne Fleming, Director of International Refugee Protection Programs, Reed Smith LLP, and International Director, Lamp Lifeboat Ladder; John Slocum, Interim Executive Director, Refugee Council USA; and Najeeba Wazefadost, Afghan Refugee, and Co-founder Asia Pacific Network of Refugees and Global Independent Refugee Women Leaders.

▶ The Situation Facing Afghans

Najeeba Wazefadost opened the discussion by outlining the current situation in Afghanistan and the needs of Afghan refugees – particularly women – and how to quickly get assistance including food and legal support to those at risk of harm from the Taliban. Ms. Wazefadost remarked that while Afghan men and women feared the resurgence of the Taliban, very few people were pessimistic enough to believe that the Taliban would regain control of the country as quickly as what transpired.

Many Afghans that lived in parts of the country most under threat from the Taliban's resurgence have already been internally displaced, while those with the means available have tried to leave the country to Pakistan, Iran,

“Afghan women and girls are telling us that they are again finding themselves as prisoners of their own gender...it's no longer about the progress of their rights, it's more about survival.”

– **Najeeba Wazefadost**

Turkey, Tajikistan, or elsewhere. However, for those able to flee the country, the closure of borders due to the COVID-19 pandemic compounds the plights of Afghan refugees as they may never see or hear from their families again. In addition, countries around the world are only pledging to take in a low numbers of Afghan refugees, further exacerbating the

problems facing Afghans seeking refuge from the Taliban.

Apart from the Taliban's resurgence threatening the safety of most Afghans, those at most risk are women and girls along with other human rights defenders unable to leave the country. For women and girls, it is the worst security situation they have faced – they have lost hope for progress, peace, and stability. They now find themselves now prisoners of their own gender, no longer finding for the progress of their rights but instead concentrating on survival.

▶ Private Sponsorship Resettlement Initiatives

The resettlement of refugees is a timely process that takes place in a context where time is limited. Jennifer Bond discussed the process of resettlement and how private sponsorship both assists governments manage large influxes of refugee flows, and help refugees become settled in their host communities.

The initial phase of resettlement is the evacuation of refugees from at risk areas - such as recent events in Afghanistan. During this time, traditional reception systems as well as their actors including resettlement agencies are placed under great stress along with health care systems and social service providers. Private sponsorship resettlement programs act as a flexible policy tool that can empower people and communities to increase reception capacity for refugees in the short-term and bridge between the need for refugee resettlement and

the ability for governments to take refugees in through traditional reception systems.

In addition to being a flexible policy tool for governments trying to manage refugee inflows, private sponsorship programs foster a sense of community between those being resettled and

“[Community sponsorship programs] at their core are a flexible policy tool that can allow us to empower communities, empower people like yourself.”

– **Jennifer Bond**

those assisting in resettlement efforts, changing societies to become more welcoming to refugees in the longer term. For instance, in Canada, 9 million Canadians between 2015 and 2016 were directly or indirectly involved in supporting the resettlement of Syrian refugees

to over 400 communities through private sponsorship initiatives. The introduction and promotion of private sponsorship programs by national governments can help foster welcoming communities for refugees.

John Slocum discussed the prospects of private resettlement programs in the United States and what challenges and opportunities are likely to exist both politically and institutionally to further resettlement through private sponsorship. While the United States' resettlement system faced significant setbacks under the Trump Administration, it has been the world's largest country of resettlement until recently. However, the U.S. is not the largest per capita country of resettlement. Given the huge amount of responsibility and relatively unfunded mandate that rests on the shoulders of countries that are immediate neighbors of countries where refugees are fleeing, there is

significant work for the U.S. to do to be a leader and standard bearer in terms of refugee resettlement and fostering community support for refugee resettlement.

The Biden Administration has issued an Executive Order aiming to strengthen and rebuild the United States' resettlement program by enhancing community sponsorship and initiating a new private sponsorship initiative that is scheduled to be in use by early 2022. Private sponsorship initiatives in the United States are growing – such as the newly launched Community Sponsorship Hub that engages philanthropists, corporations and individuals in private sponsorship – largely

“Given the huge burden and responsibility and frankly unfunded mandate that rests on the shoulders of the immediate neighbors of countries where refugees are fleeing, there's so much more that we can do.”

– **John Slocum**

spurred on by the events in Afghanistan. The United States is taking great effort to increase the number of refugees it takes in while being that while the Afghan situation is currently at the forefront of people's minds, there are refugees awaiting resettlement in the United States from all around the world. However,

while the United States government is seeking to resettle increasing numbers of refugees, it does not have the capacity to serve them and is reliant on additional funding and private initiatives to support incoming refugees – yet this call is being answered and all sectors of society are working together to resettle refugees in the United States.

▶ Private-Public Programs, a Case Study: Lamp Lifeboat Ladder

Jayne Fleming introduced and discussed the initiative Lamp Lifeboat Ladder. The initiative, a public-private initiative, is active in Europe and the Middle East and provides holistic support to at-risk refugees with immediate support such as housing, medical assistance, and food while they are still in transit from their country of origin to a country of destination.

Through an agreement with the Canadian government, Lamp Lifeboat Ladder provides pathways for refugee families to relocate to Canada. Specifically, it works with the

“It can seem like there's nothing we can do, but I think everyone has a role.”

– **Jayne Fleming**

Government of Canada to relocate women who are survivors of torture and survivors of sexual violence from Greece to Canada. Members of Lamp Lifeboat Ladder meet with the survivors of torture and sexual violence in a transit country as they are migrating to a host country, and then develops and submits resettlement applications funded by private donors to the

Government of Canada, and when the individual arrives in Canada, the initiative provides full support to them for two years, again funded through private donation. While the initiative is small, the model can be duplicated and complements other existing private resettlement programs.

► Further Reading & Partners

One of the key recommendations in the Council's *A Call to Action* report was to increase refugee resettlement as an expression of responsibility sharing:

ACTION 8

The Council calls for the resettlement of 10 percent of the world's refugees every year, including through private sponsorship, and asks interested states and other stakeholders to develop a plan to meet this objective.

A CALL TO ACTION: TRANSFORMING THE GLOBAL REFUGEE SYSTEM (PAGE 24)

Read more about the Council's calls for strengthening responsibility sharing for refugees and IDPs: <https://wrmcouncil.org/publications/a-call-to-action-transforming-the-global-refugee-system/>



The University of Ottawa Refugee Hub works at the intersection of research, policy, and programming, fostering innovative, multi-sectoral partnerships in support of refugee protection in Canada and around the world. It is a founding partner in the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, which works to assist and inspire countries around the world to open new pathways for refugee protection.



Lamp Lifeboat Ladder (LLL) is a survivor-led initiative striving to transform the refugee ecosystem and make it more humane for those seeking safety, while broadening pathways for resettlement to safe countries. Survivors of sexual violence and torture themselves are leading the process of developing the vision and goals based on their experiences, needs and what they want their futures to look like.



Refugee Council USA is a diverse coalition advocating for just and humane laws and policies, and the promotion of dialogue and communication among government, civil society, and those who need protection and welcome.



The Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR) is the only region-wide refugee-led network of refugee-led initiatives in the Asia Pacific region that is working with and for refugees. APNOR was established in 2018, on the recommendation of Asia Pacific Summit of Refugees (APSOR), which brought together 104 representatives from refugee-led organisations in Asia to advocate for refugee agency & self-representation. APNOR is actively working to connect Afghan refugees with legal support and other assistance and is looking for your help. Contact them today at: apnor.refugees@gmail.com

▶ Panelists

MODERATOR



Senator Ratna Omidvar, Independent Canadian Senator and World Refugee & Migration Council Member

Senator Ratna Omidvar is an internationally recognized voice on migration, diversity and inclusion. In April 2016, she was appointed to the Senate of Canada as an independent senator representing Ontario, and she also serves as co-chair of the Global Future Council on migration hosted by the World Economic Forum. Senator Omidvar is a Member of the Order of Canada and a recipient of the Cross of the Order of Merit from Germany. She continues to work on issues of inequality and immigration in Canada.

PANELISTS



Jennifer Bond, Managing Director, University of Ottawa Refugee Hub and Chair, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative

Professor Jennifer Bond is Founder and Managing Director of the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub. She is also Chair of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative; and a Board Member and Refugee Fund Advisor with Airbnb.org. She holds degrees in law, literature, and business and has been called to the Bars of Ontario and British Columbia. She completed her graduate work at the Yale Law School as a John Peters Humphrey Fellow in International Human Rights Law and clerked at the Alberta Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada.



Jayne Fleming, Director of International Refugee Protection Programs, Reed Smith LLP, and International Director, Lamp Lifeboat Ladder

Jayne Fleming is a human rights lawyer and director of international refugee protection programs at Reed Smith LLP, which leads Lamp Lifeboat Ladder, a public-private partnership aiding refugees who have survived torture and trauma to discover a new life by supporting their resettlement to Canada and other safe countries.



John Slocum, Interim Executive Director, Refugee Council USA

John Slocum has served as Interim Executive Director of Refugee Council USA since January 2021, having previously served on the RCUSA board. He is also a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Associate Senior Researcher at CIDOB (the Barcelona Center for International Affairs), and Co-Coordinator of the Repository of Documentation Relating to Disappearances in Mexico (RDDM). John has been a consultant to foundations and nonprofits, providing strategic planning and executive recruitment services in the fields of migration, refugees, and human rights



Najeeba Wazefadost, Afghan Refugee, Co-founder Asia Pacific Network of Refugees and Global Independent Refugee Women Leaders

At 10 years old, Najeeba Wazefadost fled Afghanistan with her parents. She sought asylum from Australia by sea in September 2000. She spent several months in mandatory immigration detention before being recognized as a refugee. Arriving with no knowledge of English, by the age of 14, Najeeba had mastered it well-enough to win a national essay-writing competition, and start the advocacy journey. She has graduated from a Bachelor of Medical Science. Najeeba has been actively involved in the development of refugee-led networks at both the regional and global level, which focuses on bringing together refugee-led organizations and refugee change-makers from around the world to gather to discuss their lived experiences and propose solutions for more effective and sustainable refugee policy.





World Refugee & Migration Council

Chaired by former Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, the World Refugee & Migration Council offers bold thinking on how the international community can respond to refugees through cooperation & responsibility sharing.

This conference was made possible through a partnership with [Cuso International](#).

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