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Section 1. Global overview of asylum in 2020



To contextualise developments in the field of asylum in Europe, Section 1 presents a global overview of forced displacement and the need for protection worldwide. The section covers recent events and trends related to displacement and discusses the international community's response to large refugee movements. Two topics which are highlighted are resettlement programmes and digitalisation in migration and asylum.
A glimpse at the broader landscape helps to set the scene for trends in asylum in the European Union which unfolded in 2020.

Millions of people across the globe are affected by forced displacement due to conflict, persecution, human rights violations, natural disasters and degrading ecosystems. Those seeking protection find refuge either within their home country or by crossing international borders.

Official statistics distinguish between two groups of forcibly displaced persons: i) refugees and asylum seekers who have crossed international borders; and ii) internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are displaced within their own country. The 1951 Refugee Convention provides the common definition for the first group as individuals who have fled their country due to a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion"[1] and crossed an international border to seek safety.

There is no internationally-agreed definition, but according to existing guidelines IDPs are "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally-recognised state border".[2] As such, IDPs legally fall under the jurisdiction of their own government and relevant national and international laws.

Both refugees and IDPs face legal protection challenges and typically need substantial psycho-social and material support, including shelter, food, safe water, health care and education. Many encounter violence, abuse and exploitation in the aftermath of displacement.[3] Emergency responses, as well as short- and medium-term arrangements, may provide relief, but identifying durable solutions remains a challenge, in particular with voluntary repatriation which may not even be possible due to the original causes of displacement.[4] At the same time, host countries struggle to integrate displaced populations, a situation which was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic when fewer refugees were accepted through resettlement programmes.[5]

[1] Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951). https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10
[2] United Nations, Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (September 2004). *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/199808-training-OCHA-guiding-principles-Eng2.pdf
[3] European Commission. (2021, May 12). *Forced displacement: refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people (IDPs)*. https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what-we-do/humanitarian-aid/refugees-and-internally-displaced-persons_en
[4] European Commission. (2021, May 12). *Forced displacement: refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people (IDPs)*. https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what-we-do/humanitarian-aid/refugees-and-internally-displaced-persons_en
[5] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (November 2020). *Mid-Year Trends 2020*. https://www.unhcr.org/5fc504d44.pdf



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