

Strategic Responses to Forced Displacement

An Opportunity for Middle Power Leadership

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 MIDDLE POWER ENGAGEMENT

Middle-power engagement is particularly relevant in the absence of clear international leadership. 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 Global South 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

<u>Ninette Kelley</u>	WRMC Chair; four decades across the UN, government, and civil society; internationally respected expert on forced displacement.
<u>Fen Hampson</u>	WRMC President; Chancellor's Professor, Carleton University; leading scholar of diplomacy and global governance.
<u>Ewen Macleod</u>	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.
<u>Alison Lawton</u>	Founder, Mindset Venture Group and Mindset Social Innovation Foundation; expert in social-impact investment across for-profit and non-profit sectors.

ADVISORS

The project draws on an Advisory Board of internationally recognised leaders, practitioners, and scholars from countries with large forcibly displaced populations and donor countries — bringing expertise in humanitarian policy, development finance, and international diplomacy, along with 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.

Four-Phase, 18-Month Project Plan	
Phase 1 Expert Roundtable Apr 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 Middle Power Conference Nov 2027 Location TBD	1.5-day middle-power conference 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.

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.

PROJECT CONTACT

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Funding Opportunity

YOUR INVESTMENT HELPS:

- Shape Global Policy Reform:** Support critical reforms required to improve international responses to forced displacement.
- Advance Practical Recommendations:** Support policy proposals developed jointly with governments, aid organisations, and partners — grounded in evidence, not abstraction.
- Elevate Your Profile** at the centre of a high-visibility, multi-government process aligned with Canada's renewed international leadership agenda.

FUNDING PARTNERS WILL:

- Gain early access to expert findings and policy recommendations before public release.
- Shape one of the first major international reform responses to the current humanitarian crisis.
- Receive recognition as a partner in a high-visibility, multi-government policy process.
- Engage directly with WRMC's global network of leaders, ministers, and senior UN officials.

FUNDING TIERS:

- \$250K — Lead Partner:** Recognition as lead partner across all press, materials, and public communications; branding and logo placement at project events; opportunity for introductory remarks at key convenings (roundtable, conference).
- \$100K — Supporting Partner:** Recognition as a project partner in press materials and public communications; branding and logo placement at project events.

PROJECT BUDGET

Seed funding secured	\$250,000
In-kind commitments	\$162,000
	Remaining to raise: \$388,000
Total project budget	\$800,000

WRMC has secured \$412K of the \$800K budget and is actively collaborating with partners and sponsors to raise the remaining \$388K. All amounts expressed in CAN\$.

World Refugee & Migration Council

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