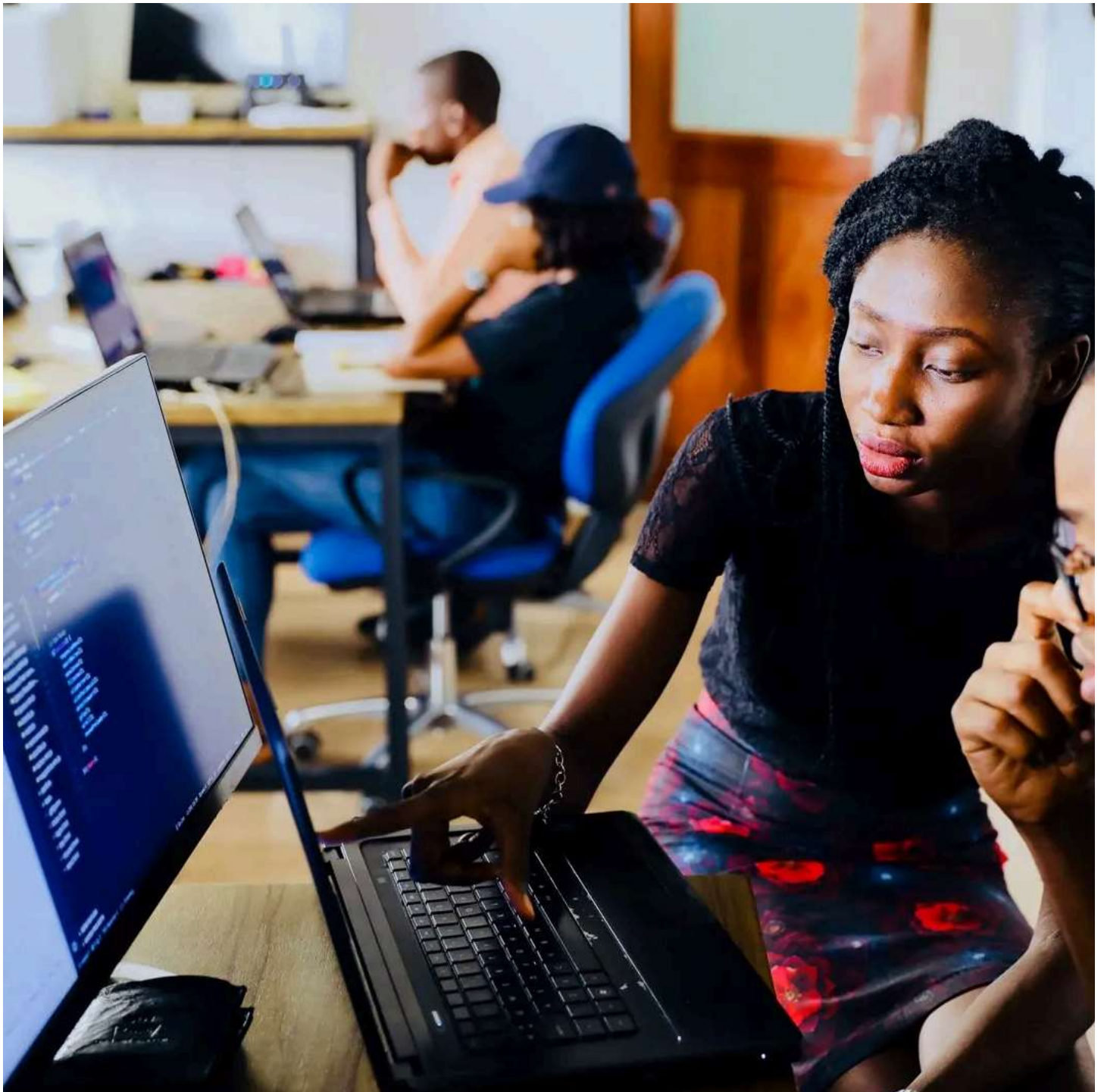




# Changing the way we see refugees and their economic integration

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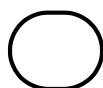
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- **Global companies play a vital role in refugee reception and integration, and must base their hiring efforts on objective facts and evidence.**
- **Refugees are often essential to rebuilding of their home countries and they also bring productivity to the societies that take them in.**
- **Contrary to popular opinion, many refugee employees become successful, because of, not despite, the adversities they have faced.**

Global companies play an increasingly important role in refugee reception and integration, so in 2022, the World Economic Forum established the [Refugee Employment and Employability Alliance](#), co-chaired by the [UN Refugee Agency \(UNHCR\)](#) and [the Ingka Group](#).

Within one year, this initiative has partnered with 140 chief human resource officers from more than 20 industries and leading non-profit organizations such as [Tent](#) to accelerate the support of refugees.

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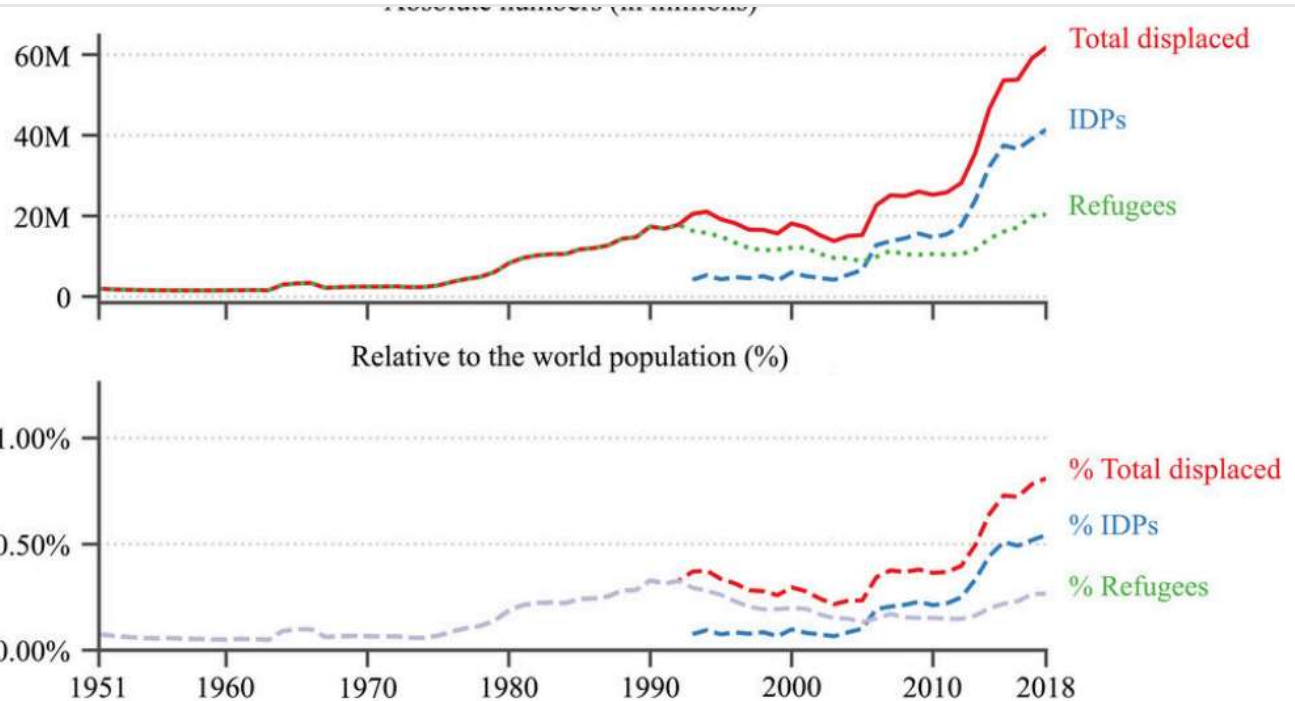
on objective facts and scientific evidence.

## Getting global refugee numbers right

The highest total number of forcefully displaced people on record was after World War II, with **175 million**, which corresponded to about 8% of the world's population. How do today's statistics – including mass displacements in Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Venezuela and Sudan – compare to these numbers?

According to the [UNHCR](#), in mid-2022, the global number of forcefully displaced was 103 million, or around 1.3% of the world population. More than 53 million people were internally displaced persons: meaning those who are forced to move within their home countries without crossing international borders. The number of international refugees was 32.5 million, or 0.4% of the world population.

Contrary to popular opinion, a recent study by [Sonja Fransen and Hein de Haas](#) has demonstrated that there is no steady increase in the refugee flows. For nearly 70 years before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the international refugee numbers fluctuated between 0.1% and 0.3% of the world's population. These numbers change depending on outbreaks and endings of wars and civil conflicts.



Trends and patterns of refugee migration. Image: Fransen, S, & de Haas, H.

Why do these details about forced migration data matter? As leading migration scholar [de Haas puts it](#), precision in numbers can help us realize that the situation is not hopeless.

His argument is that one refugee for every 243 people worldwide is not an unsurmountable number. The international community can and must protect refugees. Basing our actions on scientific evidence will help mobilize and unify people and businesses to resolve the challenges surrounding forced migration.

## Economic lives of refugees vary

As Hamdi Ulukaya, CEO of Chobani and founder of Tent, [once said](#): “The minute a refugee gets a job, they stop being a refugee.”

Global companies can become key players in integrating refugees into labour markets. Not only is this a responsible thing to do, but also makes a strong business case. In the era of [global race for labour and talent shortages](#), hiring

## DISCOVER

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Not all refugees end up being employed by companies. Their economic self-reliance comes from many different sources. It is well-known that refugees are overrepresented among innovators and entrepreneurs. Many of them have business acumen, entrepreneurial spirit, risk-taking prowess and self-reliance.

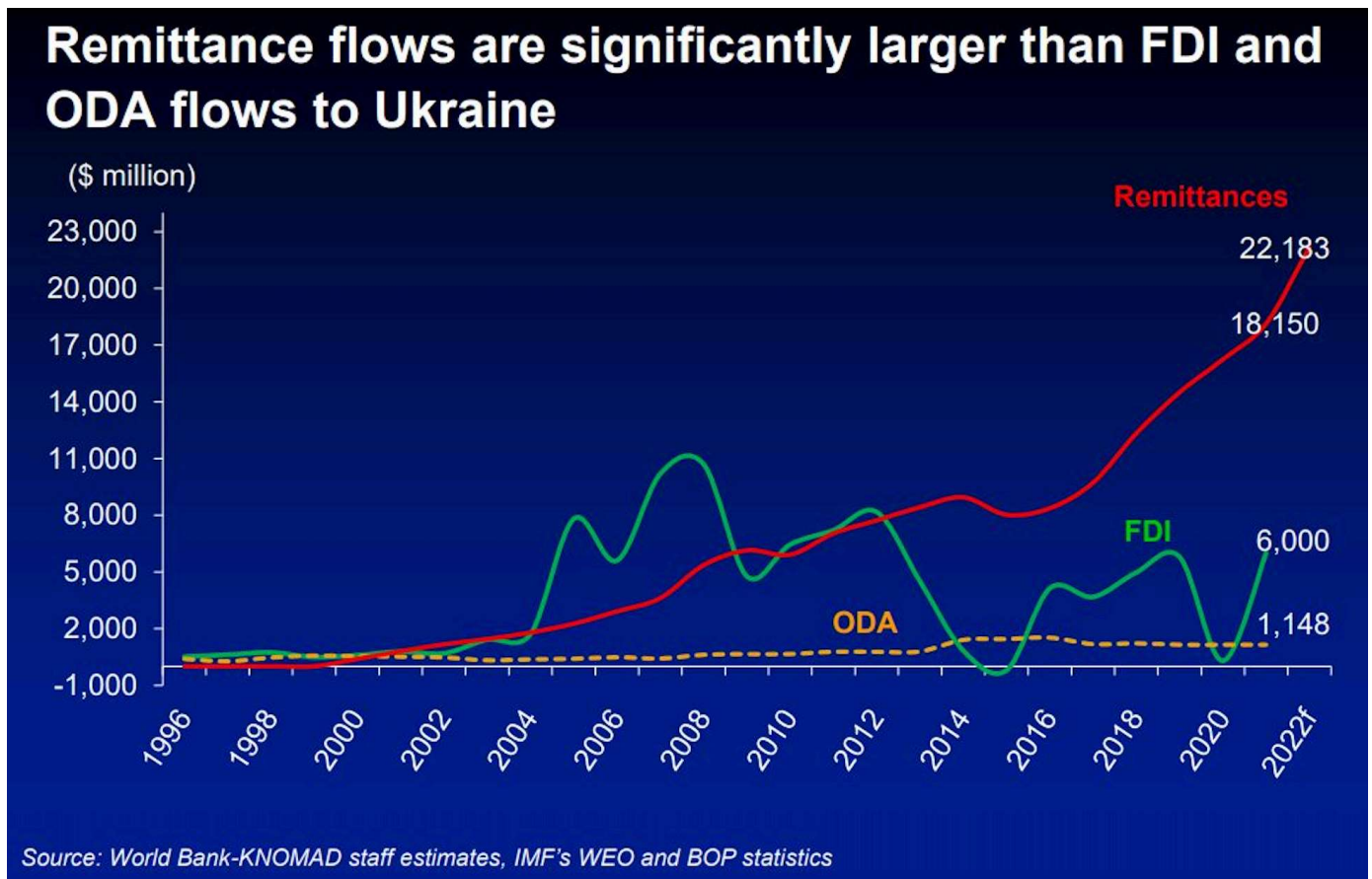
Their difficult life circumstances have taught them how to adapt to adversity. As [Forbes](#) magazine put it, resilience, tolerance for risk and decisiveness are essential character traits of successful entrepreneurs.

In addition, many refugees contribute to development in their home countries through remittances and social transfers. According to Professor of Forced Migration and International Affairs at Oxford University, [Alexander Betts](#), we should change our thinking about refugees as not just a humanitarian but also a development issue. To many people's surprise, refugees also contribute to the global economy.

Ukraine is a timely example. In 2022, the country was the largest recipient of remittances – transfers that see migrants send home part of their earnings in the form of either cash or goods to support their families – in Europe and Central Asia, with an [inflow of more than \\$18 billion](#). We also know from other historical cases how durable remittance-sending can be.

In the 1990s, the war in Bosnia killed about 5% and displaced about half of the population. Twenty-two years after the outbreak of the war, Bosnia was the fifth





Remittance flows are significantly larger than foreign direct investments and outward direct investment flows to Ukraine. Image: World Bank-KNOMAD staff estimates, IMF's WEO and BOP statistics

Refugees are essential to rebuilding of their home countries and they also bring productivity to the societies that take them in. For example, working-age refugees in the US contribute on average **\$21,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits** in their first 20 years in the country.

Contrary to popular opinion, through their employment, entrepreneurship and remittances, refugees can make a disproportionately high contribution to economic growth.

## Post-traumatic growth and resilience

Refugees often have been exposed to traumatic experiences. Because of this, they are often portrayed as highly susceptible to mental illness such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but this portrayal is problematic.

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varied findings, with an average prevalence of PTSD among refugees [estimated at around 30%](#). This implies that two-thirds or more of them do not experience full-fledged PTSD.

### Have you read?

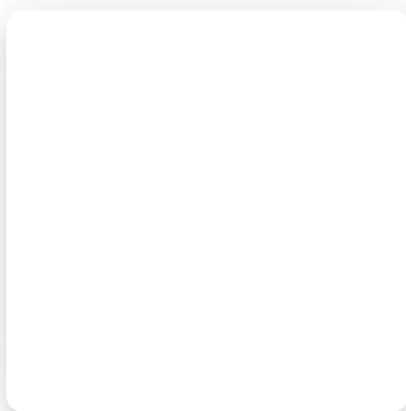
- [We must reform trade to build a sustainable, inclusive global recovery](#)
- [Afghan mayors and refugees are in danger. The world's cities mustn't fail them](#)

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The reality is complex: Some refugees merely survive but many others adapt to their new circumstances or even thrive despite the immense adversities they face.

Psychology literature records numerous examples of post-traumatic growth (PTG) among refugees, defining PTG as [“the positive psychological changes experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances”](#).

Many refugees can reappraise traumatic experiences as basis for growth, for developing personal strength, and for appreciating life in a new way.



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Why should business leaders be aware of this? Too often employers are inclined to think about refugees through vulnerability lens. [Research by Pesch and colleagues](#)

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psychological support.

However, refugees themselves prefer to be seen as capable, resilient and eager to become integrated. Emphasizing vulnerability detracts from refugees' stories of survival and resilience, and the many contributions they make to their workplaces and communities.

Businesses involvement in helping refugees and providing them with a better future can make a real difference.

Leaders who seek to become change makers must have a solid understanding of global refugee statistics, and should also be aware that economic lives of refugees are vivid and their personal lives multifaceted.

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