Strategic Responses to Forced Displacement

An Opportunity for Collective Action

WORLD REFUGEE & MIGRATION COUNCIL

THE CHALLENGE

A significant decline in donor funding, rising conflict, and record displacement have profoundly challenged the international humanitarian system established after World War II to protect refugees and crisis-affected populations.

The effects on the ground are severe and systemic. Food assistance, nutrition programs, vaccination campaigns, health services, shelter, water and sanitation programs, protection services, and educational support are being sharply scaled back or even phased out altogether. United Nations humanitarian agencies and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are retrenching at scale — terminating programs, laying off staff, and closing offices.

Current reform efforts — prioritising life-saving assistance, directing more funding to local partners, and reducing inefficiencies — are necessary. But they do not address the entrenched policies and practices that leave forcibly displaced persons trapped in protracted aid dependence. These reforms share a common limitation: a failure to adapt humanitarian action to context. Too often the humanitarian system continues approaches that are insufficient to meet the medium- and longer-term socio-economic needs of displaced populations. All key stakeholders have contributed to reliance on costly short-term assistance cycles as the primary response strategy. This is financially unviable, complicates a transition to more sustainable programming, impedes the inclusion of displaced populations in country-led national development planning, and leaves them without the means to build livelihoods and contribute to their host communities.

THE PROJECT

The project explores how to reorient humanitarian action toward more strategic, context-specific approaches aligned more closely to local socio-economic development and, where feasible, peacebuilding initiatives. Through expert consultation, it will develop recommendations on improving early response design, including preparedness measures; establishing clearer prioritisation; and, where conditions allow, charting pathways toward sustainable, government-led systems.

Data, financing, and accountability mechanisms underpin meaningful reform. The project will therefore examine how data and evidence on displaced populations can be strengthened and integrated into national planning, how financing instruments can be sequenced to fit context — from emergency response through to development-led approaches — and how accountability for outcomes can be embedded in programming.

THE CASE FOR COLLECTIVE APPROACHES

Central to the success of this initiative is the inclusion of all key stakeholders — donor and refugee-hosting governments, multilateral institutions, local authorities, and displaced communities themselves — in the design and development of future policies and implementation arrangements. The WRMC project emphasises a collective approach that maximises the use of complementary resources and capacities, reduces reliance on humanitarian aid, and improves outcomes for impacted populations.

Middle-power engagement is particularly relevant in the absence of clear international leadership during this period of rapid change. And, while middle powers cannot replace the decline in U.S. financing, their multilateral commitments, partnerships with refugee-hosting states, and diplomatic flexibility can position them to champion reform toward more strategic, context-adapted responses. Acting collectively with their host country partners, they can preserve essential emergency response capacity while re-orienting their support to reduce long-term dependence on parallel humanitarian systems.

WHY THE WORLD REFUGEE & MIGRATION COUNCIL

The Council is a network of high-profile, transformational leaders from the Global South and North — former heads of government, foreign ministers, senior UN officials, scholars, practitioners, and individuals with lived displacement experience. It has a proven track record of advancing international cooperation towards equitable and sustainable responses to forced displacement.

PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Ninette Kelley	WRMC Chair; four decades across the UN, government, and civil society; internationally respected expert on forced displacement.
Fen Hampson	WRMC President; Chancellor's Professor, Carleton University; leading scholar of diplomacy and global governance.
Ewen Macleod	Senior WRMC Advisor; humanitarian and development specialist with over 40 years of experience in crisis and post-conflict settings, including leadership roles at UNHCR and the European Commission.
Alison Lawton	Founder, Mindset Venture Group and Mindset Social Innovation Foundation; expert in social-impact investment across for-profit and non-profit sectors.

ADVISORS

In addition to WRMC Council members, internationally recognised leaders and practitioners will serve as advisors to the project, contributing expertise and perspectives throughout its design and development. The advisors will bring experience in humanitarian policy, development finance, and international diplomacy, as well as lived experience of forced displacement.

METHODOLOGY

The project applies a staged methodology designed to move from evidence to political commitment. Its underlying logic is that rigorous, practitioner-informed analysis produces credible recommendations; broad consultation builds ownership and legitimacy for them; and coordinated middle-power diplomacy translates them into shared government positions. Each phase generates the inputs for the next, and outputs are captured in published, open-access documents that serve as durable reference points for governments, funders, and institutions.

SCOPE & REACH

This initiative spans expert convening, multi-stakeholder consultation, and high-level diplomatic engagement — with explicit engagement of nations hosting large forcibly displaced populations across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas. It is designed to produce reforms that are politically feasible, practically actionable, and grounded in the experiences of displaced communities.

Four-Phase, 18-Month Project Plan

Phase 1 **Expert Roundtable** April 2027 Location TBD	Closed 1.5-day expert roundtable hosted by a leading policy institution (subject to confirmation), with up to 25 invited experts. Three thematic areas: emergency response design, prioritisation in protracted displacement, and data/financing. Generates a prioritised set of reform recommendations.
Phase 2 **Stakeholder Consultation** May–Sep 2027	Consult on the Phase 1 recommendations (the Draft Report): circulated to governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and refugee-led organisations; six weeks of written submissions; 8–10 targeted government briefings. Feedback produces a revised Policy Paper, later developed into the Final Report.
Phase 3 **Donor & Host Government Conference** Nov 2027 Location TBD	1.5-day conference of donor and displacement hosting governments co-hosted by a partner foreign ministry (subject to confirmation). Communiqué negotiated and adopted; final policy report published.
Phase 4 Ottawa Roundtable Dec 2027 Ottawa	Policy roundtable with Canadian government departments, foreign missions, multilateral organisations, and civil society. Presents findings and identifies opportunities for coordinated middle-power engagement.

There is an urgent opportunity to act — to develop practical, politically feasible reforms before today's funding crisis becomes a long-term protection crisis. Rather than documenting the crisis, this initiative is designed to help reshape the international response.

PROJECT BUDGET

Seed funding secured	**$255,000**
In-kind commitments	**$162,000**
	Remaining to raise: $383,000
Total project budget	**$800,000**

WRMC has secured $417K of the $800K budget and is actively collaborating with partners and sponsors to raise the remaining $383K. All amounts expressed in CAN$.

PROJECT CONTACT

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