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Privately Funded Refugee Resettlement

How to Leverage American Charity to Resettle Refugees

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The government's response to the current refugee crisis in the Middle East has been slow and inadequate. To stimulate a more robust response to this humanitarian crisis, the federal government should create a privately funded refugee resettlement program.

Linking refugee admissions to donations would create a strong incentive for private parties to donate money to refugee resettlement, as well as offering a powerful quantified signal of the American people's willingness to help refugees. The program would establish an account into which private individuals and organizations can donate money to fund resettlement. Greater donations would fund greater admissions.

This privately funded resettlement program should be combined with an expanded private sponsorship of refugees. Current law under the Priority-3 refugee program allows refugees already in the United States to jumpstart resettlement for their immediate relatives abroad without having to wait for a referral from the United Nations. This program should be expanded to allow non-refugee United States residents who have displaced family, including extended family, to apply to the refugee program.

Together, these two reforms have the potential to allow the private sector to lead a powerful response to the international refugee crisis. The reforms would help thousands of refugees and do so in a way that taps the energy and resources of American philanthropy without requiring significant new government spending.

INTRODUCTION

The world is facing the largest refugee crisis since World War II. Yet the United States has so far played only a very minor role in providing safe haven to the millions who have been forced from their homes. The number of refugees who are admitted to the United States is a political decision that depends on the administration's political will, the appropriation of funds by Congress, and a lengthy process of bureaucratic approval and security screening. A privately funded refugee program can smooth these political frictions by bringing new resources to the table, fostering government action to alleviate the suffering of displaced people around the world.

For these reasons, the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), which refers refugees for overseas resettlement, has called upon governments to establish "privately sponsored admission schemes."¹ "We need to initiate a massive scaling up of private sector involvement, both in terms of shared expertise and funding support," said António Guterres, then the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, to participants at the 2015 World Economic Forum.²

A few countries, including Germany and Australia, have responded to the UN's call by creating privately funded refugee programs. Germany has already accepted 20,000 privately sponsored refugees, while other countries, including the United Kingdom, are planning new private initiatives.³ At the same time, Canada has ramped up its existing privately funded refugee program, accepting 10,000 refugees under its Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program since November 2015.⁴

The United States has yet to establish a privately funded program, and its publicly funded approach has failed to meaningfully address the growing crisis in the Middle East. As of February 2016, the government had resettled only 2,743 of the roughly 26,622 Syrians that the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) had referred to the United States for resettlement.⁵ The United States has accepted just 0.05 percent of the almost five million Syrians who have fled the country since the start of the Syrian civil war.⁶ That is just 48 refugees per month since the beginning of the conflict—less than one per state each month.

Civil wars in Libya, Syria, and Iraq have driven millions to flee those countries. However, the United States government has failed to respond decisively. This underwhelming response reflects a lack of governmental resources that, in turn, reflects a lack of political motivation to overcome coordination problems within the government. Gathering the resources needed to resettle more refugees requires agreement not only inside Congress but also among three different federal departments and the White House. This sort of coordination is rarely easy and often requires external pressure to spur all parties to act.

A well-designed, privately funded program can help solve this coordination problem without a major overhaul of the current refugee system. The private program would oblige the federal government to admit refugees whenever private resources are made available to cover their costs under the existing process. The State Department would be required to admit an additional refugee under a new, privately funded category, separate from the publicly funded refugee quota. The agencies responsible for refugee admissions and resettlement would not need to wait for funds from Congress, but would receive them directly from a privately funded account. The program would ease political resistance and require federal agencies to come together to address a humanitarian crisis that many Americans wish they, and their government, could do more to alleviate.

Americans already can and do support refugee resettlement through donations to the nonprofits that coordinate resettlement for the State Department. Currently, however, those donations only augment the existing federally funded refugee resettlement process rather than facilitate the admission of additional refugees. Linking admissions to donations would incentivize organizations and philanthropic individuals who support greater refugee resettlement to give, and to give more. The money raised can then be used to finance resettlement with a minimum of public expense, diffusing common worries about the fiscal burden of refugee assistance.

In principle, the federal government could always do more to expand its refugee program. However, divisions in Congress, playing on misplaced fears of terrorism, will likely block any additional funds for more resettlement, preventing an administration decision to raise the refugee cap beyond the moderate increases promised for 2016 and 2017. Election-year risk aversion should not prevent decisive action to ease a crisis that threatens the lives and well-being of millions of innocent people—especially when there are millions of generous Americans ready to open their homes and wallets to refugees.

A mechanism that translates private donations into new openings for refugees would provide a countervailing political force, incentivizing an outpouring of charity that can neutralize worries about the fiscal burden of expanding admissions. Linking refugee admissions to private giving has the additional advantage of effectively quantifying the American public's desire to address the humanitarian crisis. This can alter the political dynamic by introducing a powerful new narrative about refugee admissions: millions of individual Americans, and not just unelected bureaucrats in Washington, want to provide a safe haven for refugees. This sort of quantifiable demand for action, and the narrative it encourages, offers an appealing justification for stronger measures on the part of the administration.

CURRENT PRIVATE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

The United States has a long history of private involvement in refugee resettlement. Since the late nineteenth century, the government has banned immigrants who were likely to become a “public charge” and required an “affidavit of sponsorship” from a

citizen who promises to support immigrants to avoid exclusion. Many ethnic and religious organizations, such as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the Catholic Church provided initial resources to avoid a likely public charge determination and connected refugees to relatives in the United States who could sponsor them.

In the early twentieth century, HIAS covered the travel expenses of Jews fleeing persecution in Russia. When the refugees arrived, the society provided meals, gave shelter, found jobs, aided family reunification, and provided information about the United States to the refugees.⁷ This record of assistance led President Harry Truman to allow private groups to act as the sponsors for refugees for the first time in 1945, arguing that expanding refugee admissions “will not cost the American taxpayers a single dollar.”⁸ Church World Service, for example, paid the full cost of resettlement and “was responsible for assisting refugees with employment, housing, and other basic needs.”⁹

Private organizations and individuals continue to play an important role in the United States Refugee Admissions Program. In 1980, when Congress passed the Refugee Act, which created America’s modern refugee system, it formalized the relationship between the federal government and the private refugee assistance groups—known as voluntary agencies (VolAgs). Under the Refugee Act, the president sets the annual refugee limit, after consulting with Congress and the VolAgs about the resources available for resettlement.

Today, the VolAgs handle all refugee resettlement on behalf of the federal government. Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the State Department provide the VolAgs with the standards of care and support they must provide. When the refugees arrive in the country, the VolAgs engage with private partners—community groups and volunteers—to find, among other things, homes, translators, jobs, and transportation for the refugees. While the federal government substantially reimburses the VolAgs for their efforts, roughly a quarter of their revenue comes from private donations. Including in-kind donations, as much as half of all the VolAgs’ resources may come from the private sector.

The Refugee Act agreements were highly successful at maintaining a much more significant refugee flow to the United States than the pre-1980 arrangements. However, during the late-1980s, when refugee admissions were surged in response to the opening of the Soviet Union, President Ronald Reagan created the Private Sector Initiative (PSI). President Reagan created a special refugee quota under which refugees would only be admitted “upon the availability of private sector funding sufficient to cover the essential and reasonable costs of such admissions.”¹⁰ The goal of the program was to “enable some refugees to enter and be resettled in the United States who might not otherwise be admitted because of limitations on the funded programs.”¹¹

Between fiscal years 1988 and 1993, roughly 16,000 refugees were admitted under PSI,¹² and State Department officials under the Bush and Reagan administrations

deemed the program successful.¹³ After not admitting any refugees under PSI during its first two years, the Clinton administration, however, did not renew the program in 1996, stating that it was too “difficult for many organizations to meet the financial requirements.”¹⁴ These difficulties arose primarily due to the structure of the program—specifically, highly variable costs for sponsors, an overly arduous approval process, and an inability to unite sponsors to specific refugees. A new program that takes into account PSI’s lessons would make it much more successful.

IMPLEMENTING PRIVATELY FUNDED REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

The State Department should create a pilot program for a privately funded refugee resettlement. The goal would be to expand the current refugee system, in a way that does not require congressional appropriations, by linking the number of refugee admissions to the amount of money raised by private donors. This link would create an incentive for greater donations, which would be used to provide financial support for the resettlement of a number of refugees above and beyond the publicly funded cap. If the pilot program is successful, it should be made permanent. The program, as we envision it, can be implemented in seven steps.

Step One

Create a reserve of visas designated for privately funded resettlement through presidential directive.

The Refugee Act of 1980 authorizes the president to establish the refugee allocation for the coming fiscal year through an annual presidential directive.¹⁵ The number must be determined “before the beginning of the fiscal year after appropriate consultation” with Congress as is “justified by humanitarian concerns or is otherwise in the national interest.”¹⁶ The law stipulates that refugees are eligible for resettlement if they are “of special humanitarian concern to the United States in accordance with a determination made by the President,” and if they are not “firmly resettled in a third country.”¹⁷

The president has broad latitude under the law to admit refugees and determine the criteria for their admission. The president should use this discretion to increase the refugee limit by establishing an allotment of new refugee slots that become open only when private funds are available to cover the costs of resettlement.

President Reagan’s PSI program was created this way. PSI consisted of a “reserve” of refugee visas that would be used only “upon the availability of private sector funding sufficient to cover the essential and reasonable costs of such admissions.”¹⁸ The Reagan administration then defined “essential and reasonable costs” in Memoranda of

Understanding (MOUs) negotiated with the organizations that signed up to perform private resettlement.¹⁹

Step Two

Require compensation to the government for the “reasonable and essential costs” of privately funded refugee admissions.

Privately funded resettlement should not create a parallel refugee resettlement system. It should use the system already in place and reimburse the government for its costs using privately donated money. Under President Reagan’s program, refugees designated as “privately funded” received different treatment than publicly funded refugees. Changes in welfare law rule out this approach. A new privately funded resettlement program would give all admitted refugees access to the same benefits and support system. Private resettlement would simply substitute private sector funding for congressionally appropriated government funding.

Step Three

Estimate, in consultation with the VolAgs, the “reasonable and essential” average marginal cost of resettling a refugee.

Just as in 1986, the State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)—in consultation with the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—should negotiate the definition of “reasonable and essential costs” through MOUs with the VolAgs on an annual basis. Only ORR, PRM, and DHS understand exactly how much private funding they would need in addition to congressionally appropriated funds to resettle an additional refugee in any given year.

Under the Refugee Act of 1980, the Director of ORR, in consultation with the VolAgs, must make periodic assessments of the needs of refugees and the resources—public or private—“available to meet such needs.”²⁰ Regardless of the funds granted to them, the VolAg is required to “provide for the basic needs (including food, clothing, shelter, and transportation for job interviews and training) of each refugee resettled.”²¹

Private resettlement should cover the *average* cost of resettling additional refugees, not the cost of specific refugees. The cost of resettling individual refugees varies. Some refugees will impose costs that are far below the average and others far above. One of the most important lessons of the Reagan-era program was that high cost variability can

limit a private resettlement program. Donors will be less willing to sign up to fund resettling a refugee if they have no clear estimate of the cost of doing so.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates the average cost at \$10,196 per refugee for the first year.²² It is important, however, that the calculation of private resettlement costs estimate the *marginal* cost of the *additional* refugee, not the average cost for *all* refugees. The average cost of resettlement for all refugees includes a variety of fixed administrative costs. Because the next or marginal refugee does not much affect the fixed costs of the administrative apparatus, once it has been established, it would be misleading to take all those costs into account when calculating the average cost of refugees admitted above the initial federally funded limit.

Step Four

Create a mechanism through which donations to a private resettlement account trigger new openings for refugee admissions.

A private resettlement account would incentivize individuals and organizations to donate to refugee resettlement, and would encourage those already giving to give more. Whenever the account passes a threshold that is sufficient to cover the “essential and reasonable costs,” as estimated in the MOUs between PRM and the VolAgs, the State Department would be required to admit an additional refugee.

A refugee account would create a single location to direct donors, while also pooling donations that, if spread among the nine agencies, would be insufficient for meeting the threshold. Assume, for example, that the marginal cost of resettling a refugee is about \$10,000. Absent a joint account, VolAgs could only resettle refugee if they each individually raised the full \$10,000. Whereas if they pooled their resources, they could perhaps resettle several more.

The account should be held jointly by the VolAgs—potentially through their umbrella nonprofit organization, Refugee Council USA. There are two reasons for this. First, it would permit donors who want to donate to private nonprofits to indirectly fund resettlement of additional refugees. According to the Internal Revenue Service, “Charitable contributions to governmental units are tax-deductible under section 170(c)(1) of the Internal Revenue Code if made for a public purpose.”²³ Even if refugee resettlement is a public purpose, some donors may have reservations about donating directly to the government.

Second, federal agencies may share funds only to the extent that they share the same legal authority to perform the same actions. This means that it may not be possible for the funds to be directed to a single agency and then distributed as needed to the other agencies involved in the process.

PRM, ORR, and DHS should determine each agency's individual needs on an annual basis, and the VolAgs should direct the funds from the private resettlement account to each agency accordingly. As a condition of their resettlement MOUs, the VolAgs would be required to use the donations to fund additional refugee resettlement through the privately funded resettlement program.

Step Five

The White House should recruit major philanthropists, philanthropic foundations, and corporations to help fund the private refugee resettlement account, and promote a crowdfunding campaign for the account.

A number of major philanthropists have expressed interest in additional refugee resettlement. For example, Hamdi Ulukaya, the billionaire founder of the Chobani Greek yogurt company, has said that the private sector “can move faster, think bigger, and modernize approaches to relief and resettlement that haven't changed since the 1940s.” Mr. Ulukaya has promised to donate \$700 million to aid refugees.²⁴ George Soros has spoken favorably about private resettlement, while Richard Branson, Bill Gates, and others have all called to resettle more refugees.²⁵ Glenn Beck, the conservative commentator, has raised millions for resettling Christians.²⁶ The White House should discuss its plan with philanthropic leaders and get financial commitments before implementing the plan, so that it can be launched with fanfare from a position of impressive financial strength.

The corporate sector has also already given generously to aid refugees overseas. The Ikea Foundation donated \$11.6 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Google has launched a donation-matching campaign that will match donations of up to \$5.5 million. JP Morgan Chase has given the International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, and Medical Corps \$1 million each. Dozens of other corporations and foundations have also given money to refugee aid efforts overseas.²⁷

The administration should pair its recruitment of private sector leaders with a crowd funding campaign open to the public. The White House has already created a page on its website to encourage volunteers and donors to engage with the VolAgs on the local level.²⁸ It could promote donations to the VolAg-held account, much as it did following the Haiti earthquake in 2010 for the Clinton-Bush Haiti Fund, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.²⁹ Last year, the White House promoted a Kickstarter campaign to help fund the United Nations' refugee relief efforts abroad.³⁰ A similar approach could help fund the private resettlement account.

Step Six

Set a privately funded refugee quota based on the amount of private funding received six months prior to the Presidential Determination of refugee limits.

During their quarterly meeting with the VolAgs, which will take place about six months prior to the start of the next fiscal year, PRM, in consultation with ORR, should determine the amount of private funding available for refugee resettlement. The VolAgs would then be required to transfer the funds from the joint account following this meeting to PRM, ORR, or DHS, according to their needs, and again prior to the start of the fiscal year. PRM would calculate the privately funded quota based on the balance of the joint account six months prior to the start of the fiscal year and, if possible, a conservative estimate of donations likely to be received in the following six months.

Privately funded refugees would use the same system as publicly funded refugees. Other than the source of their funding, there would be no administrative differences in admissions and resettlement. Just as in other cases in which the normal refugee limits are increased, refugees would need to be screened in anticipation of the quota increase. To prevent a long lag between the receipt of funds and the admission of the privately funded beneficiary, the donations would not be tied to specific individuals (except potentially in the case of Priority-3 program beneficiaries, as described below).

Step Seven

Confirm that the VolAgs have the additional private sector volunteers and resources that they need to resettle refugees.

A unique feature of refugee resettlement in the United States is that the private sector is already so heavily involved. As of 2012, at least 25 percent of the VolAgs' revenue came from private donations and possibly as much as 50 percent of their total resources—including volunteer hours and in-kind donations—came from private sources. The entire system depends on this sort of philanthropic activity continuing regardless of the funds that might be donated to a private resettlement account.

Currently, the VolAgs—as represented by Refugee Council USA—are calling for an additional 115,000 refugees above the federal ceiling on refugees for 2016.³¹ This suggests that the VolAgs believe that they have, or could have, the private sector resources and volunteers needed to cover a more than 100 percent increase of the current refugee cap.

Initially, therefore, PRM should confirm that the VolAgs do have the capacity to cover the projected number of additional privately funded refugees during their quarterly meeting six months prior to the presidential directive—just as they do for federally funded refugees.

If there is reason to believe that the VolAgs will have difficulty meeting their responsibilities to all refugees, PRM could require that they demonstrate more fully their resource capacity. The simplest approach would have PRM confirm that the VolAgs have enough volunteers willing to enter into MOUs to aid them in resettlement. If this were a requirement, it could also create an incentive for volunteers who wish to increase the refugee limit to sign up with the VolAgs.

POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS

The United States is unlikely to meet its publicly funded quota this year, so a private quota would also go unused.

In each of the past two years, the administration has actually met its refugee ceiling of 70,000, demonstrating their ability to reach its goals. It is still true that despite this year's higher goal of 85,000, it has actually brought in 4,000 fewer refugees in the first five months of FY 2016 than in the first five months of FY 2017.³² On March 2015, it had reached 38 percent of its FY2015 goal, ramping up slightly during the second half of the year, but as March 2016, it had only reached 26 percent of its FY2016 goal. However, the Department of Homeland Security surged the number of screeners in February and hopes to finish 10,000 Syrian interviews by the end of March.³³

The main reason for the slow admission rate is the administration's late announcement of its final FY 2016 target. Throughout the year, federal agencies were planning for 75,000, but the Department of State (DOS) increased the number to 85,000 in October, giving the agencies and Congress little time to prepare.³⁴ Until late September, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was prepared for only 75,000,³⁵ but Secretary of State John Kerry announced an increase of an additional 10,000 just 10 days before the official presidential determination of the FY 2016 refugee ceiling.³⁶

Despite this delayed announcement, the administration requested no increase in congressional appropriations, insisting that the target could be met at existing funding levels. Officials at DHS and DOS testified on October 1, 2015 that they would attempt to meet the FY 2016 ceiling through reprioritizing current funds. Congress then appropriated the State Department roughly the same amount of funds on refugee resettlement for 2016 as it had in 2015.³⁷ This led to an almost 20 percent drop in spending per applicant.

DHS, which is funded through fees on immigration programs, will spend seven percent less per applicant in FY 2016, despite an urgent need to spend more per applicant. DHS conducts interviews for all refugees, and yet will spend just \$430 per refugee admitted this year.³⁸ For comparison, the cost for an immigrant family member of a U.S. citizen to become a legal permanent resident is over \$1,500 per applicant.³⁹ At the same time, the intelligence agencies—the CIA, FBI, and Director for National Intelligence—that conduct the background checks devote very little personnel to refugee screening. Refugee processing is an almost imperceptible percentage of the budgets for these agencies, rendering it a much lower priority than their primary duties.

Too few resources devoted to screening have inevitably led to a large backlog in refugee referrals from UNHCR. A privately funded program would not suffer this problem. Private funding would be required at a consistent level per refugee under the proposal laid out in this paper, so agencies would not undergo sudden shortfalls. Security agencies will still need to streamline their vetting procedures, but the other agencies would receive the private funding well in advance of the annual fiscal year cap determination, giving them sufficient warning regarding new admissions.

Privately funded resettlement may displace publicly funded resettlement.

Another potential critique of private resettlement deserves special consideration. It could be argued that private resettlement would displace public resettlement. The government might come to see resettlement financed and led by the private sector as a viable alternative to the government system, leading to a decrease in government support for refugee resettlement. This is a legitimate concern, but the available evidence strongly suggests that private resettlement tends to complement rather than replace public support.

During the Reagan-era, privately funded refugee admissions surged alongside publicly funded admissions, with both admissions channels peaking in 1990. Canada's private refugee sponsorship program saw a surge in admissions after the program's launch in 1979, a surge in the years before and after 1990, and another surge in 2015 and 2016, in response to the current refugee crisis. In each case, there was a corresponding surge in public admissions. Finally, private donations to UNHCR have surged during this recent refugee crisis at the same time that government contributions have increased.

Historically, trends in public and private resettlement have moved together. Indeed, after the UNHCR's called on countries to consider private resettlement plans, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Ireland, and Great Britain all rolled out private resettlement programs, even as they began to accept greater numbers of publicly funded refugees. If the United States government created a similar program here, the remarkable generosity and volunteer spirit of Americans would likely turn the United States into one of the world's leaders in private refugee resettlement.

A privately funded refugee resettlement program will not be sustainable.

A related objection is that privately funded program would not be sustainable. The main worry is that private interest will wane over the longer term and funding will dry up.

Private interest in refugee resettlement does rise and fall, but so does public interest. Canada has shown that a private refugee program can be successfully sustained through rising and falling interest in refugee support. The Canadian private program has averaged about 3,700 admissions per year, with a high of about 6,300 and a low of 2,100, since 1995. The United States could easily replicate that level of lasting support if the administration is willing to make the continuity of the program a priority.

EXPANDING PRIVATE REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP

The structure described above is the simplest way to implement privately funded refugee resettlement in the United States. It leaves the current refugee resettlement process virtually untouched. The only real difference is that private funds are added to congressional appropriations. Private refugee *funding* programs are different from private refugee *sponsorship* programs, which have already been implemented in the United States, Canada, and several other countries, but are fully compatible with private sponsorship.

The United States already has a limited form of private sponsorship that could be expanded to allow for a broader private sponsorship category in the United States. The Priority-3 (P-3) family reunification refugee program permits legal permanent residents or U.S. citizens to effectively sponsor family members for refugee status. But the program is so restricted that very few people are actually eligible.

P-3 sponsors—or “anchor relatives”—must have entered as a refugee or asylee in the last five years. They may only submit affidavits for their spouses, unmarried children under 21, and parents of certain nationalities that the State Department deems to be of special humanitarian concern for the purpose of family reunification.⁴⁰ Because spouses and unmarried children under 21 and spouses may already be included on an initial refugee petition, the P-3 program plays at best a minor role in the United States refugee program.⁴¹

The State Department should expand the P-3 program to allow greater participation as a step toward a more robust private sponsorship program. The expansion should include all adult children, grandparents, grandchildren, siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and first cousins, whether they are inside or outside their country of origin, by any legal United States resident. P-3 sponsors must submit an Affidavit of Relationship to the State Department along with a biological sample for DNA confirmation of the

claimed biological familial relationship. Biographical details are also required and investigated during the course of the interview and application process.

This proposal follows the precedent of previous expansions of the family reunification program. During the 1990s, the State Department created P-4 and P-5 categories for Bosnian refugees, which included the classes of family members we propose be made eligible for private sponsorship.⁴² In 2014, the State Department created the Central American Minors (CAM) Program, which waived the requirement that the sponsoring “anchor relative” (in that case, limited to a parent) be a refugee.⁴³

The Affidavit of Relationship has two functions. First, it allows the refugee to apply directly to the United States Refugee Admissions Program without having received a referral from UNHCR. UNHCR refers less than one percent of all refugees for resettlement anywhere in the world, which means that the refugee would have little chance at family reunification in the United States apart from the expanded P-3 program.⁴⁴

Second, because the rigorous United States screening process duplicates the screening UNHCR conducts prior to its referrals, bypassing UNHCR would expedite the resettlement process, while adequately addressing health and safety concerns. United States screeners verify the same information as UNHCR, as well as conduct much more stringent checks against United States criminal and intelligence agency databases, so there is no loss in security through the P-3 process.⁴⁵ In fact, the P-3 program helps to respond to a common security-related objection to refugee resettlement, namely that the government cannot adequately identify individuals seeking refugee status. Under P-3, the individual would be precisely identified through DNA testing as the relative of an individual already known to be peacefully living in the United States.

By itself, an expansion of the P-3 expansion cannot make a substantial difference in refugee admissions, because current law does not require that the United States refugee cap increase to make room for P-3 applicants. The result of a P-3 expansion without a corresponding increase in the official refugee limit would be to shift some refugee admissions from UNHCR referred applicants to P-3 applicants with no net increase in resettlement. After the P-4 and P-5 expansions for Bosnian refugees, refugee admissions from Bosnia increased from 1,900 in 1993 to 31,000 in 1998. If P-3 is expanded for Syrians, it should come with a concurrent increase in the proposed refugee limit for the years in which it is in effect.

An expansion of the P-3 program, paired with the proposed privately funded refugee pilot program (with a minor addition), could allow for an increase of admissions and a *de facto* private sponsorship program. Under a revised public funding program, the Department of State could allow donations to the private resettlement account to be used only on behalf of an individual who is the beneficiary of a P-3 affidavit. If a P-3 anchor relative chose, he or she could personally fund the resettlement of their relative

abroad, instantly making available a place for them in the refugee program. While nothing prevents Americans from donating to the VolAgs, such donations provide no direct relief for their family members who have been displaced abroad.

A privately funded program that allowed for specifying specific individuals for refugee resettlement, paired with a P-3 expansion program, would create a powerful incentive for relatives in the United States to fund resettlement directly. This, it should be noted, would require adding a layer of complexity to the privately funded refugee pilot program. Rather than the donations of private “sponsors” going to the general private resettlement account, family-directed sponsor donations would have to be set aside for use in the year in which the family members actually arrived—after their vetting process abroad.

This type of private sponsorship has two basic advantages over the Canadian private sponsorship model. First, the Canadian model requires sponsors to take responsibility for the refugee’s financial and social needs, which requires a significant amount of oversight on the part of the Canadian government. Second, emulating the Canadian model would require the federal government and states to check to see whether applicants for government welfare benefits are refugees. While this was done during the Reagan-era program, welfare law today, which was reformed in 1996, clearly grants refugees access to federal programs, while prohibiting it for other new immigrants.⁴⁶

The proposed policy would reward applicants with connections in the United States, but the current P-3 process does as well. Indeed, that is its sole purpose—to prioritize the resettlement of refugees who have strong, preexisting connections in the United States. Just as importantly, refugee resettlement of this variety would not be a zero-sum proposition, as it is now. By freeing up publicly funded slots, direct private funding would actually help those refugees without family connections or resources to fund their resettlement.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

A privately funded refugee pilot program combined with greater access to the Priority-3 family reunification refugee program has the potential to greatly benefit the United States Refugee Admissions Program. It would infuse new resources into the system, reducing reliance on congressional appropriations, and weakening political resistance to raising the refugee cap—rooted in understandable but misguided fears—by showing in quantifiable terms that millions of generous Americans do want to welcome more refugees and are willing to open their pockets to pay for their resettlement.

A private refugee program would activate the remarkable and energetic American spirit of philanthropy and volunteerism, which, in addition to financing refugee resettlement, has the potential to shift public opinion in the direction of greater openness to refugees. Linking refugee admissions to private donations will send a powerful quantitative signal

of the American public's desire to help refugees. Those on the fence about admitting more refugees will come to see that this is an issue of genuine and deep concern for many of their friends, neighbors, and local faith communities. Moreover, coming into direct contact with fellow citizens who are actively working to bring over additional refugees—witnessing their honorable motives and the depth of their commitment—will help open those currently wary of refugees to the dignity, compassion and fundamental decency of offering home to the innocent homeless.

¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Syrian Refugees in Europe: What Europe Can Do to Ensure Protection and Solidarity." July 11, 2014. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53b69f574.html>

² Antonio Guterres. "Think the aid system can cope? It can't." World Economic Forum. January 18, 2015. <http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/01/think-the-aid-system-can-cope-it-cant/>

³ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Syrian Refugees in Europe: What Europe Can Do to Ensure Protection and Solidarity." July 11, 2014. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53b69f574.html>

⁴ Canada Immigration and Citizenship. "Welcome Refugees: Key figures." February 29, 2016. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/milestones/data.asp>

⁵ UN High Commissioner for Refugees. "Resettlement and Other Forms of Legal Admission for Syrian Refugees." February 10, 2016. <http://www.unhcr.org/52b2febafc5.pdf>

⁶ UN High Commissioner for Refugees. "Syria Regional Refugee Response." February 29, 2016. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

⁷ UN High Commissioner for Refugees. "Q&A: Jewish agency in US marks 130 years of protecting the persecuted." February 3, 2011. <http://www.unhcr.org/print/4d4ab6556.html>

⁸ Harry Truman. "Statement and Directive on Displaced Persons." December 22, 1945. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/truman_on_dps.html

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⁴⁶ The major benefit to the Canadian model is that it is flexible enough that people can supply housing in their own homes and provide other cost-cutting measures to make it affordable for them to participate in the program.

⁴⁷ Non-family members, churches, or community organizations could also fund refugee resettlement and partner with the VolAgs on resettling whomever the State Department refers to them for resettlement. Creating a similar process to P-3, however, where non-family members could select the specific individuals to be resettled, would impose another layer of complexity and would raise the fear of human smuggling. Such a process should still be considered carefully. A selection process could provide a powerful incentive for some groups that are interested in protecting persons of certain niche religious or ethnic backgrounds who may be underserved by the traditional refugee program. But this process should not be implemented without cautious consideration of how such sponsors could be vetted.