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1.1. Overview of trends in displacement and protection responses

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Forced displacement is a reality for millions of people worldwide as a result of violent conflict, persecution, human rights violations, natural disasters and degrading ecosystems. Recurring cycles of displacement are often linked to a complex interplay of more than one underlying cause. Displaced persons may seek refuge for themselves and their families within their home country (internally displaced persons) or by crossing international borders (refugees).

In the aftermath of displacement and experiencing traumatic events, both refugees and IDPs may find themselves in an environment where the social fabric has been damaged; economic activity is disrupted; access is not available to social, health and educational services; legal uncertainty prevails; and the overall prospects for human development are severely limited. In this state of precarity, many of them may be subjected to violence, abuse and exploitation.[1] Facing such challenges, forcefully displaced persons are in need of substantial psychosocial and material support, including shelter, food, safe water, health care and access to education and employment. When original sources of displacement persist, which is very often the case, voluntary repatriation may not be an option. Emergency responses and medium-term arrangements may provide initial relief, but in the long term, effective integration into the host society or resettlement in other parts of the world are critical to living a new life in a sustainable way.

Icon of trends in displacement and protection responses

Box 1.1. Definitions of displaced persons

Refugee: An individual who has fled a 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.[2]

Internally displaced persons (IDPs): 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.[3]

According to estimations by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),[i] there were more than
84 million forcibly displaced people worldwide as of June 2021. The figure includes 26.6 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate, 4.4 million asylum seekers, 48 million IDPs[ii] and 3.9 million Venezuelans displaced abroad.[4, iii] Approximately seven out of ten people who were displaced across international borders came from just five countries of origin: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar (in descending order). The vast majority of internationally displaced people are hosted in countries neighbouring the centre of a crisis, which are typically the first in line to accommodate them. This places a strain on the resources of host countries, especially since mostly lower-income countries continue to receive a disproportionately high number of internationally displaced populations.[5]

In a year that marked the 70th anniversary of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a fundamental component of human rights law,[6] the international community continued its efforts in developing solutions for people in need of protection worldwide. Multi-stakeholder cooperation has been crucial in this area, as complex challenges require equally complex, integrated responses that go beyond ad hoc interventions to ensure that both refugees and host communities have adequate and sustainable support.

To this end, the Global Compact on Refugees, led by a diverse group of stakeholders, has provided a framework for action through international cooperation to find sustainable solutions to the situation of refugees. It works to operationalise responsibility-sharing in protecting and assisting refugees and host communities. The main objectives of the Global Compact are to: i) ease the pressure on host countries; ii) enhance refugee self-reliance; iii) expand access to third country solutions; and iv) support conditions in countries of origin for safe and dignified returns of applicants who are denied protection.[7]

The diverse portfolio under the Global Compact includes initiatives geared toward fostering multi-stakeholder engagement, expertise-sharing and synergies to enhance preparedness and contingency planning; developing swift protection responses during crises; and addressing the needs of refugees and host communities, including in the areas of education, work and livelihoods, health, energy and natural resource management, food security and nutrition. A special focus has been placed on providing long-term solutions by supporting countries of origin in creating environments that are conducive to voluntary repatriation; arranging for resettlement and complementary pathways to protection in third countries; and facilitating local integration.[8]

The first Global Refugee Forum, which took place in December 2019, brought the international community together and catalysed strategic action toward the directives set in the Global Compact. Two years later, in December 2021, a High-Level Officials Meeting evaluated the progress made on the four key objectives of the Global Compact and planned future initiatives. The discussions were based on the 2021 Global Compact on Refugees Indicator Report, which details accomplishments and areas in need of further action.[9]

The report highlights that over the past 2 years there has been tangible progress toward all four key objectives of the Global Compact in developing comprehensive protection responses;

enhancing legal access to decent work and education; supporting developing economies; increasing financing to address refugees in countries with lower-income economies; and implementing policy measures to mitigate poverty and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees and host communities. The report also identified a number of areas where more work is needed to achieve sustainable progress in providing protection solutions, including more effort to:

- Enhance resettlement and complementary pathways to protection; increase refugee self-reliance and resilience;
- Further facilitate access to education by addressing existing practical barriers, most notably costs;
- Provide more targeted support to address refugee poverty, including through institutional responses to safeguard the right to work and property rights;
- Ensure access to health, including mental health; and
- Increase and better coordinate initiatives meant to address root causes of displacement, remove obstacles for return and create conditions for voluntary repatriation.10

At the regional level, three support platforms work toward achieving the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees: the Comprehensive Regional Framework for Protection and Solutions (MIRPS) in Central America and Mexico; the Nairobi process in East Africa and the Horn of Africa facilitated by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); and the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). In collaboration with regional and sub-regional mechanisms, international organisations, international financial institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector, the platforms aim to: i) galvanise political commitment for prevention, protection, response and solutions; ii) mobilise financial, material and technical assistance and enhance legal pathways to safety; and iii) facilitate coherent responses to refugee situations.11 The EU has contributed to these initiatives through financial, strategic and political support.12 (*Read more about EU support to protection solutions worldwide in Section 2.*)

As the international community continues its efforts to address complex aspects of displacement on a constantly-changing stage, the discourse and work on international protection continue to evolve to accommodate emerging needs and deliberate on pressing topics of relevance. Key issues that remained at the centre of attention in the area of asylum in the past year are detailed in the following sub-sections.

Footnotes

[i] Data on forced displacement at a global level are reported by UNHCR twice a year. Annual data are reported in June in the Global Trends in Forced Displacement report. Data for the first half of a year are reported in November in the Mid-Year Trends report. The methodology for UNHCR data collection and reporting is available here.

[ii] Original source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

[iii] UNHCR uses the term ‘refugee’ to refer, not only to people who have been formally granted refugee status, but to all people under the UNHCR mandate and of concern to UNHCR, including people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country (as defined in the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and other legal acts, such as the 1969

Organization of African Unity (OAU) Refugee Convention in Africa and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration in Latin America). This notion differs from the Eurostat definition which estimates the number of refugees based on individuals who have been formally granted international protection.

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- 2UN Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (1951). https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10
- 3United 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
- 4United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2021). Mid-Year Trends 2021. https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/618ae4694/mid-year-trends-2021.html
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- 6United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2021). The 1951 Refugee Convention: 70 years of life-saving protection. https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/7/6100199a4/1951-refugee-convention-70-years-life-saving-protection.html
- 7United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2018). Global Compact on Refugees. https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4
- 8United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2018). Global Compact on Refugees. https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4
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