

Upcoming Meetings & Events

RESEARCHING THE EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES- APR. 14

On Wednesday, April 14 at 9:00 AM EST, the Children, Families and Communities Research Group will speak to and discuss the conclusions of their research regarding the experiences of refugee children and families in English educational spaces. For more information and to register, click [here](#).

MIGRANT HEALTH IN PRIMARY CARE- A VIRTUAL LUNCHTIME SEMINAR- APR. 14

On Wednesday, April 14 at 7:30 AM EST, the UK Chagas Hub, in collaboration with the Hospital for Tropical Diseases, will discuss issues related to primary care for migrants, with a particular focus on Chagas disease. For more information and to register, click [here](#).

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP: FOSTERING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION FOR NEWCOMERS- APR. 15

On Thursday, April 15 at 1:30 PM EST, Kaydeen Bankasingh and Eline de Rooij will speak to the contributions that immigrants and refugees have made in Canada, and ways to further increase their involvement. For more information and to register, click [here](#).



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USCRI Reinforces its Call for Independent UN Investigation into Tigray

On February 9, 2021, [USCRI called on the United Nations](#) to launch an independent investigation into the unaccounted for refugees from Tigray in Ethiopia. Since then, the situation has only gotten worse, and gruesome new information has surfaced. Given new evidence of atrocities by all parties, along with the fact that 11,000 of the refugees are still unaccounted for, USCRI welcomes the UN's [announcement](#) that it will investigate human rights abuses and other grave violations of international law in Tigray. However, USCRI cautions the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) about involving the Ethiopia Human Rights Commission in the investigation, and urges that the investigation begin immediately.

On March 26th, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [reached](#) the Hitsats and Shimelba refugee camps in northern Tigray after being denied access since the beginning of the conflict last November. UNHCR found

the camps destroyed, humanitarian facilities looted, and shelters burned to the ground. All of the Eritrean refugees who were living in the camps had fled.

11,000 of these refugees are still unaccounted for. Of the 20,000 refugees previously living in these two camps, 7,000 are now reportedly living in the other two camps in Tigray, Mai Aini and Adi Harush. Another 2,000 refugees are purportedly living in other areas around the country. This leaves 11,000 whose whereabouts UNHCR has not reported.

The same day UNHCR reached the Hitsats and Shimelba camps, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed acknowledged for the first time that Eritrean troops are on the ground in Tigray. After months of denials that Eritrean forces were involved at all, Abiy not only admitted to their presence but also stated that they would be leaving Tigray. It is unclear whether or when Eritrean troops will actually withdraw.

United States Issue Updates

- **USCRI Rescinds “Blank Space” Policy**

On Thursday, April 1, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced that the “blank space” policy had been rescinded. The policy, in place since October 2019, led to rejections of forms, such as the application for asylum (I-589), I-612 or I-918 if there were any blank spaces left, including those spaces not applicable to the applicant. USCIS clarified that blank spaces will now cause processing delays when the applicant “leaves required spaces blank, fails to respond to questions related to filing requirements, or omits any required initial evidence.” To read the USCIS announcement, please click [here](#).

- **Flores Independent Monitor Files Report on CBP Facilities for Unaccompanied Children**

On Friday, April 2, the Independent Monitor for the *Flores* settlement agreement, in the Central District of California, filed a report to the court on conditions for unaccompanied children in Customs and Border Patrol facilities and at facilities run by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) known as “Emergency Intake Sites.” The *Flores* settlement agreement provides basic rights for unaccompanied children in the custody of the U.S. government. The report found “severe overcrowding in the RGV [Rio Grande Valley] sector” and that “virtually all the custodial and medical provisions essential to adequate detention conditions are threatened by levels of occupancy that exceed the physical space required to maintain safe, sanitary, and humane conditions.” The Independent Monitor also found that Emergency Intake Sites lacked necessary processing standards and case-management capacity for unaccompanied children. To read the report, click [here](#).

- **USAID Deploys DART Team to Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador**

On Tuesday, April 6, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) announced that a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) will be deployed in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to assist with humanitarian tasks. Central America has been the origin point for a significant proportion of U.S. asylum seekers, and the DART response is intended to lessen migration pressures for individuals in the region. According to USAID, the DART will “assess humanitarian needs, coordinate with partners and local officials, and provide urgently needed aid to crisis-affected families and communities.” For more information, please click [here](#).

- **Administration Budget Requests \$4.3 Billion for ORR**

On Friday, April 9, the Administration released its first “skinny” budget request—essentially a high-level overview of requested agency spending. The “skinny budget” requests \$4.3 billion for ORR. The budget justification indicated a need for more significant services and assistance to prospective and current refugees to support the Administration’s goal of 125,000 refugee admissions for Fiscal Year 2022, as well as provide for the well-being of unaccompanied children. The amount “reflects a commitment to ensuring unaccompanied immigrant children are unified with relatives and sponsors as safely and quickly as possible and to providing these children with care and services that align with child welfare best practices while they are in ORR’s custody.” Congress is expected to take up the budget request in early summer. To read the “skinny” budget, please click [here](#).

Around the World in International Migration

• Sexual Abuse by Croatian Police Sheds Light on Need for Independent Investigation

A new [report](#) from the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) highlights the story of an Afghan migrant who was sexually abused and threatened at knifepoint by a Croatian officer when trying to cross the border from Bosnia. She and fellow asylum-seekers were then beaten with batons back to the border. The report claims that this incident is not unique; almost 24,000 people have reportedly been pushed back from Croatia to Bosnia in less than two years. DRC documented over 500 pushbacks in January and February of this year alone, with about one third of those involving some sort of abuse or assault by Croatian officers.

Although the European Union announced it would launch an investigation into the situation late last year, DRC reports that no progress has been made, no reports have been released, and no monitoring mechanisms have been set up to address the problem. Meanwhile, Croatian authorities have denied the allegations of violence and say there was no record of their police encountering anyone on the day the Afghan woman was attacked.

• Kenya Renews Threat to Close Refugee Camps

Kenya has issued an [ultimatum](#) to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to create a plan to close the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee complexes that house over 400,000 refugees. Although the Kenyan government has tried to close the camps before, this time they gave UNHCR only 14 days to come up with a closure strategy, saying there is “no room for further negotiations.” The 14-day period ended on April 6th, and last Thursday Kenya’s high court issued an order [blocking](#) the closures for at least 30 days. The uncertainty has caused distress in the camps, where some people have been living for decades. Many younger refugees in the camps were born there and do not know any other home.

A former Somali intelligence chief has raised suspicions about the timing of the closure announcement, as it came the same day that the International Court of Justice was scheduled to wrap up hearings on a maritime dispute between Kenya and Somalia. Abdullahi Mohamed Ali says there is a belief among many Somalis that the government is using the potential closure of the camps— whose residents are majority Somalis— as political leverage in the maritime case. Kenya has refused to participate in the case, which has proceeded without the country’s input at the hearings.

• Crisis Escalating in Mozambique

Northern Mozambique has struggled with violence by extremist groups loyal to ISIS since 2017, but the violence exploded late last month when armed rebels began raiding the town of Palma. The raid has resulted in dozens of deaths and 11,000 civilians fleeing. This most recent attack has increased the total number of displaced persons since the crisis began to almost 700,000. Many of the most recently displaced have fled to the city of Pemba, which is quickly becoming overwhelmed and does not have the resources to sustain such an influx. The Mozambican government now claims its military has regained full control in Palma, but supplies in the town are running low and many still in the area are going hungry.

As thousands flee the escalating violence, the United Nations has raised concerns about reports that over 1,000 people were turned away at the Tanzanian border and were blocked from seeking asylum there. The presidents of five southern African countries [convened](#) in Mozambique last week to engage in talks about a coordinated effort to end the crisis. The leaders expressed concern about security risks to the broader region, and have planned to convene again in three weeks to create a more comprehensive response strategy.

Global Gigabyte

Mohamed Hafez is an architect and Syrian refugee who began creating models of Syrian buildings and landmarks using leftover materials from his architecture job after he was unable to return to Syria in 2003. Since then, Hafez has used his art to tell the stories of the Syrian refugee experience, and he now incorporates suitcases in his art pieces to talk about issues surrounding refugees’ “physical and emotional baggage.” In response to his new project, other immigrant families have gifted him their suitcases to help him continue to tell their stories. Hafez creates these pieces as his own form of therapy, exploring his frustrations with the ongoing Syrian crisis while also connecting to the Syria he left behind. He hopes his pieces convey the plight of the Syrian people without directly showing graphic images of dead people or other stereotypical representations of the crisis.

Read more about the story [here](#).

If you have any questions
or comments, please
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