

**Remarks to the European Commission High Level Forum,
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Commissioner, thank you for including this essential topic on your agenda today.

The founding members of the Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility, are Canada, Australia, UNHCR, IOM, Refuge Point, Fragomen, the International Chamber of Commerce, and Talent Beyond Boundaries. These members in turn work with many partners; I am delighted to see our efforts aligning more closely each day with your own priorities at the Commission, and foresee and look forward to deeper cooperation to come.

Distinguished guests:

If not now, when?

Opening safe pathways via employment for refugees in countries of first asylum is the right thing to do.

It is the smart thing to do.

And it is the right time to do it.

We have learned what we need to know. It works.

First principle: employment pathways to safe homes must be additional to needs-based resettlement programs for those refugees at immediate risk. And resettlement *must* grow.

Second principle: the best time to build something beautiful and powerful is now.

Some will say we can't think about innovative paths to help the world's displaced right now, because it is a time of crisis— Ukraine, post-covid, inflation, recession. But the reverse is true: a time of crisis is precisely the right time.

For 70 years the global community has responded reasonably well to many displacement crises. Europe and other countries did so again, this time with speed and generosity, in the wake of Russia's brutal war of aggression.

But for 70 years the global community has done far too *little* for those in their second exile, in protracted displacement for years or decades, in spite of the over-performing efforts of a handful of countries.

Will we respond to the economic fallout and mass displacement from Russia's unprovoked aggression—and thus reward it—by delaying or downsizing the building of a better long term future for the world's displaced, *even when it is in our own interest to do so?*

We need to move past conceptualizing, strategizing, framing frameworks, networking our networks, and start *doing* a whole lot more.

There is, to use again an image I stole from someone else, an hourglass effect. Tragically, we have a large supply of determined and talented refugees who need a safe home and who want to use their skills to our mutual benefit. There is, and will continue to be recession or not, severe shortages of crucial staff in industry after industry in country after country. Elder care. Nurses. Drivers. Tourism and hospitality staff. IT professionals. Electricians. Plumbers. Construction workers. (How many billions of dollars in infrastructure projects in YOUR country are delayed by labour shortages?).

So: large supply; large demand; and a narrow channel of administrative obstacles blocking a value-added flow, each obstacle easy to fix using the authorities held by many of the people on this screen.

Because, we know how to do this. I don't speak only of the thousands of people now being given care in the UK or Canada by nurses and caregivers who also happened to be refugees, or that food-producers in western Australia who could not find staff are hiring them repeatedly from amongst Syrian refugees in Lebanon. We now know that Talent Beyond Boundaries' Talent Catalog and our partnerships work and deliver, and we know they will work in the projects being implemented with EU funding now and for the other European countries and companies knocking at our door.

But I also mean something much larger: *we know how to do this*. A) we know how to move 100,000+ refugees per year across borders to safe new homes via resettlement. AND B) we know how to match millions of employees to jobs across borders annually: 1.3M into the EU alone last year. We know how to do A and we know how to do B. Bringing this knowledge together changes the protection landscape. We CAN open labour pathways to refugees at scale. The naysayers will lose.

These pathways are not theoretical. They are in place and refugees are flowing to eager and smart employers now. This is rational. And fair. And dignified. And safe.

Whether we like it or not, we are all, all the time, economic actors. These programs must work for employers and thus be driven to scale and sustainability by the power of the market. But we are also so much more than economic actors. Here the power of the market can be shaped to serve our deeper humanity.

In conclusion, what should we do for the next decade?

We can, if we choose, spend tens of billions of dollars per year keeping refugees half alive, half-fed, their children half in school, their futures dimming each day, the lure of traffickers and boats growing stronger. Or, we can adjust mechanisms *already in place* and grow the logistical partnerships to bring them to work in *needed* jobs as our tax-paying neighbours, helping local businesses flourish.

Given that, rather than building pilot projects as small as possible, why would we not be building them as robust initial phases designed to grow big, fast?

The world's forcibly displaced leave homes and belongings behind when they flee. But they carry their talents with them.

Now is the right time. We're ready.