

## **What PRM has helped break, it must now help repair.**

By Poor Richard

The State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) oversees billions of dollars in U.S. aid to refugees worldwide, oversees the U.S. refugee resettlement program, and conducts humanitarian and migration diplomacy. Historically, the bureau's lean administrative structure, deep expertise, and hard-headed, pragmatic brand of humanitarianism earned it broad bipartisan support. In recent years, however, PRM's work has been deeply politicized in support of a far-left agenda. A new administration has the opportunity, the responsibility, and the electoral mandate to reform the bureau. Under proper leadership, PRM can repair the damage ruinous policies have inflicted on American workers and communities, helping secure our borders and pioneering a new global migration regime based on the rule of law and democratic accountability.

Refugee resettlement is the most urgent item to address: It directly and materially impacts the prosperity and social fabric of communities across the nation. As part of its de facto open borders agenda, the Biden White House increased resettlement to levels not seen in decades -- over 100,000 people in fiscal year 2024. PRM set up an array of new programs to reach the ambitious White House resettlement targets. One was a network of facilities across Latin America to encourage migratory flows into the United States. Another, the Welcome Corps, transforms resettlement into an entitlement program, turbo-charging chain migration by effectively granting refugees greater rights to import friends and relatives than U.S. citizens enjoy -- subsidized by the taxpayer. Still more troubling, PRM empowered radical left-wing NGOs to name and fast-track individuals for resettlement with little or no oversight. In their rush to open the floodgates, these programs leave massive openings for fraud, human trafficking, and other abuses.

The Biden migration wave has overwhelmed local schools and social services, driven inflation upward, depressed wages, and exacerbated the affordable housing crisis. Americans are a welcoming people but their generosity has been abused, forfeiting what was once broad, bipartisan support for refugee resettlement. Resettled refugees are a numerically modest component of the Biden influx, but they come at the highest direct expense to federal and local taxpayers. Most speak little or no English and have limited education, making them largely reliant on welfare benefits. As our communities struggle to cope with historically unprecedented levels of immigration, resettlement should be halted fully, immediately, and indefinitely.

America does more for refugees than any country on earth. PRM leads those efforts by channeling billions in aid through the UN and NGOs -- who take a cut in overhead charges. Today, however, our nation faces a spiraling debt crisis where interest payments already surpass defense spending. Every marginal dollar spent is borrowed, driving inflation, crowding out productive spending such as investments in the industrial base, and forcing our children deeper into debt. That framing should inform every spending decision. Humanitarian aid should go only to life-saving assistance or to advance concrete U.S. interests.

Applying that lens, some PRM spending is ripe for the cutting. A first priority is to audit every project in the Western hemisphere to determine which facilitate illegal migration to the United States and terminate them immediately. That's a start, but not enough: There must be consequences for NGOs or UN agencies involved in undermining our laws and border security. Funding to NGOs for "advocacy," almost invariably for far-left pet causes, can also end. We can cut aid to Ukrainian refugees, a response that is over-funded and rightfully a European responsibility. UNRWA and UNFPA should be zeroed out. We should also carefully consider whether to run assistance through NGOs with lobbying arms: There's no need for U.S. government refugee aid to subsidize their domestic political agendas.

Beyond purely humanitarian ends, PRM assistance can also serve the national interest by advancing President Trump's border security and migration agenda. Aid programs can support and incentivize the return and reintegration of illegal immigrants, bad-faith "asylum-seekers," deportees, and voluntary returnees from the United States. Such projects, which also benefit sending countries, can be tailored to encourage foreign government cooperation with the new Administration's broader migration strategy.

Migration diplomacy offers a more ambitious way for PRM to support U.S. interests: using its institutional role, relationships, staffing, and funding to lead root-and-branch reform of the global migration regime. Migration is a defining issue of this century. The UN estimates a billion people are "on the move" worldwide, a number expected to grow in the coming decades. Protecting American workers and communities from the destabilizing consequences of mass migration should be a top PRM objective. The current system governing refugees and asylum, established before jet passenger travel and long-distance phone calls, is no longer fit for purpose in a connected world of instant information and cheap, easy travel. It incentivizes and exacerbates cross-border flows. Governments are finally beginning to respond to voters fed up with social, economic, and demographic change imposed against their will. Now is the time for U.S. leadership to forge a new global migration regime that gives primacy to sovereignty, the rule of law, and democratic accountability.

PRM can convene like-minded countries to develop new principles and harmonize policies. International migration and law enforcement working groups can share information and cooperate to suppress human smuggling, just as with drugs and other forms of transnational crime. PRM expertise can also support bilateral diplomacy with source and transit countries, using carrots and sticks to enlist them in clamping down on illegal migratory flows. A virtuous cycle is possible. Increasing the costs and decreasing the likelihood of success means fewer people will attempt dangerous journeys, allowing the same level of resources to focus on a smaller number of individuals, in turn further reducing the value proposition of illegal migration.

The most important changes to disincentivize illegal migration and regain control of our borders will require legislative action - for example, codifying a requirement that those not seeking asylum in a safe transit country may not do so in the United States, or suspending agreements that limit a sovereign migration policy. PRM can coordinate with allies in Congress to develop legislation that leads the way in establishing new international migration norms.

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