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In addressing “challenges in refugee protection” this chapter includes sections on ongoing threats to the norm of *non-refoulement*, the benefits and drawbacks of temporary and “complementary” forms of protection, UNHCR's expanded mandate to protect those in “refugee-like” situations, and the predicament of internally displaced persons. We also explore the root causes of refugee movements, and the importance of recognizing that refugees are healers of communities as well as victims of oppression. These challenges have not receded in our current historical moment, whether in responding to the needs of children, single adults, and families from Central America at the United States’ southern border under the Biden administration; considering the health, sanitation, and dignity rights of asylum seekers in detention centers and refugee camps in the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania; or imagining new policy frameworks for admitting, welcoming, and naturalizing refugees in societies throughout the world.

In facing the challenges and dynamism of refugee law and policy, we can identify both restrictive trends and attacks on asylum-seekers, on the one hand, alongside welcoming trends and affirmations of the basic dignity of individuals fleeing persecution, on the other. Yet in calling for more humane and lawful treatment of refugees, practitioners and scholars continuously grapple with the basic notion of who “refugees” are, in order to affirm their claims to legal status and humanitarian assistance. In this vein, a recent [essay](#) published on the Public Seminar blog explores whether academics can or should maintain a linguistic border between refugees and non-refugees.

What makes a refugee – is it the experience of oppression, need, or both? Is it the threat to life, freedom, or dignity? Is it the will to survive or thrive? Are these qualities distinct or overlapping? Refugee advocates continually face the question of what makes refugees unique and different from other migrants and other human beings. As we – individuals, agencies, states, the “international community” – call for the protection of individuals who flee human rights abuses, we sometimes presume hierarchies of need and categories of entitlement to various legal, social, and political privileges which do not hold up upon deeper examination. Many of the “binaries” or oppositional categories of humans on the run have been and will continue to be challenged – refugees vs. “economic migrants,” victims of state oppression vs. victims of “non-state actors,” those who flee persecution vs. those who flee armed conflict, cross-border refugees vs. “internal refugees,” etc. And yet, if we fail to make distinctions between refugees and non-refugees, do we risk further weakening the fragile protections that those with a well-founded fear of persecution should enjoy, particularly freedom from forced return to violence at the hands of powerful state actors?

These questions will and should remain at the heart of refugee law, policy, advocacy, and scholarship.