The Mobility Key
Realizing the Potential of Refugee Travel Documents

BEYOND TERRITORIAL ASYLUM: MAKING PROTECTION WORK IN A BORDERED WORLD

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Executive Summary

Refugees' ability to travel internationally is often restricted, despite growing efforts by international and nongovernmental organizations and some destination states to create more and safer mobility options. Regardless of their travel goals—whether attempting to safely settle permanently in another country, such as through family reunification, or taking up a more short-term opportunity for work, study, or leisure—refugees are often unable to acquire the documents they need to make the trip. This restricts refugees' agency and unnecessarily puts additional pressure on major host countries by blocking refugees from taking up opportunities abroad.

Travel documents are critical facilitators of global mobility, providing a widely recognizable and verifiable form of identification while also affirming the link between the document holder and the issuing country. They are required at nearly all stages of international travel, from obtaining pre-travel authorization to enter a destination country and physically leaving the country one is in, to being checked after arriving at a destination-country airport or land or sea border, to serving as the basis for a permit to work or study. But refugees are not able to safely use the most common travel document—a passport issued by their country of origin—and therefore are often unable to travel safely and legally.

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Some travel document options do exist for refugees. The most common is the Convention Travel Document (named for its basis in the 1951 Refugee Convention), which is issued by a country of asylum. When well designed and implemented, Convention Travel Documents—and similar documents issued by countries not party to the Refugee Convention—act like passports, allowing entry into countries that recognize them and subsequent return to the issuing country. But in practice, refugees face a number of challenges acquiring and using these and other travel documents:

▶ **Issuing countries may not have sufficient staff capacity or resources.** This is particularly a challenge when there is a need to issue refugee travel documents at scale. The countries that host the most refugees, many of which are low- and middle-income countries, may lack the funds to procure and run the specialized machinery and materials needed to adhere to international security standards.

► **Processes to obtain refugee travel documents are often lengthy and procedurally difficult.** Refugees are often required to navigate onerous documentation requirements, undertake long and costly trips to national capitals or other major cities for appointments, and wait through lengthy procedures that can delay their travel or even lead to cancellation.

► **Transit and destination countries may not accept certain refugee travel documents as valid and may limit refugees' access to visas.** While this may be the result of official policies, it may also be due to consular and border officials' lack of training to recognize refugee travel documents or understand what visas are available for refugees, leading to the needless denial of their applications.

To remove these barriers to refugee mobility, concrete policy and operational changes are needed.

► **Countries of asylum** should consider adapting their laws, policies, and practices to make refugee travel documents as easy to acquire and use as possible. First, they should work to align refugee travel documents with national passports in terms of design and privileges conferred, with both issued by the same specialized agency and included in the same planning and funding processes. Second, they should streamline the process for refugees to acquire travel documents, for example by enhancing data sharing and reducing bottlenecks between government agencies. Finally, governments should work to limit logistical challenges posed to refugees, including by allowing refugees to submit their applications to offices closer to where they live and by facilitating remote interviews and meetings.

► **Destination and transit countries** should identify and address discrepancies and gaps in how they handle the travel documents of refugees trying to enter or travel through their territory. This could include working with the countries that issue the documents (primarily countries of asylum) to build greater trust in the security of these documents and the thoroughness of the related vetting of refugee travelers, and to agree on expanding visa access while receiving greater assurances that refugees will return to the country of asylum when their visa period ends. They should also enhance the training of consular and border officials so that they can more readily recognize refugee travel documents and process them appropriately.

► **Donors and international organizations** should provide capacity support and funding to countries of asylum for travel document processes. This can include contributing funds to procure the necessary machinery and software, as well as training and institutional strengthening for document-issuing agencies and their refugee agency counterparts. They could also consider broadening existing development initiatives that focus on expanding access to key identity documents in low- and middle-income countries (such as the World Bank's Identification for Development initiative) to include travel documents for refugees and other target populations. Finally, they could provide additional support to regional mobility integration processes such as those being undertaken in East Africa and the Horn of Africa.

At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, several countries of asylum and destination, as well as nongovernmental stakeholders, made pledges to enhance

access to and usability of refugee travel documents. These specific commitments, along with broader pledges to enhance refugee mobility, can form the foundation for new efforts to identify specific and resolvable challenges and to implement policy and operational changes to address them. And as wider discussions take place about the future of mobility, international organizations, governments, and other experts can mainstream refugee issues into these conversations. If this momentum can be translated into concrete action, states can more fully realize the potential of refugee travel documents, expanding refugees' safe mobility options and easing pressure on the global protection system.

1   Introduction

The challenges facing the global protection system are immense and varied, but many of them can be traced to refugees' inability to legally move onward from first countries of asylum.[1] There are numerous obstacles to onward movement, such as movement restrictions within a host country and many refugees' lack of resources for travel; however, the lack of a valid travel document poses a distinct legal barrier to refugees' access to opportunities abroad.

Without a travel document that is accepted by the country of destination, refugees (like any other noncitizen or nonresident) cannot enter—and thus cannot access opportunities to study or work abroad, reunite with family members who have settled elsewhere, or, if living in a border community, access services and markets in a neighboring country. And while there are many porous borders that can be crossed without such documents in low- and middle-income countries, where most of the world's refugees live,[2] having a travel document still provides refugees with proof of identity and legal status, making their border crossing experience easier and reducing their vulnerability to abuse by authorities.

Lack of a travel document not only severely restricts refugees' agency, it also unnecessarily puts additional pressure on major refugee-hosting countries. More often than not, refugees do initially want to remain close to their country of origin, due to their hopes of returning, cultural similarities with their neighbors, and remaining links to their home country. But these ties, when they exist, can lose their strength as displacement lengthens, and over time more refugees become willing to consider their options to move and seek better opportunities elsewhere. However, for refugees without documents, the inability to travel keeps them in one place and thus contributes to their increasingly protracted stay in their first country of asylum. By contrast, the lack of mobility restrictions (documentation or otherwise) facing Ukrainians in Europe has allowed them to settle in a wider range of countries and eased pressure on frontline states.[3]

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Long-term solutions for refugees in protracted displacement situations are often limited. Many refugees do not see their countries of origin as safe or stable enough to return to; few first countries of asylum are willing to provide refugees with the opportunity for permanent integration and eventual citizenship; and the number of third-country resettlement slots is well below what is needed globally.[4] Meanwhile, host-country policies often restrict refugees' ability to become self-reliant, leaving them dependent on an ever dwindling pool of humanitarian assistance.[5] Policies that limit refugees' ability to move freely in a host country or that restrict their settlement to remote rural encampments, restric-

tions on their right to work, and challenges accessing financial services make it difficult to establish livelihoods and rebuild capital. Thus, opportunities outside of a host country's borders, both permanent and short term, are attractive. But without legal means to travel internationally, they are also often unattainable.

Travel documents have been an integral part of the global refugee protection system since its inception.[6] Over time, however, their role receded in prominence as facilitating mobility became less of a priority and attention turned toward supporting refugees in the neighboring countries that host the vast majority of them. But since the lead-up to the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016, recognition has been growing incrementally within the international community that refugees' ability to move onward from a first country of asylum is crucial to the functioning of the global protection system.[7] With the subsequent increase in focus on complementary pathways (e.g., education and labor mobility programs for refugees) and heightened concerns about irregular and unsafe onward movement from first countries of asylum and through transit countries,[8] the time is right to re-engage on travel documents—to understand their critical importance, the challenges refugees face to acquiring and using of them, and the opportunities that better, more accessible travel documents could open for refugees. The urgency of this issue is reflected in the push made by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum for countries to work toward a functioning, usable travel document ecosystem.[9]

This policy brief outlines the importance of travel documents for mobility and how different types of travel documents can facilitate refugees' movement. It reviews the challenges refugees face in acquiring and using these documents and identifies potential

ways countries of asylum, transit, and destination, along with donors and international organizations, can overcome these challenges. The brief concludes by highlighting three areas in which relatively modest efforts could unleash substantial progress on this issue.

2   What Role Do Travel Documents Play in International Mobility?

Travel documents are essential to the ability of all people to move regularly across international borders. They provide a widely recognizable and verifiable form of identification while also affirming the link between the document holder and the issuing country. Passports issued by an individual's country of nationality are the most common form of travel document, but depending on the context and regional agreements, other forms of identification can be used in their place. For example, EU citizens can use their identity cards at the bloc's external borders rather than their passports, and countries can issue laissez passers—documents that allow for one-time travel across a border, often in emergencies or exceptional personal circumstances.[10]

Travel documents are typically required at a number of stages in a cross-border journey—first, to apply for a visa or other predeparture authorization to enter another country; second, to leave a country (being checked at airport passport controls or by gate agents or at border crossings); and then to enter a new country. While in another country, these documents serve as a primary form of identification. And during longer stays, travel documents are often needed to register with local authorities and get a residence, student, or work permit. Finally, travelers use these documents to return to the country that issued them.

The following features are important to travel documents' ability to act as standardized, accessible, and widely recognized tools for international travel:

▶ **Allow for return to the issuing country.** This is critical for two reasons: it ensures that travelers will not be stranded abroad, and it ensures that the destination country will not become legally responsible for them in the long term. Without the latter guarantee, destination countries are unlikely to allow travelers to enter their territory for fear of them staying.

▶ **Accessible renewal options.** Because travel documents are issued for a limited duration, holders need to apply to renew them periodically if they want to keep traveling. This can usually be done either within the country of issuance or abroad. If travelers are abroad when their documents near expiration and they do not have an option to renew without returning to the issuing country, this can limit how long they can remain abroad, potentially precluding them from taking up education or labor opportunities that would last for several years.

▶ **Readable by machines and humans.** Internationally agreed-upon standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) recommend that travel documents be machine-readable, which essentially means a document is sufficiently standardized and presents information in a way that can be read by both the human eye and by specialized machines. This involves providing an individual's data using a standardized font, characters, and codes within a specified part of the document.[11] While machine readability helps to ensure standardization and document security, producing such documents requires specialized machinery,

software, and technical capacity, which is not readily available in some lower-income countries. All 193 ICAO Member States issue some form of machine-readable travel document, though not all countries are able to issue these to all eligible applicants.[12]

▶ **Contain biometric information.** Travel documents may additionally include an electronic chip with biometric information, such as a face profile, fingerprints, or other unique personal information.[13] This allows border and consular officials to more easily verify that a document's holder is its legitimate owner, including by using automated verification. The process of issuing these documents tends to be more expensive and requires additional expertise than issuing documents that are machine readable but lack biometric data. Despite this, roughly 140 countries, including many that host refugees, issue travel documents with electronic chips.[14]

In most cases, refugees cannot safely use travel documents issued by their countries of origin. Doing so could result in loss of refugee status, which is premised on an individual's inability to avail themselves of the protection of their country of origin. At the very least, traveling with an origin-country document would put a refugee at risk of being returned to their country of origin once the visa or other stay permit they gained using that travel document expires.[15] In practice, many refugees do not have a valid origin-country travel document, whether because they lost it somewhere along their journey or because it has been damaged or expired. When a refugee has a passport that has expired, renewing the document is often not possible; this would entail either returning to their country of origin (and thus, potentially jeopardizing their refugee status) or visiting a consulate in their host country (potentially exposing them to harm). And some refugees, such as

many Afghans displaced in Pakistan and Iran or children born to refugee parents who have already fled their origin country, have never had a passport.[16]

Without a passport or other usable travel document, refugees cannot access opportunities outside of their country of asylum. They are unable to travel for study, work, or other mobility opportunities—even those specifically designed to facilitate their movement. For example, the U.S. humanitarian parole program for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans that was created in 2023 requires applicants to have a travel document, which many Haitians do not have.[17] Not only are travel documents required during the application process for many of these programs, but they are also needed to apply for the necessary visas, board a plane, or cross a border. This limits refugees' access not only to long-term solutions but also to the regular opportunities in life that are generally available to nonrefugees.

3   How Alternative Documents Facilitate Refugees' Travel

The challenges to mobility posed by refugees' lack of traditional travel documents can only be resolved by governments providing and accepting alternatives. Which government provides a refugee with an alternative document and what form that document takes, however, will depend on who is willing and able to take responsibility for the refugee.

There are three main types of alternative travel document: one issued by the country of asylum, which is valid for general use; one issued by a destination country, often where a refugee has a specific approved opportunity (such as education or a job); and

one issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) when no other entity can or will.

A.   Documents Issued by Countries of Asylum

The primary means of facilitating refugees' travel is for the country of asylum to issue a general-use document that mimics its passport as closely as possible, providing most of the same rights and benefits to refugees as passports do for the country's nationals. The most common such document is the Convention Travel Document (CTD), which was established by the 1951 Refugee Convention. In theory, convention signatory states are obligated to issue these to refugees "lawfully staying in their territory," except when this cannot be done for national security or public order reasons, and they should recognize CTDs issued by other signatories.[18] The convention specifies what a refugee travel document should look like, providing a template with the aim of ensuring that CTDs are widely recognized and allow for ease of travel.[19] This has been bolstered by ICAO and UNHCR guidelines for ensuring that CTDs are machine readable.[20] However, in practice, not all signatory states issue CTDs, and not all recognize all CTDs issued by other states (see Section 4.B). In addition, states that are not party to the convention, even when they host substantial refugee populations, are under no obligation to issue or recognize such documents.[21]

The primary means of facilitating refugees' travel is for the country of asylum to issue a general-use document that mimics its passport as closely as possible.

Countries that are not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention sometimes issue alternative general-use travel documents. These may be developed for specific populations within host countries, such as Palestinian refugees in Lebanon who are eligible for a special travel document, primarily recognized by other Arab countries and valid for up to five years.[22] In other cases, refugees may be able to apply for an alien's passport, which is issued by the country of legal residence to foreigners who are unable to acquire a travel document from their country of origin and which allows them to travel and return.[23]

Often, governments have broad authority to issue travel documents to non-nationals at their discretion, even when there is no official process or policy for doing so. Nepal, for example, has issued travel documents to Tibetan and Bhutanese refugees, even though the country is not a signatory to the 1951 convention and does not have a domestic refugee regime.[24] Finally, in countries that issue CTDs, there may be alternative travel documents that function similarly for individuals who do not qualify for refugee status but do qualify for another form of protection (for example, under the European Union's subsidiary protection status). These documents tend to have narrower recognition, however, limiting the destinations to which refugees can travel on them.

B.   Documents Issued by Destination States

When countries of asylum are unwilling or unable to issue a refugee travel document, destination states may step in to provide one—usually valid only for a single use, such as to facilitate a refugee's arrival along a designated pathway. Canada, for example, issues a single-journey travel document to refugees without other travel documents who are moving permanently to Canada, through resettlement or certain study or work pathways.[25] Similarly, Italy's humanitarian corridor program relies on one-way Italian-issued travel documents to facilitate arrival to Italy, with beneficiaries ultimately acquiring CTDs after their refugee status is adjudicated.[26] This approach relieves first countries of asylum of the need to issue travel documentation, leveraging the fact that destination states often have greater bureaucratic capacity.

In other cases, countries issue more generic limited-use documents that allow for temporary travel abroad or temporary entry. In most contexts, these laissez passers are issued by destination countries to allow a refugee to enter. Governments may also have the discretion to waive certain travel document requirements, although this hinges on refugees or consular officials knowing the waiver exists and being able to overcome bureaucratic obstacles.[27] This also does not resolve the need for travel documents in transit countries. In addition, the number of countries willing to regularly issue a single-use travel document, or waive documentation requirements, for a nonimmigration purpose is limited, as they have not had the opportunity to fully assess the individual's need for protection status.

C.   The ICRC Emergency Travel Document

Finally, there are cases where, for logistical or legal reasons, no government is able or willing to issue a travel document despite a refugee needing to and being eligible for travel. In these cases of last resort, refugees may be eligible for emergency travel documents (ETDs) issued by the ICRC. For example, if a destination state does not have the legal mandate to issue a travel document in a certain country, or if the security situation prevents the refugee from accessing a destination country's consulate, ICRC will issue an ETD once the destination country has issued, or promised to issue, the refugee a visa.[28] ETDs are one-way and valid for one journey, after which they must be returned to ICRC headquarters in Geneva.[29]

While ETDs are internationally recognized documents and have been issued since 1945, some countries do not officially recognize them (in Europe, for example, Germany, Croatia, and Iceland)[30] or may recognize them only in special cases. ETDs are mostly used for family reunification, although they can be used for other humanitarian purposes such as medical travel. They can also be used to facilitate specific parts of a journey. For example, Syrian and other refugees living in Iraq have to travel to Jordan to access resettlement opportunities and do so by traveling on ETDs. In the 2010s, of the more than 29,000 ETDs issued worldwide, the vast majority were to travelers departing from the Middle East and North Africa, and the primary destinations were the Americas and Eurasia.[31]

D. *Drawbacks to Single-Use Documents*

While single-use travel documents—whether issued by a destination state or the ICRC—fill an important gap when refugees are unable to access a general-use document, they are resource intensive. For example, Canada's single-journey document is an important part of specific pathways (such as the Student Refugee Program and the Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot), but they require a significant support infrastructure: nongovernmental organizations (and often the International Organization for Migration [IOM]) help refugees apply for the travel document, book and board flights, change planes in transit airports, and greet them upon arrival.[32] Single-use documents also require significant diplomatic outreach and negotiations to ensure that the countries of departure and transit recognize this niche document type and do not delay the holder's travel.

These documents are also logistically cumbersome to use. They are often tied to, and therefore only legally valid for, a specific itinerary. When there are delays and disruptions to travel, refugees may miss

flights or connections, rendering their documents invalid. While this is resolvable, it can cause additional stress and confusion.[33] There are also challenges to using single-use documents for the same additional purposes as general-use documents, such as local registration upon arrival and applying for longer-stay visas. While refugees with single-use documents are usually in the process of acquiring longer-term documents, the delay could have an impact on their ability to establish themselves after arrival in a new country.

Single-use documents are an important stopgap in exceptional circumstances, but general-use travel documents would ideally be sufficiently easy for refugees to acquire and use that such a stopgap would rarely be needed.

Given these constraints, general-use travel documents have much greater ability to facilitate refugee mobility at scale, and the CTD remains the gold standard due to its international recognition. Single-use documents are an important stopgap in exceptional circumstances, but general-use travel documents would ideally be sufficiently easy for refugees to acquire and use that such a stopgap would rarely be needed.

4 Barriers to Acquiring and Using Travel Documents

When well implemented, general-use refugee travel documents issued by countries of asylum, in particular CTDs, can be easy to acquire and use. But for

many refugees, obstacles rooted in both policy and practice can make this option difficult or impossible.

A.   *Barriers in Countries of Asylum*

Some of the barriers that refugees encounter in their country of asylum affect everyone's access to travel documents, while others are specific to refugees.

Lack of State Capacity to Issue Travel Documents

In order to issue travel documents in a timely manner and at scale, governments need to have sufficient capacity, including enough staff to process applications and the systems to run security and legal-status checks. But in many low- and middle-income countries of asylum, this capacity is limited.[34]

These countries may also lack the funds to procure or operate the specialized machinery and materials to personalize travel documents in line with international standards.[35] Machine-readable documents, for example, require software and printers with specific security features, as well as ink, paper, and booklets from specialized vendors, often international, making them much costlier than handwritten travel documents.[36] This can lead to shortages, such in Lebanon, where demand for passports outstripped the government's limited supply of blank passport booklets, increasing wait times and backlogs throughout 2022 and 2023 until additional booklets could be procured.[37] Similar delays occurred in Ghana in 2022, when pandemic-induced supply-chain issues delayed the delivery of blank booklets, and Nigeria in 2023, when a dispute over access to foreign currency delayed the importing of booklets.[38] When countries have limited resources, some governments may prioritize issuing travel documents to nationals rather than refugees. And when countries do not procure refugee travel document materials through

the same vendors and processes as those for passports, this can increase the government's costs.

Previously, UNHCR could help overcome these issues by providing host-country governments with blank CTD booklets that could be personalized for each refugee. These booklets were procured by UNHCR headquarters in Geneva and then distributed to UNHCR country offices. However, beginning in 2015 with the adoption of machine-readable CTDs (MRCTDs), UNHCR has phased this practice out, as the existing UNHCR booklets cannot be made machine readable.[39] Rather than providing machine-readable booklets, UNHCR and ICAO advocate for states to issue their own MRCTDs along with machine-readable passports and other travel documents in order to promote national governments' ownership of the travel document process.[40] This leaves a gap, however, when states do not do so.

Restrictive Policies and Laws

In countries that are not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, access to general-use travel documents is severely legally restricted, with only a few options available (such as Lebanon's travel document for Palestinians and the alien's passport). In other cases, some states that are party to the 1951 convention do not have the laws or policies in place to issue CTDs.[41] And even when countries have asylum frameworks and those include provisions for issuing refugee travel documents, they may not have a functional process for doing so (see the next section on procedural barriers).

Countries of asylum may also have mobility or border policies that prevent refugees from using travel documents once issued. In some countries, such as Kenya, travelers are required to obtain an exit permit or visa before leaving. Refugees who have their travel facilitated by a destination state, such as those on specific education and labor pathways, often have the exit visa taken care of for them by a nongovern-

mental partner or the IOM, though the government of the country of asylum may still withhold permission for political reasons. Refugees traveling alone have to get the visa themselves, which can be costly and cumbersome.[42]

Finally, when refugees need to renew travel documents issued by a country of asylum, some countries allow them to do so at an embassy abroad but others require them to return and start the application process from scratch. This disrupts refugees' ability to travel long-term and potentially their ability to work or study abroad.

Onerous Procedural Requirements

Obtaining a general-use travel document often requires refugees to navigate a complex set of procedural and bureaucratic hurdles. They may face many of the same hurdles as host-country nationals—submitting supporting documentation and biometric information, showing up to appointments, paying fees, and waiting as the machinery of government bureaucracy grinds on. But at each step, these challenges can be exacerbated by different aspects of refugees' unique situation.

Documentation requirements may be more difficult for refugees to fulfill. While all applicants for travel documents need to prove their identity and eligibility, refugees may have more than the usual difficulty providing the required identity documents because they either never had them or have lost them. In some countries, applicants may be required to provide additional supporting documentation. In many East African countries, for example, applicants for travel documents are required to submit a letter of recommendation from local authorities, but doing so may be more difficult for refugees than for host-community members.[43] When applying for travel documents, refugees are also often required to provide their country of asylum with a justification for travel (such as a job offer, school acceptance letter, or conference invitation)—information a destination country often requires as part of a visa application (see Section 4.B on challenges obtaining visas) but not something that is part of most standard passport application processes. Such requirements reduce the flexibility of refugees' travel options and make it difficult to take advantage of opportunities that come up at short notice.

The length of time it takes to process refugee travel documents may delay them well past when refugees need them—for example, to start a school program or take up a job abroad.

Logistical challenges can also make the application process difficult, especially for refugees who live in remote areas or have limited freedom of internal movement. In many cases, refugees must travel to the national capital or another major city to submit their application, sit for interviews, and shepherd the application between different departments. Many refugees live far from these cities, and thus must make multiple long and costly journeys, often requiring overnight stays, to attend the required appointments.[44] The fees the government charges for travel documents can be prohibitively expensive for some refugees with very limited resources. This is the case even when the fees for refugees are the same as or less than those for nationals, such as in South Africa and Uganda, where refugee travel documents and passports for the country's nationals cost roughly USD 31 and USD 40, respectively.[45]

The length of time it takes to process refugee travel documents may delay them well past when refugees need them—for example, to start a school program or take up a job abroad. Refugees in Uganda who want to study in Kenya often are only able to travel weeks after the semester starts, and often have to defer their start dates to the following semester be-

cause they did not receive their travel documents in time.[46] These delays may also disincentivize schools and employers from offering opportunities to refugees, since there is no guarantee that the refugees will be able to arrive in a timely manner.

B. Barriers in Transit and Destination Countries

Once a refugee has obtained a travel document, using it often requires overcoming additional barriers imposed by transit and destination countries.

States' Nonrecognition of Refugee Travel Documents

Refugees cannot use their travel documents if destination and transit states do not recognize them as valid. This poses challenges at all points in the travel process. While some governments are explicit about the countries from which they recognize refugee travel documents, many others are not, which can lead to confusion, as passports issued by the same countries to their nationals are typically recognized. For example, refugees holding Ugandan CTDs are often not allowed into Kenya, or have their visas arbitrarily and indefinitely delayed,[47] while Ugandan passport holders are able to enter Kenya relatively freely under the East African Community's free movement agreements.[48] Similar discrepancies in document recognition occur in Europe's Schengen zone, where most countries recognize the vast majority of refugee travel documents issued by non-Schengen states, but four countries—Estonia, Latvia, Poland, and Slovakia—consistently do not, with little publicly available explanation of why.[49]

Once in the destination country, refugees may struggle to use their travel documents to complete administrative steps that normally require a passport, such as registering for or renewing a student or worker residence permit, because their refugee travel documents are not recognized as valid iden-

tity documents.[50] This can be a particular challenge for those traveling on single-use documents, such as students traveling on a laissez passer or ETD. In these cases, their country of study may be able to issue a general-use document, such as Italy's title of courtesy, a form of alien's passport.[51] But as with other less-used documents, they may pose challenges due to lack of widespread recognition.

Challenges Obtaining Visas

Even when their travel documents are recognized, refugees may face particular difficulty in getting a visa—even when they have an official reason for entering a country, such as education or conference attendance, and documentation of a return flight.[52] Refugees often require specific advocacy from a sponsor or meeting organizer to have their visa granted in time. For example, some refugees attending global meetings in Switzerland facilitated by UNHCR report having an easier time getting a visa because of UNHCR's support,[53] while those who do not have this support often face delays or nonresponses. However, this assistance does not guarantee that refugees will be issued a visa. Some refugees applying for visas to attend the December 2023 Global Refugee Forum in Geneva had their applications denied, despite having institutional support, while other refugees from their organization had their applications granted.[54] Visa delays and denials not only affect refugees financially, since they may lose money from having to cancel their travel, but also limit the professional development and continuing education opportunities available to them.

The reluctance of states to provide visas to refugees may stem from concerns about refugees being unwilling or unable to return to their country of asylum.[55] Intent to return is a requirement for obtaining many nonimmigrant visas. For example, applicants for U.S. student visas must prove they do not intend to stay permanently (i.e., do not have "immigrant intent"), which refugees should be able to prove with

a travel document issued by their country of asylum. However, without a travel document, they cannot prove that they have durable status, and if their travel document does not explicitly state that they can return, consular officers may interpret their status as not durable.[56] Similarly, some refugees applying for student visas to Germany have reportedly had those visas denied because consular officials viewed them as a risk for claiming asylum.[57] And for some of the refugees denied visas for the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, officials justified their decision citing insufficient proof the refugees would be able to return to their country of asylum.[58]

Officials' Unfamiliarity with Refugee Travel Documents

Refugees may also face difficulty in using their travel documents due to consular and border officials' lack of familiarity with different kinds of travel documents. These officials have a considerable amount of discretion in granting a visa or allowing someone to board a plane, and there is little disincentive to deny someone entry if the official has even small doubts about whether their documentation is valid.[59] A border official's concern about a document's validity necessitates review and approval from higher-ups, which can delay or deny travel. As such, refugees will inevitably face more scrutiny when officials are not well trained to recognize CTDs.

This is an even greater issue with less common general-use and single-use alternative travel documents. It is also an issue when a travel document is used for the first time. For example, Nigeria issues biometric MRCTDs that are widely recognized. However, when students traveling to Italy to study under a refugee-specific program attempted to get Italian visas, the Italian embassy had reportedly not seen the MRCTDs before and therefore did not recognize them. Following additional coordination with Nigerian authorities, facilitated by UNHCR, Italy agreed to accept the Nigerian MRCTDs.[60]

5   Removing Barriers and Constraints

Host and destination countries—alongside multilateral, civil-society, and private-sector partners—can take a number of concrete steps to remove obstacles to refugees' access to travel documents and thus facilitate refugee mobility. These steps—which include simplifying the application process, coordinating national standards and procedures, and bolstering personnel and technological capacity—can benefit not only refugees but also the countries' citizens and officials.

A.   Countries of Asylum

Countries of asylum can reduce barriers to access in two key ways: by aligning the travel documents they provide to refugees with those they provide to their own nationals, and by making the application process simpler and easier (both for refugees and for government officials).

Aligning Refugee Travel Documents with Travel Documents Provided to Citizens

Many of the practical barriers refugees face in acquiring and using travel documents are due in part to policies or processes that are different than those for host-country nationals. By aligning travel documents for refugees and nationals as much as possible, host countries can not only improve access to travel documents but also streamline their own internal processes.

First, the two documents should align as closely as possible in terms of their design and conditions of use. For design, they should abide by ICAO recommendations to ensure increased acceptance abroad. Rwanda, for example, revised its MRCTD so that it aligns closely—legally, practically, and visually—with its travel document for nationals.[61]

In terms of aligning documents' conditions of use, particular areas to focus on are the duration of the document's validity and its renewability outside of the country. For example, the U.S. refugee travel document is only valid for a year—and thus only usable for six months, given that many countries require that travel documents be valid for at least six more months when granting their holders entry. In contrast, U.S. passports for adults are generally valid for ten years and those for children for five years.[62] While complete parity would not make sense in the U.S. case, given refugees' eligibility for citizenship after six years (one year for permanent residence and an additional five years for citizenship), the refugee travel document's duration should be considerably lengthened.

Rwanda, for example, revised its MRCTD so that it aligns closely— legally, practically, and visually—with its travel document for nationals.

Second, the legal and bureaucratic infrastructure for issuing refugee travel documents should align as much as possible with the infrastructure for national passports and identity cards. This means first and foremost ensuring refugees are legally able to acquire a travel document. It also means that refugee travel documents should be budgeted for alongside national passports and included in procurement contracts with external vendors. In addition, governments should place responsibility for issuing refugee travel documents in the hands of the same government agency that issues passports, whether it is an identity agency or foreign ministry, rather than the agency responsible for refugee affairs. For example, in Uganda's CTD application process, the Office of the Prime Minister (the government branch responsible for the country's refugee response) is only responsible for verifying that a CTD applicant is in fact a refugee, while the Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control processes and issues

the document, allowing each ministry to work with its comparative advantage.[63] This also allows international donors and development actors to better target capacity and resource support, which can be directed solely at one agency and benefit both nationals and refugees.

Streamlining the Process of Acquiring Refugee Travel Documents

The first step in making the application for travel documents less burdensome is to reduce the amount of documentation refugees need to provide to the greatest extent possible while still maintaining security standards. In many cases, refugees applying for a travel document have already had to provide substantial documentation—such as any existing identification documents and proof of previous residence, family composition, and experiences of persecution—in order to be officially recognized as a refugee or granted another protection status in their host country.[64] When travel document applications require similar information, there is an opportunity to streamline the process by acknowledging that these documents were already collected and vetted through the refugee status determination process. Relaxing documentation requirements so that refugees do not need to provide any more documentation than a national would to obtain a passport would reduce the burden not only on refugees but also on the country's bureaucracy.

In cases where refugee status determination is not conducted, such as when refugees are recognized as in need of protection on a prima facie basis (that is, on a population-wide rather than individual basis), additional documentation might be needed before a travel document can be issued. However, refugees may still have provided some of the needed information via other host-country processes, such as applying for social support or enrolling a child in school. In these cases, governments could consider

ways to better link these other registration opportunities with the system for issuing travel documents.

Countries should also address the logistical challenges many refugees face in applying for travel documents, in particular when required appointments all take place in a host country's capital. Investing in processing capacity at decentralized locations would benefit not only refugees but host communities as well. This does not mean that document production and personalization machinery needs to be distributed throughout a country, but rather that staff at local offices are trained to process refugee travel documents (along with documents for host-community members and non-travel documents), so refugees themselves do not need to make as many costly and difficult journeys. Virtual visits are another option for reducing the need for refugees to travel to appointments.

Finally, governments should ensure that the bureaucratic infrastructure for issuing travel documents is designed to avoid bottlenecks and streamline the approval process. In Uganda, for example, while the division of labor for issuing refugee travel documents between the Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control and the Office of the Prime Minister has value (as noted above), it can also create bureaucratic delays, with refugees reporting having to attend multiple meetings in different agencies with little to no progress toward actually receiving their document.[65] By having clear timelines for communicating information between government agencies, and ensuring a refugee's information is stored in a way that is easily accessible by all agencies involved, the process can run more smoothly.

B.   *Destination and Transit Countries*

For destination and transit countries, strategies for improving access to and use of refugee travel documents include: coordinating to improve document acceptance, ensuring consular and border staff have the necessary training to recognize and process these documents, and streamlining the use of single-use documents.

Expanding Acceptance of Refugee Travel Documents

The ultimate aim of global coordination on refugee travel documents is for all countries to accept these documents and award visas to their holders in the same way as to passport holders. Achieving this goal requires addressing the specific concerns of transit and destination states, as well as building recognition of travel documents into broader cooperation frameworks.

One area where progress is feasible is in security and vetting. The recognition of travel documents, and the privileges afforded to their holders, are often contingent on the level of trust that destination states have in the security of these documents and the ability of issuing states to limit their fraudulent acquisition. In the case of refugees, a destination state may also have concerns about whether the country of asylum's refugee status determination process takes security concerns sufficiently into account.

Addressing these concerns and building needed trust could be accomplished through existing channels. For example, ICAO is an important player, given its role in promulgating travel document security standards and its relevant expertise, global membership, and ongoing collaboration with UNHCR. The organization, and in particular its implementation and capacity building working group, could serve as a forum for assessing and improving the security of refugee travel documents issued by different countries and for directing investments and capacity support.[66] Meanwhile, concerns regarding vetting during refugee status determination could be ad-

dressed through mechanisms such as the UNHCR-facilitated Asylum Capacity Support Group, which is intended to help match donor countries' offers of support with the needs of countries of asylum.[67] Finally, these mechanisms can also help educate destination countries on existing security measures in countries of asylum and identify when security and vetting concerns have already been addressed.

> *The prospect of refugees not returning to their country of asylum is a concern of many higher-income destination states.*

A second area for cooperation could be in the field of return agreements and visa access. The prospect of refugees not returning to their country of asylum is a concern of many higher-income destination states, leading to onerous requirements for refugees to prove that they are not trying to travel for immigration purposes. While refugee general-use travel documents should always allow for return, destination states could work with first countries of asylum to make these guarantees more explicit, including by entering into agreements to allow for enforced return if refugees overstay their visas (providing the principle of nonrefoulement is respected, meaning that individuals are not returned to countries where they may face harm). Doing this, however, may require developing concrete return agreements with countries of asylum, and linking them to expanded document recognition and visa access. By linking these two areas of agreement, both countries can benefit from greater mobility and visa recognition, and can relax some of the more stringent visa requirements for refugees. This can bring destination states' policies toward refugees and nationals of refugees' host countries closer together as well.

Agreeing to cooperation in these areas in principle should be relatively simple—they are already covered in part by existing international agreements and global policy fora including the Global Compact on Refugees; the Global Compact for Safe, Regular, and Ordered Migration; and ICAO. But making progress means investing in host countries' refugee and migration management capacity as well as building long-term technical cooperation on identity management and document issuance systems. Existing regional-level mobility and free movement initiatives can serve as one area for raising awareness of these issues. For example, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development has been particularly active in taking a regional approach to mobility and refugee policy.[68] Integrating refugee issues into the existing mobility workstream could help ensure that refugee travel documents are treated similarly to other regionally recognized travel documents and passports.

Enhancing Training for Consular and Border Security Staff

Governments should take steps to train their consular employees and border officials to more readily recognize refugee travel documents and know how to process their holders' visa applications. This could be done by disseminating existing guidance through diplomatic cables, ensuring these documents are included in consular training, and ensuring that guidance is kept up to date as countries issue new types of travel documents.[69] This guidance should also include instructions on potential fee or documentation waivers that refugees may be eligible for. Similarly, workers at points of entry (in particular, airports) who as part of their job inspect travel documents and make a decision on whether to allow someone to travel should receive similar training, or have easy access to an official who is trained to recognize these documents.

In addition, there should be close coordination between country-level consular operations and host governments. Ensuring that there is continuous dialogue and sharing of document specimens (the

generic, example template) can increase officials' familiarity with refugee travel documents and thus reduce disruptions in the visa acquisition process. Embassies within the same country could work together to streamline communication, jointly committing to recognizing these documents and processing them effectively.

Coordinating on Single-Use Travel Documents

There will always be situations in which an exceptional travel document is needed, due to either urgency or legal technicalities. But the plethora of single-use documents and the wide variation in their recognition suggest a need for a more coordinated approach that could allow for greater standardization, in accordance with ICAO guidelines for ETDs,[70] and wider recognition. Such coordination could include multilateral agreements to issue these documents with the same format and privileges, allowing for easier recognition at points of entry. Coordination could also involve common transit states to ensure that these documents include transit privileges. Finally, countries could remove the provisions that link these documents with a specific travel itinerary, to ensure that travel delays and missed connections do not render documents invalid. Through greater coordination and recognition, these documents could be used more effectively, with less need for UNHCR, IOM, and sponsoring organizations to advocate on behalf of individual applicants and to provide support to refugees en route.

C.   Donor Countries and International Agencies

To facilitate improvements in access to travel documents, international organizations and higher-income countries should support the development of lower-income countries' capacity to produce and process refugee travel documents in a timely fashion. First, donors could contribute funds to procure the machinery, software, and materials needed for machine-readable travel documents, and potentially help find cost efficiencies by supporting the bundling of procurement by multiple countries.[71] Second, donors could provide training and institutional strengthening support to document-issuing agencies, as well as their refugee agency counterparts, to facilitate swifter processing and more cohesive coordination between the two.

Development agencies' existing investments in improving documentation more broadly could be expanded to include travel documents. For example, the World Bank's ID4D (Identification for Development) initiative, which provides technical support and assistance to countries to assess and improve their documentation systems and better link them to services, could incorporate travel documents into its work.[72] This would make use of existing expertise in document security and identity verification that is directly implementable in the travel sector. Similarly, broader refugee governance and asylum system support projects could incorporate refugee travel documents. UNHCR, for example, helped Mozambique resume issuing refugee travel documents in late 2022 after a five-year pause, as part of a larger data interoperability project.[73]

International support could also be channeled through ongoing migration-related cooperation processes, such as the work being done by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the East African Community to facilitate greater regional mobility.[74] By incorporating refugee issues into the discussion on travel documents, these processes can help reduce the discrepancy between the ease of regional travel with a passport and the difficulty making the same trip with a refugee travel document. Development actors already support these regional actions and should consider incorporating refugee mobility into their support.

6   Moving Forward

As more governments experiment with new mobility pathways for refugees, travel documents remain the key to unlocking these opportunities. Realizing the full potential of refugee travel documents—and thus new mobility options—requires removing capacity and procedural barriers while implementing systemic reforms to make these documents easy to acquire and seamless to use.

While some of these changes can be done by individual countries unilaterally, the complexity and interconnectedness of travel document policy requires that countries coordinate with each other to achieve these reforms in a cohesive and systematic way. Three avenues for inspiring and enabling progress on this issue show particular promise.

First, the December 2023 Global Refugee Forum raised awareness around refugee travel documents and, if momentum can be sustained, could renew and strengthen international cooperation on this issue. At the first forum in 2019, roughly ten countries made pledges related to improving access to refugee travel documents, but only a few were realized by the 2023 forum.[75] This time, UNHCR proposed a multistakeholder pledge to link and align pledges made by various governments, nongovernmental actors, and international organizations related to travel documents.[76] The pledging framework has the potential to facilitate inter-state partnerships and donor support, provide peer learning opportunities, and set measurable benchmarks for progress toward the adoption and recognition of these documents. Perhaps more critically, it can also bring more stakeholders to the table by linking with pledges on complementary pathways, family reunification, and labor migration and demonstrating the importance of travel documents to success in these areas. Moving forward, the pledges made at and in the wake of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum will need to be followed up by sustained implementation and careful monitoring if they are to have the intended impact.

Second, expanding the knowledge base on refugee travel documents could provide the foundation for reforms and improvements. Despite the importance of refugee travel documents to the international protection system, research on their issuance and use is sparse. There are significant gaps in terms of both broader surveys comparing practices across countries and regions and more specific examinations of country-level policies and practices. As the focus on refugee travel documents increases, development and government actors should prioritize commissioning targeted, region-specific needs assessments that could help identify specific trends and barriers and then outline an agenda for addressing them.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic and the mobility challenges it imposed have led to significant policy discussions on the future of international mobility, including the role of documentation and the potential use of digital travel documents at borders.[77] And for several decades, governments in high-income countries have been particularly concerned about the need for increased labor migration, given long-term demographic trends such as population aging and declining birthrates.[78] As these larger conversations progress and issues of documentation come up,[79] it is crucial that refugee mobility be included to ensure that any developments in travel documentation for nationals also include refugees.

If these various opportunities and catalysts do in fact spur effective action, this could help unlock the to-date underutilized potential of refugee travel documents. And by removing or at least lowering one of the major barriers to refugee mobility, these steps can support efforts underway to make more opportunities available to refugees beyond first countries of asylum, help refugees access the opportunities they choose, and relieve some of the immense pressure on the global protection system.

Endnotes

1   In this brief, "refugees" refers to people who are registered or could be registered as refugees with their host country's government or with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. It also includes people in refugee-like situations who qualify for refugee-specific mobility opportunities to destination states.

2   According to UNHCR, 76 percent of refugees were living in low- and middle-income countries as of the end of 2022. See UNHCR Global Data Service, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022* (Copenhagen: UNHCR, 2023).

3   Ukraine has a 90-day visa-free travel agreement with the European Union. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, this has allowed Ukrainians to enter EU countries without a visa and with only a biometric passport, and some states have waived the documentation requirement for Ukrainians altogether. Under the Temporary Protection Directive, which EU leaders activated in March 2022, Ukrainians are able to seek temporary protection in any EU Member State and have freedom of movement throughout the bloc. See Andrew Selee, Susan Fratzke, Samuel Davidoff-Gore, and Luisa Feline Freier, *Expanding Protection Options? Flexible Approaches to Status for Displaced Syrians, Venezuelans, and Ukrainians* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2024).

4   UNHCR Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Division, *UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2023* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2023).

5   UNHCR's funding gap has steadily increased over the past decade. See UNHCR, *Global Report 2022* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2023).

6   The global refugee regime traces its origin to the work of Fridtjof Nansen, who, as the League of Nation's first high commissioner for refugees, introduced the Nansen passport, a travel document for refugees. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees includes a successor to the Nansen passport: the Convention Travel Document.

7   One of the core objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees is to "expand access to third country solutions." See United Nations, "Global Compact on Refugees" (New York, 2018), 4.

8   These concerns have led to calls for increasing safe mobility opportunities for refugees as alternatives to dangerous irregular journeys; however, they have also heightened some destination-county governments' desire to close external borders to asylum seekers and limit their entry.

9   Global Compact on Refugees, "Multistakeholder Pledge: Refugee Travel Documents—The 21st Century Nansen Passport," accessed November 5, 2023.

10 Laissez passers are also issued to facilitate travel by officials of supranational entities, such as the European Union or the United Nations. In these cases, the documents are valid for multiple uses, as opposed to a laissez passer issued in an emergency situation to allow someone to cross a border once. See, for example, European Commission, "EU Laissez Passer," accessed November 4, 2023.

11 International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), *Machine Readable Travel Documents, Part 3: Specifications Common to All MRTDs*, 8th ed. (Montreal: ICAO, 2021).

12 Under ICAO standards, all 193 state parties are obligated to issue machine readable passports. See ICAO, *Annex 9 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation: Facilitation*, 16th ed. (Montreal: ICAO, 2022).

13 ICAO, *Machine Readable Travel Documents, Part 3*; ICAO, *Machine Readable Travel Documents, Part 9: Deployment of Biometric Identification and Electronic Storage of Data in MRTDs*, 8th ed. (Montreal: ICAO, 2021).

14 ICAO, "ICAO PKD Participants," accessed November 4, 2023. This does not necessarily mean that electronic travel documents are easily accessible in all 140 countries, as the transition to new documents can be difficult and issuing them can be costly.

15 Marjoleine Zieck, "Refugees and the Right to Freedom of Movement: From Flight to Return," *Michigan Journal of International Law* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 19–116.

16 Author interview with Giulia Gori, Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, January 27, 2023.

17 Eileen Sullivan and Steve Fisher, "At the End of a Hard Journey, Migrants Face Another: Navigating Bureaucracy," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2023.

18 United Nations General Assembly, "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees," July 28, 1951, Article 28 and Schedule.

19 United Nations General Assembly, "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees," Article 28 and Schedule.

20 UNHCR, *Guide for Issuing Machine Readable Convention Travel Documents for Refugees and Stateless Persons* (Geneva and Montreal: UNHCR and ICAO, 2017).

21 For example, the majority of Syrian refugees are not eligible for Convention Travel Documents because they are living in non-signatory states (Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon) or in Turkey, which only applies the 1951 convention to refugees from Europe. See Selee, Fratzke, Davidoff-Gore, and Freier, *Expanding Protection Options?*

22 Lebanon also issues a laissez passer that has been used by refugees and stateless persons for onward travel. Author written communication with representatives of Talent Beyond Boundaries, June 16, 2023.

23 Luuk van der Baaren and Dimitry V. Kochenov, "Travel Document," in *Concise Encyclopaedia of Migration Law*, eds. Vincent Chetail and Giulia Raimondo (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, forthcoming).

24 Robert Sloane and Elizabeth Brundige, *Tibet's Stateless Nationals: Tibetan Refugees in Nepal* (Berkeley, CA: Tibet Justice Center, 2002); U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Nepal: Information on the Issuance of Refugee Travel Documents by the Nepalese Government," updated May 2, 2001; Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, "Nepal: Situation of Tibetans with a Refugee Identity Card" (response to information request, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa, January 9, 2015).

25 These include the Student Refugee Program and Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot. Author interview with Michelle Manks, World University Service Canada, February 3, 2023; author interview with a representative of a complementary pathways nongovernmental organization (NGO), February 9, 2023; author written communication with representatives of Talent Beyond Boundaries, June 16, 2023; Government of Canada, "Resettlement: Visas and Travel Documents," updated February 25, 2013.

26 Author interview with Giulia Gori, Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, January 27, 2023.

27 For example, the United States has a specific form (DS-232) for people with unrecognized travel documents who have been granted a waiver to enter. The form can have a visa affixed to it and grants entry to the United States; however, it does not serve as a travel document and cannot be used to transit through states. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analyst interview with a former U.S. State Department official, March 2, 2021; MPI analyst interview with consul general, U.S. Embassy Nairobi, April 14, 2021; U.S Department of State, "Using Form DS-232," *Foreign Affairs Manual*, volume 9, section 403.9-3(D), updated September 20, 2023.

28 While travelers typically need a travel document to apply for a visa, the process of acquiring an emergency travel document (ETD) works in reverse, given its purpose as the travel document of last resort. In order for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to issue an ETD, all countries involved must agree to allow the traveler to complete their journey (exit the current country, transit through transit countries, and enter the destination country). Only when these permissions are granted, including the issuance of visas or promise thereof, and travel arrangements are made will the ETD be issued. Author interviews with representatives of the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), March 6 and 28, 2023. Similar guidance can be found in ICAO's guidance on machine readable emergency travel documents. See ICAO, *Machine Readable Travel Documents, Part 8: Emergency Travel Documents*, 8th ed. (Montreal: ICAO, 2021).

29 ICRC, *Emergency Travel Document* (Geneva: ICRC, 2018).

30 European Council, "Recognised Travel Documents, Part III: Travel Documents Issued by International Organisations and Other Entities Subject to International Law," PRADO—Public Register of Authentic Identity and Travel Documents Online, updated August 30, 2023.

31 Author interviews with representatives of the ICRC and IFRC, March 6 and 28, 2023.

32 Author interview with Michelle Manks, World University Service Canada, February 3, 2023; author interview with a representative of a complementary pathways NGO, February 9, 2023; author written communication with representatives of Talent Beyond Boundaries, June 16, 2023.

33 Author written communication with representatives of Talent Beyond Boundaries, June 16, 2023.

34 Understaffing is one of the underlying drivers of a significant lack of identity documents in low-income countries. See World Bank, *Identification for Development (ID4D) and Digitalization G2P Payments (G2Px) 2022 Annual Report* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2023).

35 Author written communication with representatives of UNHCR Complementary Pathways and Resettlement Services Division, June 20, 2023.

36 UNHCR, "Refugee Travel Documents—The 21st Century Nansen Passport" (internal document, shared with the author by representatives of UNHCR Complementary Pathways and Resettlement Services Division, June 20, 2023).

37 Adam Chamseddine, "Lebanon Crisis: Citizens Desperate to Escape Decry Passport Application Chaos," Middle East Eye, August 15, 2022.

38 GhanaWeb, "Passport Booklet Shortage: 90,000 Passports Backlog to Be Cleared Soon—Foreign Minister," GhanaWeb, October 3, 2022; Leke Baiyewu, "Immigration, Firm Blame Cash Crunch for Passport Booklet Shortage," Punch Newspapers, May 10, 2023.

39 UNHCR, *Guide for Issuing Machine Readable Convention Travel Documents*; Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Program, "Machine-Readable Travel Documents" (69th Standing Committee Meeting, Geneva, June 7, 2017).

40 See UNHCR, *Guide for Issuing Machine Readable Convention Travel Documents*; Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Program, "Machine-Readable Travel Documents."

41 For example, a 2019 UNHCR compliance update noted that, at the time, 38 state parties did not issue any travel documents to refugees. See UNHCR, "2019 Compliance Update: Machine-Readable Convention Travel Documents for Refugees and Stateless Persons" (fact sheet, UNHCR, Geneva, 2019).

42 Author interview with a representative from a complementary pathways NGO, February 9, 2023; author interview with representatives from the UNHCR Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region, July 17, 2023.

43 Nastassja White, *Open the Doors! Towards Complete Freedom of Movement for Human Rights Defenders in Exile in Uganda* (Kampala: DefendDefenders [East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project], 2020); author interview with representatives from UNHCR Regional Bureau for East and the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region, July 19, 2023.

44 For example, in Uganda, those able to acquire CTDs have typically been self-settled refugees in Kampala rather than refugees in rural settlements. See David N. Tshimba, *Asylum in Urban Spaces: The Case of Refugees in Cities in Uganda* (London: EU Trust Fund for Africa, Horn of Africa Window, Research and Evidence Facility, 2022).

45 Scalabrini Centre of Cape Town, "How Can I Apply for a Refugee ID or a Refugee Travel Document (Passport) Online?," updated October 2022; Tshimba, *Asylum in Urban Spaces*.

46   Author interview with representatives from UNHCR Regional Bureau for East and the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region, July 19, 2023.

47   White, *Open the Doors!*

48   This potentially undercuts the utility of a CTD to allow refugees to travel under a protected status, as refugees from other East African Community Member States, such as South Sudan, would have an easier time crossing from Uganda into Kenya on their South Sudanese passport, rather than their Uganda-issued CTD. See White, *Open the Doors!*

49   Author analysis of data from European Council, "Recognised Travel Documents, Part I: Travel Documents Issued by Third Countries and Territorial Entities," PRADO—Public Register of Authentic Identity and Travel Documents Online, updated June 1, 2023.

50   Author interview with representatives from UNHCR Italy, July 17, 2023.

51   Author interview with representatives from UNHCR Italy, July 17, 2023.

52   Refugees are not the only people to face these challenges. Bearers of passports from many low- and middle-income countries have a relatively hard time gaining entry to higher-income countries. For example, among prospective participants in a July 2022 international AIDS conference in Montreal, Canada, 36 percent of visa applications were rejected and another 10 percent were not processed in time. Of those who did receive a visa, at least 15 percent claimed asylum upon entry. See Dylan Robertson, "Asylum Claims Followed Montreal AIDS Summit Marred by Visa Woes, Planning Issues," CBC, July 23, 2023. Similar problems do not necessarily occur in travel within the Global South. For example, in Africa, regional mobility frameworks have been adopted that significantly reduce barriers to entry by citizens of other Member States but maintain restrictions for those from outside the region. See Mathias Czaika, Hein de Haas, and María Villares-Varela, "The Global Evolution of Travel Visa Regimes," *Population and Development Review* 44, no. 3 (September 1, 2018): 589–622.

53   Susan Fratzke, Jackie Keegan, and Adhieu Achuil Kueth, "A Passport to Opportunity: The Importance of Refugee Access to Travel Documents" (World of Migration podcast, MPI, November 15, 2023).

54   Post by the Africa Refugee-led Network on X, December 10, 2023; post by Edmund Page, CEO of COHERE on X, December 13, 2023; author interview with a representative of a refugee-led organization, Kampala, Uganda, May 31, 2022.

55   Abraham T. Zere, "This Is What It Is Like to Travel as a Stateless Person," Al Jazeera, October 14, 2020.

56   8 *U.S. Code* § 1184(b), "Admission of Nonimmigrants – Presumption of Status; Written Waiver," accessed December 22, 2023; U.S. Department of State, "Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Status," *Foreign Affairs Manual*, volume 9, section 401.1-3, in particular subsections C-E, updated September 8, 2022; U.S. Department of State, "Presumption of Immigrant Status – INA 214(B): Application," *Foreign Affairs Manual*, volume 9, section 302.1-2(B), updated June 29, 2023.

57   MPI analyst interview with official from Bard College Berlin, April 13, 2021.

58   See, for example, the image contained in a post by the Africa Refugee-led Network on X, December 10, 2023.

59   Susan Fratzke et al., *Refugee Resettlement and Complementary Pathways: Opportunities for Growth* (Geneva and Brussels: UNHCR and MPI Europe, 2021).

60   Author interview with representatives from UNHCR Italy, July 17, 2023.

61   UNHCR, "Refugee Travel Documents."

62   Paulina Sosa, "The Regulatory Leash of the One-Year Refugee Travel Document," *Columbia Journal of Law and Social Problems* 52, no. 2 (2018): 273–319.

63   Uganda Ministry of Internal Affairs, Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control, "Convention Travel Documents," accessed November 5, 2023; White, *Open the Doors!*

64   UNHCR, *Procedural Standards for Refugee Status Determination Under UNHCR's Mandate* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2020).

65   White, *Open the Doors!*

66   Rey Koslowski, "International Travel Security and the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration," *International Migration* 57, no. 6 (December 2019): 158–72; ICAO, "Implementation Capacity Building Working Group (ICBWG)," ICAO Security and Facilitation, accessed January 10, 2024.

67   UNHCR, "Asylum Capacity Support Group," accessed November 8, 2023.

68   See, for example, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, "Protocol on Free Movement of Persons in the IGAD Region," February 26, 2020.

69   Fratzke et al., *Refugee Resettlement and Complementary Pathways*.

70   ICAO, *Machine Readable Travel Documents, Part 8*.

71   UNHCR, "Refugee Travel Documents."

72   World Bank, "Country Action," Identification for Development, accessed November 5, 2023.

73   Author interview with representatives from UNHCR Italy, July 17, 2023; UNHCR Mozambique, *End of Year Report 2022* (Maputo: UNHCR Mozambique, 2023).

74   See, for example, Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, "EUTF Supports the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons in the IGAD Region," Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, December 13, 2021.

75   Global Compact on Refugees, "Pledges and Contributions," accessed November 6, 2023.

76   Global Compact on Refugees, "Multistakeholder Pledge: Refugee Travel Documents."

77   See, for example, Lawrence Huang, *Digital Health Credentials and COVID-19: Can Vaccine and Testing Requirements Restart Global Mobility?* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2022).

78   Kate Hooper, *What Role Can Immigration Play in Addressing Current and Future Labor Shortages?* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2023).

79   Karoli Hindriks, "Upgrade the Passport System to Unlock Global Talent," HR Magazine, July 10, 2023.

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