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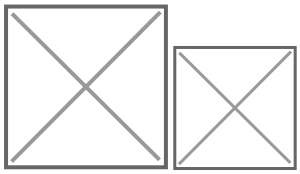
1. Global overview of asylum in 2020



Millions of people across the globe are affected by forced displacement due to conflict, persecution, human rights violations, natural disasters and degrading ecosystems.

Official statistics distinguish between two groups of forcibly displaced persons: a) refugees and asylum seekers who have crossed international borders; and b) internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are displaced within their own country. Refugees are persons 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 and crossed an international border to seek safety. IDPs have not crossed the border of their country but may still find themselves in a vulnerable situation.

In the context of Europe, international protection encompasses refugee status and subsidiary protection status. The latter refers to persons who do not qualify for refugee status but are eligible for protection because they run the risk of serious harm, such as the death penalty or execution; torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in the country of origin; or serious and individual threat to their life due to indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict.

In June 2020, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported a total population of concern of approximately 80 million people, including 26.4 million refugees, 4.2 million asylum seekers, 45.7 million IDPs and 3.6 million Venezuelans displaced abroad. Two-thirds of the global refugee population come from five countries of origin: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar (in descending order). The vast majority of displaced populations are hosted in countries and communities neighbouring the centre of a crisis, which are often developing countries. In 2020, Turkey continued to be the top hosting country, followed by Colombia, Pakistan, Uganda and Germany.

The COVID-19 pandemic which hit in 2020 has had a deep and complex impact, both in creating or amplifying protection needs worldwide and in impeding access to safety. In this challenging context, stakeholders who are involved in the provision of protection adapted their work accordingly to ensure some continuity in services, including new modalities for registering and processing applications and increased use of technology and digital solutions.

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, the international community worked through multilateral collaborations and progress achieved in 2020 under the Global Compact on Refugees included:

- Enhancing protection capacity worldwide;
- Increasing access to education for displaced children;
- Promoting durable solutions;
- Introducing clean energy solutions in humanitarian settings;
- Fostering human development and economic growth as structural solutions in fragile environments;
- Increasing equitable access to health services, clean water and sanitation; and
- Promoting employment opportunities for persons affected by displacement.

The EU plays a key role in providing protection solutions worldwide, with most of its humanitarian budget allocated to projects helping the forcibly displaced and their host communities.

As the international community continues its efforts to address complex aspects of displacement globally, the focus of development may change from year to year to target areas where progress can be made to alleviate situations of displacement or where new modalities can be developed to provide protection. In 2020, two areas were at the forefront of the discourse on international protection, each for different reasons. **Resettlement** was among the areas that were strongly impacted by the pandemic due to travel restrictions. With the risks associated with movement during the global health emergency, the need for resettlement in providing a safe legal pathway was even more accentuated. At the same time, the pandemic provided the opportunity for countries to make further advances in the area of **digitalisation** to increase efficiency in asylum procedures.

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