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Article

Statist and Cosmopolitan Obligations to Refugees

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Abstract: This article first discusses the questionable ethics of the debate on the normative relevance of IQ for obligations of refugee protection and outlines conditions for permissible engagement. It then develops the central argument that the deployment of accurate and complete statist and cosmopolitan analyses, that carefully consider both the costs and, importantly, the benefits of refugee protection, can resolve much of the disagreement in the debate on the normative relevance of IQ to obligations of refugee protection. This is because these complete analyses reveal that the benefits of refugee protection within political communities in the Global North are immense, and this is true irrespective of prospective IQ. These immense benefits thereby outweigh even priority-weighted costs. Therefore, states in the Global North have obligations to protect refugees within their political communities on both statist and cosmopolitan grounds, and the purported IQ of those protected is not relevant to those obligations. The article, finally, reinforces the demonstration that any view that IQ is relevant to obligations of protection is false and repugnant.

Keywords: refugees; obligations; cosmopolitanism; statism

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In their 2024 article for the Journal of Controversial Ideas, Heiner Rindermann, Bruno Kluak, and James Thompson presented studies purporting to show that 1,080 recently arrived refugees given IQ tests in Germany scored on average 12 to 15 points below the national average of 100. This, in the authors' view, cast doubt on whether protected refugees would contribute as much economically as existing citizens, and instead may be an economic cost to the host state.

Critical responses followed. Turkheimer and Harden (2024) criticised the methodology and statistical analysis as 'error-ridden' (p. 3). My own response (Hillier-Smith, 2024a), cast further doubt on the empirical claims but primarily argued that

even if (for the sake of argument) refugees had a lower IQ and were an economic cost, this would be legally and morally irrelevant to obligations of refugee protection, and that any view that IQ was relevant to obligations of protection was false and had repugnant implications.

The debate developed further. Rindermann (2025) responded to Turkheimer and Harden defending his methodology; and to my article by accepting the irrelevance of IQ to obligations of protection, but nonetheless introducing new arguments regarding the security costs of refugees. More significantly, Tavren Oshal (2025), writing pseudonymously, argues that, contra Rindermann and myself, if refugees did have a lower IQ than the national average this would be normatively significant insofar as the costs of protecting them within states in the Global North (hereafter Northern states) would be sufficient to defeat obligations to provide it. This would be true not only on statist grounds where states may give additional weight to the interests of their own citizens over those of noncitizens; but also on cosmopolitan grounds where all persons' (citizens and noncitizens) interests must be given equal weight. Indeed, the costs of protection are sufficiently significant to render it questionable 'whether Global North countries are morally required or even permitted' to admit large numbers of such refugees (p. 14).

This article defends that IQ is irrelevant to obligations of refugee protection, but with a view to resolving disputes within this debate. Section 1 addresses the statist case against refugee protection, responding to Rindermann and Oshal's concerns regarding the economic and security costs of refugees. Section 2 analyses Oshal's cosmopolitan case that refugee protection imposes significant costs on (i) refugees themselves, (ii) host societies, and (iii) the Global South. This section also identifies a seriously compromising methodological error of Oshal's cosmopolitan analysis: it only considers potential costs of refugee protection but, strikingly, fails to consider potential benefits. Section 3 redresses this imbalance to complete the cosmopolitan analysis by including omitted benefits of refugee protection to (iv) refugees, (v) host societies, and (vi) the Global South. Section 4 considers the broader normative implications of treating IQ as relevant to obligations of protection.

The overall argument is that complete and accurate statist and cosmopolitan analyses, which consider both costs and benefits, can resolve much disagreement in this debate. This is because complete analyses reveal that the purported costs of refugee protection within Northern states' political communities are contestable, but even if established and even if priority-weighted, these costs are overwhelmingly outweighed by the immense benefits, and these benefits are orthogonal to prospective IQ. Therefore, Northern states possess obligations to protect refugees within their political communities on both statist and cosmopolitan grounds, and the purported IQ of those protected is irrelevant to such obligations.

Before proceeding to the analysis, it is worth discussing the ethics and terms of this debate. I have been deeply concerned about the ethics of engaging with an inquiry on the normative relevance of refugees' IQs to obligations of protection. Refugees are equal persons who have been, and are being, subjected to serious harms, human rights violations, and threats to their lives in both the causes of their displacement and whilst are displaced, and they have urgent needs for protection. An inquiry and debate on the relevance of their IQ to obligations to protect them from these harms and threats is deeply morally problematic for several reasons.

First, the inquiry itself is disrespectful in virtue of an *attentional surplus on the wrong properties* that fails to recognise the moral worth of refugees and of their urgent needs.[1] To focus attention on a person's purported intellectual capabilities as the, or even a relatively, relevant factor in determining obligations of protection, relative to her urgent needs for that protection, fails to respect her moral worth as a person. This is because it treats those urgent needs – essential to *her* for her basic wellbeing, rights, and/or survival – as insufficiently morally important to be worthy of one's relative attention distribution. To treat those needs as insufficiently worthy in this way is to discount them to an implausible extreme which is incompatible with respecting the victim's moral worth as a person who thereby has needs that matter morally. If, to take an extreme example, an agent who could protect a prospective victim from sexual violence were to first inquire into that victim's intellectual capabilities to reach a judgement on whether and to what extent they had an obligation to protect her from that violation, that agent would plausibly be regarded as displaying a sickening attitude that grossly wrongs the victim through disrespect. This is because the agent has fixated on entirely the wrong properties as falsely salient and worthy of their attention to the omission of what is in reality salient – her urgent need for protection – in a way that treats the latter as relatively morally insignificant. And to treat such needs as relatively morally insignificant is to treat the person herself and that which greatly matters to her as relatively morally insignificant: it expresses she is not the kind of being whose needs matter morally. The inquiry on the normative relevance of refugees' IQ to obligations of protection is, therefore, wrongful in virtue of a comparable attentional surplus on the wrong properties that fails to respect the moral worth of refugees as persons with needs that matter morally.

The inquiry is also disrespectful for a second, related, reason. Focusing on refugees' IQ as an alleged predictor for economic contribution to determine obligations for protection presupposes an unargued-for bias that privileges questions of what properties refugees may or may not possess that could benefit 'us' as (citizens of) affluent host states over questions of what severe harms and injustices to them could be alleviated through protection. This instrumentalises refugees (a form of objectification) in treating them as valuable only insofar as they may serve one's own interests and ends rather than as valuable in and of themselves as persons with their own (more urgent) interests and ends, not least in protection itself.[2]

The inquiry may also have harmful consequences. An academic debate on refugees' IQ relative to host populations may contribute to false public perceptions that refugees are in some relevant respect inferior, with foreseeable discriminatory and persecutory conduct by states and individuals. Relatedly, the appearance in an academic journal of specific claims made within this debate, regarding, for example, refugees' IQ and refugees allegedly imposing security and economic costs, may confer a sense of legitimacy that these claims are relevant consideration open to, and worthy of, serious academic debate. This sense of legitimacy may then proliferate into public political discourse enabling

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[1] This discussion is indebted to Ella Whiteley's (2023) insights. 'Attentional surplus on the wrong properties' is Whiteley's formulation of a distinct form of disrespecting personhood. This discussion has also benefitted from Eilidh Beaton's (as yet) unpublished research on the ethics of attention distribution.

[2] Instrumentalisation as a form of objectification and hence disrespect of moral value is taken from Martha Nussbaum's (1995) influential analysis, and, of course, Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative, Kant ([1785] 1998, §4:428–9, 435).

political figures to use such claims to ostensibly 'justify' seriously harmful policies that deny protection to, or persecute, innocent refugees.

These consideration of disrespect and harm ground powerful pro tanto reasons against engaging with this line of inquiry. Seriously engaging may commit or sustain the same disrespect by adding to the attentional surplus on the wrong features, and to the instrumentalisation of refugees by debating their value for the host state. And seriously engaging may contribute to, or sustain, the wrongful perception of inferiority (that refugees' IQ is indeed a relevant factor debated academically) and the false sense of legitimacy that the claims discussed are indeed relevant consideration for refugee protection.

However, having discussed this issue in depth with fellow researchers, ethicists, and refugee scholars and activists with whom I have worked and campaigned, I have tentatively concluded it may be all-things-considered permissible to reactively engage with this inquiry here. The inquiry was wrong to undertake in the first instance for the reasons of disrespect and potential harm. But the inquiry has already been initiated and published in this journal nevertheless. That horse has bolted. Hence, the risks of disrespect and harm are already operative. These risks could be exacerbated if certain assumptions and claims of this inquiry were to remain unchallenged. Refraining from challenging could give the false impression not only that, for example, refugees' IQ is a sufficiently relevant consideration to merit publication in an academic journal, but also that such claims have not been, and so perhaps could not be, refuted in an academic journal and thereby have in fact been established. Moreover, there may be further value in challenging specific narrow claims. No scholar who has studied forced displacement and obligations to refugees in depth has made or endorsed particular claims made in this debate – e.g., that refugees have a lower IQ, would necessarily pose an economic burden, are a security threat, or increase crime, or that protecting them may result in catastrophic consequences. However, comparable claims do appear in public political discourse. Scrutinising these claims through sustained empirical and philosophical analysis to demonstrate precisely how and why they may be false could therefore be beneficial as a useful resource to substantiate and sharpen challenges to analogous claims in public discourse. Consequently, challenging the assumptions and claims of this inquiry may serve to counter false senses of legitimacy as well as bolster efforts to counter public arguments and policies that seek to deny protection to refugees. In terms of disrespect, my interventions in this debate aim to affirm the equal humanity and moral worth of refugees by refocusing attention onto what indeed matters and is worthy of attention: their moral claims, rights, interests, and value as persons; and thereby repudiate the disrespect of lines of inquiry that deny that equal humanity. Moreover, consultations with refugees emphasised the high value of, and pressing need for, 'allyship'. The concern is that, in the contemporary political environment, the moral worth of refugees as persons and that of their rights, interests, and needs are increasingly questioned if not denied across several different spheres (e.g., academia, media representations, policy design, public attitudes, and political movements). There is a pressing need, therefore, for those who are well situated, to provide allyship in terms of sustained advocacy for the worth of refugees and that of their rights, interests, and needs across all of these spheres (especially when opportunities to participate in these spheres are, to varying degrees, denied to, or inaccessible for, refugees themselves).

It is for these reasons and under these conditions, and therefore sincerely only in the interests of countering the disrespect and harms faced by refugees today, that I critically

engage with this inquiry here. I will, however, make no further interventions into this debate. It is important to note that my not responding to any potential future interventions or replies must not be taken as evidence they could not be refuted, but only as evidence of the moral reasons not to sustain this inquiry and debate any further.

To turn to the terms of this debate, for the avoidance of doubt, it has not been established that refugees have a lower IQ or that refugees impose net economic costs on Northern states. These empirical claims are almost certainly false, for reasons discussed in the existing debate and below. Therefore, it is worth emphasising that the relevant normative debate proceeds on the hypothetical conditional where these empirical premises are granted only for the sake of argument to assess their normative relevance. Oshal's (2025) formulations occasionally slip into references to 'relatively low-IQ refugees from the Global South' (p. 5) or 'when a relatively low IQ prevents refugees from making a net contribution' (p. 2), which risks the false impression the empirical claims have been established. They have not.

1. Statism

Let us start with areas of agreement. In my 2024 article, I argued that even if refugees had a lower IQ compared to the German average and were an economic cost to the state, this would not diminish or defeat obligations of protection towards them. Rindermann (2025) now makes clear this point of agreement: intelligence levels of refugees do not provide 'a sound reason against helping them'(p. 1).

There is also agreement on the underlying ethics. Rindermann (2025) is concerned that a 'universalist ethics' according to which all persons have equal moral worth and should be treated impartially (which he suggests underpins my 2024 analysis) is 'fundamentally at odds' with common morality, which allows priority for close personal relations, one's 'social group' and those with whom one stands in reciprocal cooperation (p. 23), and emphasises states' obligations to protect their own citizens (p. 20).

There is agreement here since my 2024 article did not commit to 'universalist ethics' at odds with common morality. Rather, that article appealed only to negative obligations not to harm persons, and positive obligations to protect others in desperate need if one is able to do so at no unreasonable cost (p. 12). These are based, respectively, on the principle against harming innocent people (perhaps the most widely shared and fundamental commitment in common morality), and the principle – sometimes called the humanitarian or Samaritan principle – to protect innocent persons in desperate need. These principles are endorsed by all plausible normative ethical theories[3] and the ethical tenets of all major religious doctrines.[4] They also underpin human rights policy and

[3] See for example Kant ([1785] 1998); Mill ([1863] 2014); Sidgwick (1907); Ross (1930); and more recently Scanlon (1998); Hooker (2002); Parfit (2011).

[4] Basic commitments not to harm and to save others are found in Christianity, among many places, as commandments against harm, and Samaritan principles to help, and in Judaism and Islam, among many places, as incapsulated in the famous dictum found in both the Talmud and Quran that one who saves a single life is as if he saves the entire world, and one who destroys a single life is as if he destroys the entire world. See Khalil (2025); and Korn (2024).

practice,[5] and they form the intuitively compelling, foundational, and widely accepted commitments *central* to common morality.

There is further agreement on agent-relative permissions. I had accepted that agents have permissions to prioritise the interests of those with whom they stand in morally significant relationships (p. 14). A parent has agent-relative permissions to prioritise her own child's interests over those of an unrelated other; and, so it is argued, analogously, state actors have agent-relative permissions to prioritise the interests of their own citizens over those of outsiders. This is what we will understand as *Statism*: a family of views (sometimes called compatriot partialism, liberal nationalism, weak cosmopolitanism, or non-cosmopolitanism) that broadly holds that (1) all persons have equal moral worth, but respecting equal moral worth need not require impartially considering all persons' interests, only respecting (by not violating) all persons' human rights; (2) agents have morally valuable relationships with particular persons that generate special obligations and thereby agent-relative permissions to give non-absolute priority to their interests over those of others; and (3) shared membership of a political community and state is a morally valuable relationship (in virtue of, inter alia, political and economic co-participation, reciprocity and co-operation in providing essential goods, a shared cultural identity, and/or shared determination of and subjection to a particular political authority) generating special obligations and thereby agent-relative permissions between co-citizens.[6] On this view, therefore, state actors are permitted if not required to give non-absolute priority to the interests of their own citizens over those of noncitizens (so long as they do not violate noncitizens' human rights). Hence, in any policy decision, affected noncitizens' interests must be considered, but, in David Miller's (2016) words, 'in the weighing process, a degree of compatriot partiality is permissible' (p. 71).

I accepted such agent-relative permissions but highlighted their limitations in scope. To explain further, even the strongest agent-relative permissions do not permit harming or violating the rights of innocent others, or allowing innocent persons to suffer needlessly when one could easily protect them, in order to serve priority-weighted interests. A parent may permissibly save her own child's life over that of an unrelated child (or even many other children). But a parent may not permissibly break an unrelated child's arm to prevent them playing with their own child's favourite toy (which would have caused them distress); or allow an unrelated child to drown when they could easily save them on the grounds that if that child were saved they would play with their own child's favourite toy.[7] Hence, even the closest special relations and strongest permissions have limits of negative obligations not to harm, and positive obligations to protect innocents from serious harm at no unreasonable cost.[8] These limits also apply at the state level (McMahan, 1997; Pogge, 2008, pp. 137–38; Hidalgo, 2018, pp. 35–40). For instance, we already accept a

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[5] These duties underpin the purported distinction between so-called negative political human rights and positive social, economic, and cultural human rights. See Shue (1980) for criticism.

[6] See Brock (2013) for an overview. See Scheffler (1999) for a defence of special relationships as sources of reasons for action, as the basis of his defence of 'moderate cosmopolitanism'. See also Miller's (2016) principle of *weak cosmopolitanism* (p. 24). See also Blake (2001); Nagel (2005); and Sangiovanni (2007) for differing defences of the view I here call statism.

[7] See McMahan (1997, p. 132).

[8] For discussions of the limits of compatriot partiality see McMahan (1997) and Pogge (2008, pp. 126, 130 and 137–38).

state may not attack other states to expand its territory, take their resources, and enslave foreign populations even if that would greatly serve its own citizens' (security, political, economic, and/or cultural) interests. Nor, for instance, would affluent states be permitted to refuse to distribute surplus stock of COVID-19 vaccinations abroad at little cost, and thereby allow thousands if not millions of noncitizens to needlessly suffer and die.

Therefore, agreement can be reached between Rindermann and me: states may have agent-relative permissions to give non-absolute priority to their citizens' interests, but this does not nullify negative obligations not to harm innocent others, or positive obligations to protect innocent others at no unreasonable cost. Hence, on the question of refugees, states have negative obligations not to harm innocent refugees, and positive obligations to protect them at least if they can do so at relatively little cost. To calculate the latter, states must balance the priority-weighted interests of citizens against protecting refugees with the interests of refugees in being protected. My 2024 article argued that, on balance, since the purported economic costs to the host population are not significant, nor morally significant, relative to the urgent interests of refugees in protection to avoid severe threats to their basic needs, human rights, and lives, serving such citizens' interests, even if priority-weighted, could not justify refusing protection to refugees (pp. 14–15).

This, however, is where the disagreement emerges. Rindermann (2025) now suggests the costs to host populations are far more significant than I acknowledge, citing economic costs and, in a new argument, security costs. Moreover, Oshal (2025, pp. 3–4) suggests that protecting refugees could result in economic costs, increased crime, and impacts on the domestic poor through longer social housing waiting lists and reduced spending power. Oshal is particularly concerned with the potentially 'life threatening consequences' of such impacts for citizens who would then struggle to afford 'expensive, life-saving medications or treatments' (p. 4). Let us consider these costs carefully.

1.1. Economic Costs

It is certainly the case that the initial processing of asylum claims and the initial protection and support of refugees incurs economic costs to Northern states. However, I presented numerous macroeconomic studies that demonstrate that on balance and over different timescales, refugees' economic contributions substantially outweigh initial costs (Hillier-Smith, 2024a, pp. 5–6). Rindermann (2025) now counters with three studies from Denmark and the Netherlands to conclude there is conflicting data (p. 19). However, Rindermann's analysis, and the studies he cites (for example, van de Beek et al., 2025) appear to assume that net economic contributions are reducible to income tax minus welfare assistance alone (pp. 17–19). But, a more complete analysis requires also including demographic offsetting of ageing populations; activate participation in the economy increasing demand for goods and services and thereby jobs for citizens; business creation; filling shortages in high-demand sectors in the labour market such as healthcare and social care and in lower-qualification roles, which also allows existing citizens to specialise and increase their own earning power (Hillier-Smith, 2024a, pp. 5–6).[9] Moreover, we can add that refugees uphold the very functioning of many Northern economies simply in virtue of the specific roles they perform within them. Refugees

[9] For further support see Peri and Sparber (2009); Clemens et al. (2018a, 2018b).

(among other migrants) are overrepresented among 'key workers' (Fasani and Mazza, 2026). These are persons, especially celebrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, whose roles in, inter alia, transport, agriculture, food supply, cleaning and sanitation, retail, and healthcare, were and remain essential to economic and social functioning. The claim then that refugees are an overall net economic cost to Northern states is almost certainly false, at least controversial, and certainly not established as a factor to be included within a statist case against refugee protection.

Further, to justify refusing protection on statist grounds, it must be shown that the priority-weighted net costs to citizens are not only (1) sufficiently substantial to outweigh the net costs to refugees of being denied protection, but also (2) not reasonably avoidable insofar as there are no alternative means to address them.[10] Failure to demonstrate (2) would entail refusing protection and the resultant serious harms to refugees would be needless and avoidable.

Recall, for instance, Oshal's concerns with potential 'life-threatening' economic costs of refugee protection to the domestic poor. This fails to sufficiently acknowledge the array of policy and fiscal tools available to states including reallocating funding priorities to expand public services; raising taxes on corporations or wealthy individuals; migration 'impact funds'; expanding social housing (through empty property acquisition, state development, or quotas for private developments); boosting incomes of the domestic poor (through minimum wage increases, income support, or grants); increasing social welfare and provisions in kind; and/or simply providing free prescriptions to those with acute healthcare needs and low incomes as many developed states already do (Scotland, for instance, provides free prescriptions to all). Oshal's identification of potential hardships to the domestic poor provides powerful reasons to adopt these or comparable (re)distributive policies and targeted interventions, not to refuse protection to refugees.

Oshal does acknowledge the in-principle possibility of policy alternatives but suggests the likelihood of state actors adopting them 'appears bleak' (4). However, it is illegitimate to treat state actors' purported unwillingness to pursue available policies as a fixed constraint to then justify their choosing the policy option of refusing protection to refugees. We are assessing the ethics of refugee policy: what, among available alternatives, state actors ought to do. If unwillingness to choose a policy option was treated as a fixed feasibility constraint that thereby precluded that option, this would have the absurd implication that state actors could escape obligations to choose certain policies simply by not being willing to choose them, and hence, for example, that states would be justified in refusing protection to refugees because that is the policy option they would choose.[11] This would risk a circularity and poor ethical analysis. Moreover, it is arbitrary to stipulate away readily available policy alternatives. State actors have the capacity to choose among available policy options, and further, to shape the political and policy landscapes they inhabit to increase the range of policy options available. It is especially arbitrary to stipulate away available policy options while endorsing others such as the forced refugee relocation schemes Oshal later proposes (p. 15), which would face far more robust practical and legal obstacles. Last, in practice, states do in fact adopt policy alternatives that simultaneously invest in local services and improve conditions for existing

[10] These desiderata are based on Oberman's (2016, p. 46).
[11] See Gilabert and Lawford-Smith (2012).

disadvantaged citizens as well as refugees.[12] For one example, the European Union's Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE) package released billions for local infrastructure, education, healthcare, housing, and urban regeneration.[13]

1.2. Security Costs

What of security costs? Both Oshal and Rindermann are concerned with crime rates. Rindermann (2025) provides shocking details of violent offences (p. 20), and also includes an appendix (pp. 24–27) collating high-profile cases, newspaper reports, and personal anecdotes concerning terrorist or criminal incidents in Germany where asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers, refugees, or other migrants have committed or are alleged to have committed serious violent offences, including multiple homicides.

Although the veracity of some cases can be contested, some refugees, asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers, and migrants have committed serious violent offences. Violent crimes are, of course, seriously wrong, and must be prevented, with perpetrators subjected to criminal sanction. The question is whether such cases are sufficient to demonstrate the general claim that refugees impose net security costs to thereby justify refusing protection to all on statist grounds.

The fear that refugees pose a security threat is common and nothing new. Edmund Burke brandished a dagger during the parliamentary debate on the 1793 Aliens Act, dramatising the supposed danger of migrants. Belgian refugees in Britain were suspected as German spies during the First World War. Refugees fleeing Eastern Europe were feared to be communist sleeper agents during the Cold War. Even Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution were seen as criminals and security threats (Arar and FitzGerald, 2022, pp. 191–92).

Yet, since refugees are fleeing and seeking protection from threats to their own security, they are understandably overwhelmingly averse to physical violence, and studies find no positive association between the location of refugees and outbreaks of civil violence, crime, or terrorism (Bollfrass et al., 2015; do Céu Pinto Arena, 2017; Amuedo-Dorantes et al., 2018; Forrester et al., 2019; Nowrasteh, 2023). The chance of being killed by an asylum seeker in the U.S. between 1975 and 2015 was 1 in 2.7 billion per year, and by a resettled refugee 1 in 3.6 billion (Nowrasteh, 2023). A comprehensive European analysis found the primary terrorist threat is 'homegrown' terrorists radicalised online, with no 'empirical evidence to suggest that increases in the share of immigrants from abroad is significantly correlated with higher rates of terrorism, including immigration from Muslim majority countries' (do Céu Pinto Arena, 2017).

Studies showing a rise in crime that was attributed to refugee arrivals in Germany (Alkousaa, 2018; BBC News, 2018; Lange and Sommerfeld, 2024) in fact indicate an overreporting rate for migrants and refugees, and point to explanatory causal factors such as lack of access to the labour market, mental health difficulties, and demographic profile (younger men are more likely to commit crime) regardless of nationality or immigration

[12] See for example the European Commission's (2020, 2026) 'Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027' and 'Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2021–2027.'

[13] Regulation (EU) 2022/562 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 April 2022 Amending Regulations (EU) No 1303/2013 and (EU) No 223/2014 as Regards Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE) (European Union, 2022).

status. Overall crime rates in Germany have in fact fallen since 2014, coinciding with the arrival of large numbers of refugees (Statista Research Department, 2025).

More broadly, one of the most comprehensive longitudinal studies found that 'long-standing concerns about immigration as a major source of crime are unfounded' (Flagg, 2018). A meta-analysis by Kubrin and Ousey (2023) found that in comparison to states with low levels of immigration, 'at the macro-level, the vast majority of studies indicate that places experiencing more immigration have less (or roughly equivalent) crime' with 'immigration's crime suppressing impact [being] most notable for violent crime, especially homicide'; and, at the micro-level, immigrants are far less likely than existing citizens to commit crime (p. 95). In fact, curiously, the Marie and Pinotti (2024) study that Rindermann cites to support a positive association between immigration and crime actually explicitly negates it: despite overrepresentation in incarceration rates, existing studies as well as comprehensive most-recent European data 'do *not*, in general, find any detectable causal effect of immigration on local crime rates' (p. 195). Further, with a significant rise in hate crimes by right-wing groups and violent attacks against Muslims in Germany and across Europe, among whom are many refugees (Bundeskriminalamt, 2025; CLAIM Organisation, 2025), refugees are plausibly far more likely to be victims rather than perpetrators of violent crime.

Moreover, it is worth reflecting on what is meant by 'security', and what is valuable about it. One plausible understanding is (the value of) persons' lives, wellbeing, and human rights being reasonably secure from standard threats. This is plausibly what Rindermann has in mind in highlighting violent crime that threatens citizens. But, if so, then Rindermann, and the appendix he provides, fails to include any positive contributions to the lives, wellbeing, and rights of citizens in Germany by refugees. For example, as mentioned, refugees are overrepresented among key workers across European states, who during the COVID-19 pandemic incurred substantial health risks to perform roles (in healthcare, social care and social work, food supply, and sanitation) essential to protecting the lives, wellbeing, and rights of countless citizens, and to sustaining society while nearly all were under lockdown, which itself was essential to the protection of all those citizens (Gerver, 2022; BBC News, 2020). Consider also, in the German context, those in the voluntary sector, charity, and civil society, whom, reporting a sense of duty to their host state, support the most vulnerable citizens (Easton-Calabria and Alaous, 2022); the thousands working in the care sector supporting the wellbeing of elderly, vulnerable, and sick citizens (about whom Oshal was also especially concerned) (Grunau, 2025; European Commission Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2025); those thousands working in nursing and as doctors including the over 6,000 Syrian doctors who make up the largest group of foreign doctors in German healthcare (AP News, 2024; European Commission Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2025). The number of citizens whose wellbeing has been vastly improved and/or whose very lives have been saved by these contributions is incalculable (and thereby admittedly difficult to include case by case in an appendix). In terms of security then, German citizens are overwhelmingly more likely to be assisted or have their lives, wellbeing, and rights saved by a refugee than threatened by one.

A final point is the following. It may be tempting to argue that since the state ought to protect its citizens, and since some refugees may pose a security threat, the state ought to deny protection to refugees. But this would be a mistake. In 1940, U.S. President Roosevelt reported that 'among German refugees […] especially Jewish refugees, they

found a number of definitely proven spies.' As a result of these and comparable fears, many thousands of Jewish people were denied protection and suffered and died under Nazi persecution (Holocaust Encyclopedia, 2022; Gross, 2015). We all now rightly recognise that using the possibility or fact that some members of a group may pose a threat to deny protection to all was a catastrophic moral error. This was because the security concerns were either insubstantial or could be otherwise addressed, and refusing protection exacted an immense cost in the avoidable suffering and death of thousands of innocents.

It would be an equally serious moral error to suggest the violent crimes of a vanishingly small minority of refugees today could justify denying protection to all, and for the same reasons. There are less harmful and more effective crime prevention and reduction strategies,[14] and the moral cost would be immense: extensive suffering and death to innocent persons who have nothing to do with any crime or threat, but who are simply seeking protection and are not liable to be harmed. Denying protection to innocent refugees because of purported security costs would thereby violate the foundational principle – the ground norm of criminal justice, and of prohibitions on collective punishment in International Law – not to harm innocent persons for the crimes of others.

1.3. Balancing Priority-Weighted Interests

To summarise, on statism, states must balance the priority-weighted interests of citizens with the interests of refugees, to determine potential obligations of protection. Careful consideration reveals that the purported net costs to citizens of refugee protection are not substantiated (economic and security costs are contested), reasonably avoidable (with policy alternatives), or not substantial (in being mitigated, offset, or even outweighed by economic and security gains). By contrast, net costs to refugees of being refused protection are substantiated, not reasonably avoidable, and substantial: contemporary refugees face well-documented severe threats to their lives, basic needs, and human rights and endure extensive mental and physical suffering and human rights violations, both in the causes of their displacement and whilst they are displaced, and have no reasonable alternative to secure adequate protection but to seek safety in Northern states (UNHCR, 2026c; Parekh, 2020; Hillier-Smith, 2023). A statist priority-weighted balancing of interests therefore produces one sound outcome: Northern states have obligations to provide, and thereby may not refuse, protection to refugees.[15]

2. Incomplete Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism is a family of views that analyse, inter alia, states, institutions, policies, distributions, and obligations from the standpoint of being 'a citizen of the world'. In its paradigmatic form, cosmopolitanism broadly holds that (1) persons are of ultimate moral

[14] These include stronger community integration, mental health interventions, youth outreach, counterterrorism initiatives, tackling online radicalisation, investment in law enforcement and increased police presence, effective deterrence functions of punishment, and addressing economic and social factors that are reliable determinants of crime.

[15] Indeed, philosophers who defend a broadly statist position accept such obligations to protect refugees within Northern states' political communities, see Miller (2016) and Pevnick (2011).

value (rather than states, ethnic groups, religions, and so forth); (2) all persons have equal moral value; and therefore (3) all persons' interests ought to be impartially considered in being given equal weight no matter their place of birth, nationality, or citizenship status (Pogge, 1992; Scheffler, 1999; Brock, 2013; Kleingeld and Brown, 2019).[16] A cosmopolitan analysis therefore requires an impartial consideration of the impacts of a given policy (or institutional arrangement, or distribution of goods) on the equally weighted interests of each and every person affected.

Oshal (2025) argues that, on such cosmopolitan grounds, Northern states may not be required, or even permitted, to protect refugees within their political communities (if those refugees had a substantially lower IQ than the national average) (pp. 5, 16). This is because protection would involve (i) costs to the refugees themselves; (ii) costs to members of the host state; and (iii) catastrophic costs to (persons in) the Global South.

This section will analyse these purported costs in detail. Yet, most fundamentally, it is important to highlight at this stage that Oshal's analysis suffers from a seriously compromising methodological error: it fails to apply a complete or thereby accurate cosmopolitan analysis. To accurately calculate an overall impact (for example, of a policy) on persons' interests, cosmopolitan methodology requires considering the costs to each and every person affected *but also* the benefits to each and every person affected. Oshal correctly considers how refugee protection may involve (i) costs to refugees, (ii) costs to host societies, and (iii) costs to the Global South, but, strikingly, fails to consider how refugee protection may involve (iv) benefits to refugees, (v) benefits to host societies, or (vi) benefits to the Global South. As a result, the analysis is only half-done and thereby yields only skewed and false results. So while this Section 2 will analyse the purported costs (i)–(iii), Section 3 will move towards completing Oshal's cosmopolitan analysis by considering omitted benefits (iv)–(vi). The more complete cosmopolitan analysis that emerges will, I suggest, help to resolve the broader disagreements in this debate.

2.1. Costs to Refugees

Oshal (2025, p. 6) argues that if refugees did have a substantially lower IQ (a 12–15-point deficit) than the national average, this would 'render it much harder [for those refugees] to participate on full and equal terms in society', because IQ is the 'most important predictor of, and contributor to, people's life outcomes including their educational outcomes, socioeconomic success, and occupational status.'

It is not clear what is meant by 'participating on full and equal terms in society.' One plausible understanding is having capabilities to access the goods and opportunities deemed markers of social standing, including particular material goods, employment, housing, community participation, political rights, and civic participation; and, in virtue of these capabilities, being viewed and treated by others as having equal social worth (Wolff, 1998; Anderson, 1999). But on this understanding, it is straightforwardly false that a below average IQ precludes full and equal participation. Afterall, almost precisely half of any domestic population has a below-median IQ (with a smaller percentage lower than that). No one seriously suggests that fellow citizens who might have a below average IQ are

[16] This is based on Pogge's (1992) influential formulation. See also Pogge (2008, p. 175) and Miller (2016, p. 23) for discussion.

thereby precluded from material goods, housing, employment, community, political rights and civic participation, nor that they are for that reason inferior as lesser or non-valuable members of society. Alternatively, Oshal may simply mean 'having less economic or career success relative to others', but that is contestable (as discussed below), and entirely different from, and should not be equated with, participating on full and equal terms.

More importantly, one might wonder why refugees may face barriers to social participation. The documented barriers are well established: the psychological trauma of displacement, dangerous journeys, and family separation or bereavement; severe disruption to education, employment, and training; language barriers; navigating an unfamiliar institutional environment; insufficient integration programmes; non-recognition of qualifications from states of origin; legal restrictions on access to employment, education, and political participation; and/or institutional and local hostility and discrimination.[17] Despite these evidenced barriers, Oshal instead speculates that a supposedly genetically caused lower IQ is the primary limitation to refugees' social participation (pp. 9–10). Oshal includes an array of material on alleged intelligence differences between racial groups. This material is irrelevant, however, not least because refugees do not belong to one 'race' (whatever that is taken to mean);[18] the states with the highest rates of displacement under UNHCR's mandate are various: Venezuela, Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Sudan, and South Sudan.[19] But also because the relevant site of assessment is the question of what barriers refugees face to social participation (alleged IQ differences or social factors), not the supposed causes of alleged IQ differences. Indeed, to assess whether IQ, as opposed to other factors, undermined social participation, that factor ought to be held constant, and hence the relevant comparison would be between arrived refugees and existing citizens with comparable IQ scores. If the existing citizens faced identical or comparable difficulties in accessing social goods and opportunities, this would support Oshal's claim; if they instead faced fewer and less robust barriers and could access social goods and opportunities with less difficulty, this would support the opposite. Such an experiment would likely be unnecessary, however, since the answer to whether existing citizens and refugees face identical or comparable barriers to social participation (all else being equal) seems a forgone conclusion.

Moreover, despite the difficulties and barriers faced, refugees (and migrants from the Global South more broadly) *do* access social goods and opportunities and fully participate in social and political communities when granted the capabilities to do so (Keita and Dempster, 2020). For instance, in the German context, 61% of Syrian refugees are in full employment, 75% of them in qualified positions, and 25% overqualified for their current roles; and, as mentioned, the over 6,000 Syrian doctors represent the largest group of foreign doctors in German healthcare (AP News, 2024; European Commission Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2025). Further, Oshal cites figures showing only 14% of Somali immigrants in the U.S. have a bachelor's degree or higher (Batalova and Lorenzi, 2022). But that figure appears an odd selection because that same

[17] See UNHCR (2026a), European Commission (2020), 'Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027,' and Commission on the Integration of Refugees (2024) on addressing barriers to accessing social goods. See also Arar and FitzGerald (2022, p. 196).

[18] Supposing 'race realism' as a metaphysical truth is itself highly contested and controversial.

[19] See UNHCR Figures at a Glance.

source in fact shows that 'Sub-Saharan African immigrant adults tend to have higher levels of education than the overall foreign- and native-born populations […] participate in the U.S. civilian labor force at a higher rate […]' and 'were almost as likely to be employed in management, business, science, and arts occupations as their U.S.-born counterparts.' The source used by Oshal to seek to demonstrate that those from certain regions may fail to participate on full and equal terms therefore demonstrates the opposite.

An even more fundamental concern arises, however. Recall, Oshal is seeking to demonstrate the *costs* to refugees of being protected. Oshal does this by considering the benefits to those refugees of protection 'compared to a counterfactual scenario where the refugees' IQs are broadly similar to, or higher than, the host population's average' (p. 6). That baseline is bizarrely ad hoc and necessarily fails to demonstrate *any* costs to refugees. Demonstrating that a person would have benefitted from X more greatly if they had entirely different characteristics does not in any way demonstrate that they did not benefit from X, much less that X was a cost to them. Rather, the correct counterfactual comparative baseline to calculate if protection is a benefit or cost to refugees is between their being protected in Northern states and their not being so protected. Indeed, this is the comparison Oshal employs for *all* their other calculations: costs to host societies and costs to the Global South are both calculated as a comparison between refugees being protected within Northern states and those refugees not being so protected (pp. 10, 12). It is inconsistent, as well as misleading, to 'move the goalposts' here. And, in doing so, Oshal fails to demonstrate any discrete or overall costs to refugees.

2.2. Costs to the Host Society

Section 1 challenged purported economic and security costs to host societies. This subsection will therefore be brief, considering only other costs that Oshal highlights, including declining social trust, interethnic tensions (including nativist backlashes and violence), and diminishing 'institutional quality' (pp. 10–11). On institutional quality, Oshal cites Garrett Jones' (2022) view that immigrants from societies with lower levels of 'trust' and 'saving' and higher corruption negatively impact host societies' institutions (p. 11).

Declining social trust (presumably concentrated against arrived refugees) may stem from out-group bias, xenophobia, misperceptions due to lack of interaction, or unsubstantiated fears of economic and security threats propagated through media and political misrepresentations. Each could and ought to be addressed through integration and community cohesion programmes, and responsible, evidence-based academic, political, and media representations that alleviate rather than inflame public anxieties (see for example Knappert et al., 2021; Dempster and Hargrave, 2017). Anti-refugee violence is a serious problem, but provides a reason to address it, not to refuse protection to refugees, which would wrongfully punish the (would-be) innocent victims.

On 'institutional quality,' recent evidence shows that migrants from states with higher corruption tend to welcome the move and be positively predisposed to new institutional environments, exhibiting high rates of trust, political participation, and support for host institutions, with no detrimental effect on 'institutional quality' (Aksoy et al., 2025). This is plausibly particularly the case for refugees, who are forced to flee because their own state was unwilling or unable to adequately protect them, and thereby actively seek safety and participation in another state. Last, any purported impact on the composition and direction

of political institutions is contingent on domestic policy on political participation: nearly all states, for example, deny refugees the right to vote let alone stand for office.[20]

2.3. Costs to the Global South

Oshal argues that protecting refugees within Northern states could exact catastrophic costs on the Global South. For Oshal, the Global South is dependent on research and innovation in the Global North, including in disease prevention, green innovation, and food production (p. 13). Protecting this innovation constitutes 'a global priority' (p. 14), on which the 'whole of humanity depends for its future welfare' (p. 17). Yet, protecting large numbers of refugees will impose economic costs on, and diminish the institutional quality of, Northern states, where institutional quality is measured by 'protection of property rights, market-friendly policies, control of political corruption, and effectiveness of the judiciary' (p. 13). These impacts will undermine or slow research and innovation with catastrophic results. Oshal emphasises that 9 million die from hunger and between 5.7 and 8.4 million from poor healthcare each year, and that 250,000 additional deaths a year are projected from climate change, to underline that even a modest delay in innovation can exact 'a tremendous human toll' (pp. 14–15), presumably meaning suffering and death for thousands if not millions of innocent persons.

To establish that denying protection to refugees within Northen political communities is necessary to avoid these catastrophic consequences, each of the following causal links must be demonstrated: (1) refugees necessarily impose economic costs and weaken institutions in Northern states; (2) they do so in specific ways that diminish property rights, market-friendly policies, control of corruption, and judicial functioning; (3) to a sufficient extent to decrease (funding for) research and innovation; (4) in ways that impact the specific areas essential to the Global South and to global development more broadly; and (5) to a sufficient extent to increase suffering and death associated with global poverty and climate heating for thousands if not millions of persons.

None are so demonstrated. On (1), as shown, it is not established that refugees necessarily impose net economic costs (in fact, the contrary is more evidenced and plausible) or negatively affect institutional quality. On (2), there is no evidence that refugee protection has specifically altered or would alter Northern states' market-friendly policies, commitment to property rights, judicial functioning, or levels of corruption. On (3), there is no evidence that any purported costs would necessarily be absorbed by cutting research and innovation. On the contrary, research and innovation funding increased substantially across EU states (by 62%) from 2014–2024 to its highest ever level, the precise years of the protection of large numbers of refugees from the Global South, including in Germany and Sweden, which protect the largest numbers per capita, with Sweden the leader in R&D funding as a percentage of GDP.[21] Globally, such spending is at its highest ever level and increasing.[22] On (4), there is no evidence that any cut to (funding for) research and innovation would be in areas relating to global health and development. On (5), it is doubtful that (increases to) present and future preventable

[20] For a sustained treatment of refugee enfranchisement see Ziegler (2017).
[21] See "EU Spending on R&D Exceeded €403 Billion in 2024" (Eurostat, 2025).
[22] See Bonaglia et al. (2025).

deaths associated with global poverty and climate heating are, and would be, (primarily) attributable to cuts to, or insufficient, Northern research and innovation, rather than, for instance, Northern states emitting the most greenhouse gasses globally (Ritchie, 2019); cuts to development assistance (Cavalcanti et al., 2025 project that recent USAID cuts will cause 14 million additional deaths by 2030, including 4.5 million children); intellectual property rights preventing global access to life-saving products; maintenance of Global South debt, increasing tariffs, domestic subsidies, and unfavourable trade terms that cripple Global South economies; and the perpetuation of a global economic order with resource and borrowing privileges that incentivise corruption and repressive regimes and thereby sustain or exacerbate global suffering, poverty, and refugee displacement itself (Pogge, 2008, especially pp. 118–20; Ashford, 2013; Blunt, 2015).

Oshal is correct that the preventable suffering and death affecting millions of innocents resulting from global poverty and climate heating is an urgent moral concern. But this concern supports addressing the various established contributing factors, not refusing protection to refugees. It is not clear that refusing protection, and presumably allowing innocent refugees to instead suffer and die, would be an effective (notwithstanding ethical) means to prevent additional poverty and climate-related deaths. Fortunately, there are more simple, direct, effective, and ethical alternatives, the most obvious being reducing global emissions and increasing development assistance (Cavalcanti et al., 2025). And if, contrary to the more established contributors to, and means of preventing, these deaths, Oshal is correct, and research and innovation is the most essential, then Oshal has provided an elaborate argument for ring-fencing or increasing R&D funding and/or increasing the share dedicated to addressing these deaths, not for refusing protection to refugees.

2.4. Alternative Protection

Oshal has not demonstrated costs of refugee protection. Yet, Oshal suggests that even if these purported costs would not obtain, Northern states are not required to protect refugees within their political communities since they could instead protect those refugees more effectively through involuntary relocation to safe third states in the Global South and supporting local integration in those regions (p. 15).

There are many concerns with this proposal. First, in practice, an assumption that refugees should be protected in the Global South underpins policies that result in extensive human rights violations and deaths (Fine, 2019). These include the forced containment of refugees in regions where they face extreme poverty and extensive human rights violations, including torture (Hillier-Smith, 2020); forced encampment where millions are housed in camps for prolonged periods and endure extensive human rights violations, in particular sexual violence (Parekh, 2016); and forced relocation or return schemes to ostensibly ‘safe’ states that are in reality less able or unable to adequately protect refugees, resulting in human rights abuses, trafficking, exploitation, and psychological trauma.[23] Forced relocation also overrides refugees’ will, deprives their liberty through coercion, and dehumanises them in treating them as undesirable elements to be exported

[23] For one example, the UK’s proposed relocation to Rwanda scheme has been criticised due to Rwanda’s lack of capacity to support refugees and its record of human rights abuses against refugees; see ‘UNHCR ‘Firmly’ Opposing UK-Rwanda Offshore Migration Processing Deal’ (United Nations, 2022).

away akin to some toxic waste (see Sandel, 2012). These schemes are also typically vastly expensive and inefficient: the UK-Rwanda scheme, under which four persons voluntarily relocated to Rwanda, cost hundreds of millions (see UK Home Office, 2024).

Second, ostensible regional protection may not adequately address the relevant harms of displacement that refugees require protection from, including extensive mental and physical suffering; violations of autonomy, dignity, and moral status; deprivation of capabilities to enjoy human rights; social dislocation; and loss of membership of a political community and state (Owen, 2020; Parekh, 2020; Cole, 2022; Hillier-Smith, 2024b). This is especially the case in regions close to refugees' states of origin, mostly low- to middle-income states without the requisite infrastructure or resources, or requisite institutional and financial support from the Global North. Forced relocation and regional protection are therefore not ethical, effective, or feasible policy alternatives.

It must be objected that adequate regional protection is possible in principle. But adequately addressing the relevant harms of displacement would require a radical increase in foreign political, economic, and development assistance as well as transformational institution building. This would be targeted to drastically improve the macroeconomic conditions of low- and middle-income states that host the majority of the worlds' refugees to build and sustain a vastly improved infrastructure necessary to adequately protect refugees' security and subsistence, human rights, Refugee Convention rights, autonomous and dignified existence, and inclusion as political and moral equals through integration into the local economy with rights to work, healthcare, housing, education, civil and political rights, and pathways to political membership.[24]

This in-principle possibility, however, provides no justification for refusing protection in Northern states to refugees who were not in fact so protected. As Kieran Oberman (2025, pp. 570–71) points out, it is not justified to refuse protection to a person in need on the grounds that she could have been otherwise protected (even more cost-effectively) when that protection was not in fact forthcoming, especially if it was one's obligation to provide that prior protection in the first instance. For example, a hospital may not refuse to treat a patient in desperate need on the grounds that a more cost-effective home treatment was available when the patient through no fault of her own did not in fact receive it, especially if the hospital was obligated but failed to provide the home treatment.

Moreover, Oshal accepts that Northern states do possess obligations to protect refugees, but these can be discharged either through protection within their political communities or via supporting regional protection (pp. 2, 17).[25] Therefore, on this view, states may only refuse protection within their political communities if they instead fulfil the then compulsory obligations to provide the radical and transformative regional support required for adequate protection described above. That would be a seismic rupture to the status quo: a fundamental restructuring of the entire global regime of refugee governance with an abolition of current harmful and punitive practices (border violence, forced detention, encampment, and containment) to be replaced with transformational multilateral increases in foreign assistance, infrastructure investment, and grants to host states, all of which to vastly improve the security, subsistence, human rights protection,

[24] See UNHCR (2026b); Keita and Dempster (2020); Betts and Collier (2017); Center for Global Development and International Rescue Committee (2017) Center for Global Development (2019).

[25] See also Wellman (2008)'s 'disjunctive duty' to refugees.

and societal and political inclusion of tens of millions of refugees worldwide who presently lack it. Only once this point was reached could Northern states, on Oshal's account, refuse protection within their political communities. Since no Northern state in the world is sufficiently supporting such regional protection,[26] none may refuse protection within their political communities. Hence, when applied, in highlighting the in-principle possibility of regional protection, Oshal has not provided an argument against Northern states protecting large numbers of refugees from the Global South within their political communities, but an argument for it.

3. Complete Cosmopolitanism

Oshal failed to demonstrate costs of refugee protection to refugees, host societies, or the Global South. Yet the most fundamental limitation of Oshal's cosmopolitan analysis is the methodological error of being incomplete. A complete cosmopolitan analysis considers both costs and benefits to each person affected. Oshal, unfortunately, only considered costs. This section, therefore, builds towards a more complete cosmopolitan analysis by briefly considering only the most obvious, direct, and short- to medium-term benefits of refugee protection, and, in addition, demonstrates that these benefits are orthogonal to IQ.

3.1. Benefits to Refugees

As is well established (UNHCR, 2026b), refugees have fled their states of origin due to extensive human rights violations, variously including military attacks on civilians, mass violence, torture, rape and gender-based violence, persecution, extrajudicial killing, ethnic cleansing, and potential genocide. The vast majority are then displaced into conditions where again they lack adequate security and subsistence, and face further human violations in camps or urban areas in the Global South, or on perilous journeys where tens of thousands die trying to seek safety in the Global North. For the minority of refugees able to reach it, protection within Northern states (through asylum or resettlement) provides the immediate benefit of (1) security and subsistence, and thereby safety from severe threats to their basic needs, human rights, freedoms, and lives. The vast improvements to wellbeing, enjoyment of human rights, and prospects for survival for each person protected are incalculable. Protection also secures (2) an autonomous existence with opportunities for refugees to live and rebuild their lives according to their own wishes and reunite with loved ones; (3) a dignified existence and decent standard of living with access to employment, social welfare, and social participation; (4) recognition and treatment as moral equals through societal and political inclusion; and (5) pathways to an otherwise deprived membership of a political community and state. These benefits are immense for each person and are entirely orthogonal to prospective IQ: every refugee protected would receive each of these benefits to the same degree no matter their IQ score.

[26] For one indication, the budget of the UNHCR which seeks to support regional programmes is chronically underfunded, typically receiving less than half for its projected needs. See UNHCR (2026d).

3.2. Benefits to Host Societies

Section 1 already considered selected benefits refugees provide: significant overall economic contributions; demographic offsetting; societal contributions of key workers, healthcare workers, and social care workers; and civil society participants supporting vulnerable groups. These are again orthogonal to IQ, since, as demonstrated in Section 2.1, it is not IQ that precludes economic and social participation and contribution, and the above benefits are the real contributions of contemporary refugees (who allegedly have a below-average IQ).

3.3. Benefits to the Global South

South-to-North migration yields vast global economic benefits. Some economists estimate that increasing it by a few percentage points would add tens of trillions to the global economy (Clemens, 2011). One significant benefit to the Global South specifically is remittances. In 2024, remittances amounted to 700 billion USD: three times total global development assistance from the Global North (Our World in Data, 2026). The estimated net economic gains to the South of increasing South-to-North migration by a few percentage points would exceed 'the combined effect of meeting national targets for development aid, cancelling all Third World debt and abolishing all barriers to Third World trade' (Holtug, 2020, p. 137). This is why the UN's development agency and the World Economic Forum advocate greater migration (United Nations Development Programme, 2009; World Economic Forum, 2024). Refugee remittance networks specifically are less stable due to the volatile nature of forced displacement and because would-be recipients are often themselves scattered globally, displaced as refugees or internally. Nonetheless, refugee remittances provide life-saving support to those facing destitution in camps or urban areas, risking their lives on dangerous journeys, or internally displaced facing severe threats, and support post-conflict reconstruction (Alix-Garcia et al., 2019; Vargas-Silva, 2017).

Moreover, protection within Northern states enables the eventual return (voluntary repatriation) of refugees who, had they not been protected, would have endured extensive suffering, human rights violations, and/or been killed. It is plausibly better for post-conflict recovery – rebuilding infrastructure, restoring government capacity, stimulating demand for goods and services to build the economy, providing a workforce, and developing a civil society – to have a well-protected refugee population return than one that has greatly suffered and among whom many have been killed. And returnees who have maintained and/or acquired skills, education, and material resources through participation in Northern economies would further contribute.

Last, 68% of the world's refugees are currently hosted in low- to middle-income states in the Global South (UNHCR, 2026c). These states often lack the resources and capacity required to adequately protect refugees and their own citizens. Lebanon, for instance, a country the size of Wales, with a GDP 50 times smaller than that of the UK, hosts over one million refugees, and, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), cannot adequately meet their basic needs (UNHCR, 2025). If Northern states, among the most affluent and stable on the globe with greater resources and capacity for protection, protected a far greater and fairer share of refugees within their political communities, this would provide an immense benefit to states in the Global

South, whose resources are stretched. This would enable those states to better ensure the security and subsistence of their own citizens and better protect remaining refugees (Gibney, 2015; Lutz and Caballero-Vélez, 2026). A fairer distribution of responsibilities of protection would improve the wellbeing and human rights protection for millions of refugees as well as for millions of citizens of the Global South. Again, none of these benefits – remittances to support vulnerable persons, repatriation of protected refugees, or global responsibility-sharing – are contingent on refugees' IQ.

3.4. Balancing Cosmopolitan Interests

To summarise, when only the most obvious, direct, and short- to medium-term benefits of refugee protection are taken into account within a more complete cosmopolitan analysis, an entirely different picture emerges from the one painted by Oshal's incomplete analysis. Considering the interests of all affected globally reveals that the benefits of refugee protection in the Global North are incalculably enormous, not least to refugees themselves, and overwhelmingly outweigh prospective costs. Since these benefits are orthogonal to IQ, this conclusion holds irrespective of such consideration. Therefore, completing the cosmopolitan analysis reveals that, owing to the enormous overall benefits, Northern states have particularly strong obligations to protect great numbers of refugees within their political communities and IQ is irrelevant to this fact. In this way, the more complete cosmopolitan analysis has been able to resolve the disagreement on the relevance of IQ to Northern states' obligations of refugee protection.

4. The Normative Insignificance of IQ

Before closing, it is worth noting that Oshal does not engage with any of the normative arguments for why IQ is irrelevant to obligations of protection. My 2024 article outlined how IQ and prospective economic contribution are irrelevant to positive obligations to protect persons from harm, and negative obligations not to harm them. It would be grossly implausible to suppose the IQ and economic productivity of a prospective victim of sexual violence should determine whether and to what extent one would have an obligation to protect her from that violation; or to suppose that because a person had a lower IQ and may not be as economically productive compared to others that this renders it more permissible to cause them to suffer or violate their human rights (say by torturing them) (pp. 12–13). That article also showed that any principle that there are weaker or no obligations to protect those judged to have a lower IQ or to be an economic cost to the state has false and repugnant implications, and should therefore be rejected. This was demonstrated by presenting sickening historical cases where persons with cognitive disabilities were deemed a net economic cost to the state as 'useless eaters' and 'ballast existences' and for that reason then denied protection, allowed to die, persecuted, and killed (pp. 7–8).

Oshal did not attempt to reply to any of these arguments, as would be required to demonstrate that IQ is normatively relevant to obligations to protection. Failing to defend the position against these arguments may provide evidence and implicit acknowledgement that the position is in fact indefensible. Indeed, Oshal is explicitly committed, as the central argument of their article, to the view that IQ and/or economic costs to the state are normatively relevant in mitigating or defeating obligations of protection on both statist and cosmopolitan grounds. That view indeed has that repugnant and false implication that there therefore were (and would be) weaker or no obligations to

protect persons with cognitive disabilities on the grounds of the prospective economic costs of their protection. Rindermann et al. (2024; Rindermann, 2025) was careful enough to avoid endorsing such a view and this implication. Oshal was not. Oshal has failed to defend against this implication of their view, or why, if it is an implication, it is acceptable. This may be because both defences would be extremely difficult if not impossible. If Oshal's view that IQ is normatively relevant to obligations of protection is indeed indefensible in these ways then that provides decisive reason to reject it as not only abjectly false but despicable too.

5. Conclusion

A close and more complete analysis of the costs and benefits of refugee protection has helped towards resolving disagreements in the debate on the normative relevance of IQ. This is because appreciating the contingency and tractability of purported costs and, importantly, balancing those costs with the benefits reveals that the benefits are overwhelmingly enormous irrespective of refugees' prospective IQ and thereby outweigh even priority-weighted costs. Complete analyses, therefore, demonstrate that Northern states possess obligations to protect refugees within their political communities on both statist and cosmopolitan grounds, and IQ is irrelevant to those obligations. Any contrary claim on the relevance of IQ is false, despicable, and a gross misunderstanding of the moral worth of refugees and of obligations of refugee protection. It must be resisted by all wherever and whenever it appears.

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