

# **Women in Refugee Law (WiRL)**

**2025/26 Public Seminar Series**

## **International Refugee Law and the Global Compact - Where are the Women?**

**Monday 27 April 2026**

**10:00am-11:15am (EDT) / 3.00pm-4.15pm (BST) / 2:00pm- 3:15pm (UTC)**

## **Recent Developments in International Refugee Law - Global Compact on Refugees**

**Professor James C. Simeon**  
**School of Public Policy and Administration**  
**Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies**  
**York University**  
**Toronto, Ontario, Canada**  
[jcsimeon@yorku.ca](mailto:jcsimeon@yorku.ca)

# Recent Developments in International Refugee Law - Global Compact on Refugees

## PRESENTATION OUTLINE

### **1. The Broader Context – The World at War**

What is the relationship between armed conflict and forced displacement?

### **2. The State of International Law and International Refugee Law**

Blatant violations in international law and reducing the number of asylum seekers.

### **3. The *2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants***

A multi-stakeholder approach to dealing with mass influx situations.

### **4. The *2018 Global Compact on Refugees***

Coordinating the international response to large refugee flows and protracted refugee situations.

### **5. “Migration and Human Rights in the Age of the Global Compacts” – Four Thematic Questions**

Assessing the Global Compacts across four thematic questions.

### **6. Concluding Reflections**

## The Broader Context – The World at War

It is relevant to begin with some pertinent points regarding the state of the world today. The Geneva Academy, Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law, Rule of Law in Armed Conflict Portal (RULAC) classifies all situations of violence as armed conflict under International Humanitarian Law and has identified 110-armed conflicts in the world today. They breakdown as follows:

Middle East and North Africa	45
Africa	35
Asia	21
Europe	7
Latin America	6

Geneva Academy, <https://archives.geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts.html>. (accessed April 24, 2026)

The UNHCR’s flagship annual publication, *Global Trends in Forced Displacement*, reported that there were 123.2 million forcibly displaced people in 2024. *The report notes that displacement has doubled over the last decade.*

UNHCR, Global Trends, 12 June 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>. (accessed April 24, 2026)

The UNHCR’s 2025 *Mid-Year Trends* report states that, “similar to recent years, two-thirds of refugees and other people in need of international protection are from just five countries: **Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, Ukraine and Venezuela.**”

UNHCR, Mid-Year Trends, 4 November 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trends>.

The State of International Law and International Refugee Law

The state of international law and international refugee law is far from sanguine. Recent examples of the violations on the prohibition of the use of force, that are contrary to the UN Charter and international law, include:

- **U.S. – Israel Attack and Ongoing Military Operations on Iran** (since February 28, 2026)
- **U.S. Operations in Venezuela and Rendition of its President, Nicolas Maduro** (January 3, 2026)
- **Russia's Invasion of the Ukraine** (since February 24, 2022)
- **China's Military Buildup in the South China Sea with military bases.** (starting in 2013-2014)

Since the US Trump Administration has come to office it has been systematically dismantled its asylum system. The situation in the US is well-known with the crackdown on so-called illegal migrants, and so on.

The United States is setting the *negative example* that is influencing other countries such as Canada that recently passed Bill C-12, *Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act*, on March 26, 2026, that places a one year limitation on making a claim for asylum, and those who enter Canada between ports of entry along the Canada US border will only have 14 days to make an asylum claim. *It limits the ability to seek refugee protection in Canada.* For instance, it enables the mass cancellations of immigration documents and the removal of inactive asylum cases from the system.

In the UK the *Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill* (now the *2025 Act*) treats asylum claimants as security threats, imposes a 20 year wait time for permanent residence, limits refugee status for 2.5 years and makes status dependent on regular reviews of whether their country of origin is safe to return, it removes accommodation and financial support for certain asylum seekers, and much more. Essentially, this legislation restricts asylum rights to reduce the number of asylum seekers seeking entry to the UK.

*The intentions are the same in the US, Canada, and the UK, to reduce the number of asylum seekers.*

## The 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants

The *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants* is the United Nation's commitment *to protect the human rights of all forcibly displaced people, focusing on sharing responsibility for host countries, ensuring education for refugee children, and strengthening global migration governance.*

The two annexes are: **Annex I, A Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework**; and, **Annex II, Towards a global compact for safe, orderly, and regular migration**. The declaration calls for the adoption of a **Global Compact on Refugees** and a **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration** by 2018, as outlined in its two respective Annexes.

The declaration brought the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** into the UN system to strengthen global migration management.

UN member states committed to provide immediate financial and logistical support to countries and communities hosting large numbers of refugees.

What is noteworthy is the first Annex, the **Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework**, charged the UNHCR, in coordination with States, to develop a broad *multi-stakeholder approach to deal with mass influx situations*. There would be a different **Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework** for each large movement of refugees. What is envisioned is a detailed program of action on the part of the international community to address large refugee flows while honoring and respecting the rights of refugees in international law.

The search for *durable solutions* for those forcibly displaced is a key feature of the **Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework**.

## The 2018 Global Compact on Refugees

The *Global Compact on Refugees* (GCR) is a non-legally binding framework designed to strengthen the international response to large-scale refugee movements and protracted refugee situations.

The four key interlinked, interdependent, and voluntary objectives of the GCR are:

- *Ease the Pressures on Host States* – The GCR seeks to establish a more equitable sharing system for the protection of refugees.
- *Enhance Refugee Self-Reliance* – Promoting opportunities for refugees to be self-reliant and to contribute to local economies.
- *Expand Access to Third Country Solutions* – Increase availability for resettlement and other legal pathways for refugees.
- *Support Conditions in Countries of Origin* – Help to create the conditions for safe and dignified voluntary repatriation.

The three key implementation methods include:

- *Global Refugee Forums* (GRF) – Held every four years at the ministerial level to allow for pledges in contributions, share best practices, and assess progress.
- *Support Platforms* – Established to assist specific refugee situations through the mobilization of political, financial, and technical support.
- *High Level Officials Meetings* – Held between the GRFs to maintain momentum and review progress.

“Migration and Human Rights in the Age of the Global Compacts” –

Four Thematic Questions

Professor Elspeth Guild and I have been co-editing a research topic on “**Migration and Human Rights in the Age of the Global Compacts**” that takes a broad multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to the research topic. Please see this MDPI research topic page at

<https://www.mdpi.com/topics/YZR1MQ87U9#:~:text=World%2Dwide%20migration%20levels%20have,remain%20in%20their%20host%20country.>

*The four thematic questions that this research topic poses are:*

1. **Has there been any advancement of protection of refugee and migrant rights since the adoption of these Global Compacts?**

Advancements have included *structured, multi-stakeholder participation* (e.g., [Global Refugee Forum](#)), *the expansion of refugee resettlement pathways*, and *a stronger recognition of migrant rights in international law*.

The human rights approach of the *Global Compacts* calls upon states to respect the *inherent dignity of migrants*. Nonetheless, implementation has been inconsistent, with some nations focusing more on migration management than human rights protection.

Implementation is dependent on *voluntary state pledges and monitoring*. But does this simply address the symptoms rather than the “**root causes**” of forced displacement?

**2. Has there been any variation in the application and implementation of these Global Compacts and what can be learned from one or the other in the progressive development of the rights of refugees and/or migrants?**

There is significant variation in the implementation of the *Global Compacts* that are driven by their *non-binding voluntary nature, political constraints, and national sovereignty concerns amongst states*. One of the central challenges for states is turning their international commitments and support for the Global Compacts into concrete domestic action.

Despite the GCR being voluntary, it does *build on legal human rights norms* which should make it easier for States to implement the Global Compacts' principles and commitments into domestic policy responses. There are *noticeable gaps, however, between what some states have reported and what has been their national practice*.

**3. What lessons can be learned from how the UNHCR, and the IOM, have managed these two Global Compacts?**

Some of the key lesson learned appear to be the necessity of *multi-stakeholder engagement*, including non-state actors, the *value of formalizing review mechanisms*, like the *Global Refugee Forum*, and the extraordinary challenge of *merging humanitarian protection needs with state-centric migration management* desires.

Despite the Global Compacts not being legally binding they have proven to offer *a tangible framework for setting norms, encouraging state cooperation, and establishing "best practices,"* showing that normative authority and voluntary commitments can drive action.

#### 4. What is the future of these two unprecedented Global Compacts on refugees and migrants?

The GCR seeks to transform how the world responds to refugee crises, moving from *temporary, emergency-based responses* to *long-term, sustainable solutions*.

A key aspect of the GCR is to strengthen *burden-sharing* from low- and medium-income States, that host the vast majority of the world's refugees, to high-income States through *more funding* and *resettlement pathways*.

The **Global Refugee Forum** is playing an important role in pledging concrete support, in “three-year-cycles,” **to expand resettlement and other pathways to provide more durable solutions to the world's refugees.**

There is an effort to achieve stronger partnerships with development actors, such as the World Bank, to support host states, rather than simply the provision of humanitarian aid.

However, one must be mindful of the serious challenges confronting the Global Compacts and the world community as a whole. For instance, the *rising anti-migrant sentiments* in many regions of the world today. The difficulties attendant to fulfilling *voluntary pledges and commitments* over a sustained period of time. Not addressing the “**root causes**” of conflict induced displacement that accounts for the vast majority of both internally and externally displaced people.

## Concluding Reflections

The vast majority of the world's forcibly displaced persons are due to *armed conflict*. The number of forcibly displaced persons *has doubled over the last decade*, due, in no small part to the number of *protracted armed conflicts* that are taking place in the world today.

Directly related to this is the fact that international legal norms, that have helped to maintain international peace and security and prosperity, are under threat by the major world powers. *The outbreak of hostilities and the blatant acts of aggression, and the commission of war crimes, has undermined international law.*

Further, there has been a regression of international refugee rights, led by the United States, that is limiting access to refuge. This is evident in a number of other jurisdictions, including, Canada and the United Kingdom.

The *2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants* sought to protect the human rights of migrants and refugees and was an effort to try and address mass forced displacement through greater burden-sharing and it also called for two Global Compacts: one on refugees and another on migration.

The *2018 Global Compact on Refugees*, a non-legally binding agreement, was intended to strengthen the response to *large scale refugee movements* and for *situations of protracted displacement*.

*Have the Global Compacts had their intended effect and what are their long-term prospects?*

There has been some progress in advancing the rights of refugees and developing the institutional arrangements to continue the mechanisms to address large refugee flows. While recognizing the necessity of dealing with the "*root cause*" of the vast majority of forced displacement, *protracted armed conflict*, there has been precious little actually done to address this principal cause of the world's forcibly displaced, *protracted armed conflict*.