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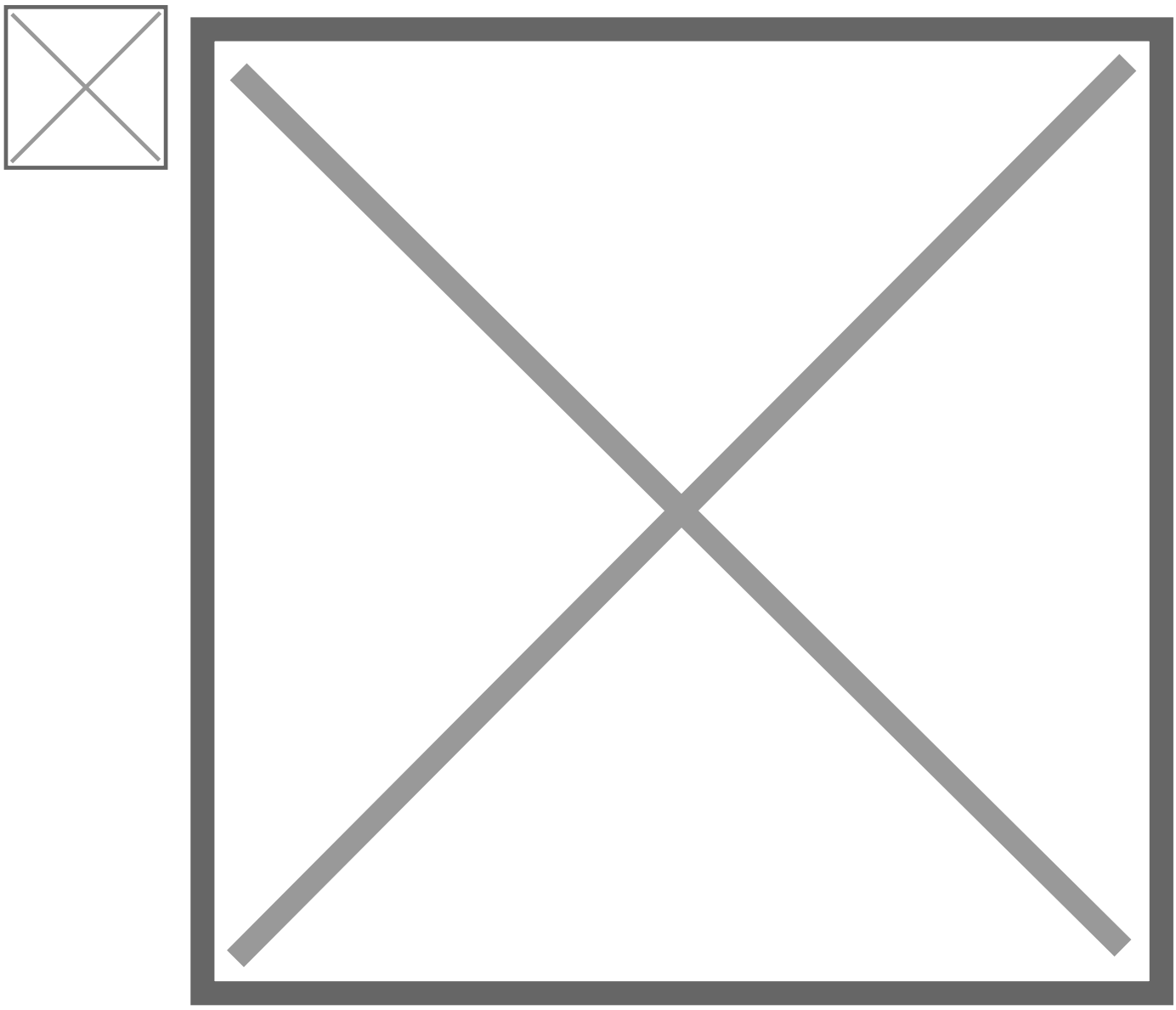
# 1.1 General overview



Major displacements have occurred over the past years due to conflict, systematic human rights violations, political instability and economic hardship.[6] In June 2020, a total of 80 million people had been forcibly displaced, according to UNHCR.[i] The figure includes 26.4 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate, 4.2 million asylum seekers, 45.7 million IDPs[7] (as at the end of 2019) and 3.6 million Venezuelans displaced abroad.[8]

Two-thirds of the current refugee population, which includes displaced Venezuelans, come from five countries of origin. The largest number of refugees originated from Syria (6.6 million), followed

by Venezuela (3.6 million), Afghanistan
(2.7 million), South Sudan (2.3 million) and Myanmar (1 million).[9] Venezuelan refugees constituted the largest group of new asylum seekers in 2020.

The vast majority of displaced populations are hosted in countries and communities neighbouring the centre of a crisis.
In 2020, 85% of the global refugee population was hosted in developing countries.[10] Turkey continued to be the top host country, accommodating 3.6 million refugees, almost all from Syria. Colombia hosted the second-largest number of refugees (1.8 million), with Venezuelans constituting the overwhelming majority. This was followed by Pakistan, which hosted a refugee population of over 1.4 million, most of whom originated from Afghanistan. Uganda hosted the fourth-largest refugee population of approximately 1.4 million. In contrast to the first three host countries where the refugee populations came mainly from one country of origin, refugees hosted in Uganda originated from a number of countries, including Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Somalia and South Sudan.

The only European country to be amongst the Top 10 refugee-hosting countries was Germany which has more than
1.1 million refugees and ranked as the fifth top host country in 2020.[11] A common appeal expressed by countries receiving a large share of displaced populations is for greater responsibility-sharing. While this principle has been acknowledged, it has not been matched in practice on the international stage.[12]

Undoubtedly, 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 or complicating access to safety. Thus, the pandemic has had an adverse effect on displaced populations, host communities and those who assisted in providing protection. The economic downturn led to a reduction in the sources of income for displaced persons who were already struggling to meet their basic needs[13] The closing of borders impeded access to territory and to the asylum procedure and delayed the travel of refugees to resettlement countries through planned programmes. Restrictions in movement made it harder for people to flee persecution and increased the risk of resorting to smuggling networks and more dangerous routes to seek international protection.[14] The pandemic also led to a spike in gender-based violence, while many women and girls have seen their access to assistance and services minimised.[15] Access to education, health services and socio-psychological support overall was disrupted to unprecedented levels.[16]

In such a challenging context, actors involved in the provision of protection adapted their work to ensure some continuity in services. Countries receiving displaced populations introduced new modalities in registering and processing applications. There was an increase in the use of technology and digital solutions to perform tasks remotely or online. Still, the number of asylum applications worldwide dropped significantly in 2020 compared to the previous year *(see Section 2.2).*[17] While the pandemic in 2020 seemed to be a factor inhibiting mobility, this trend is likely to change in the future: post-COVID-19 recovery may be uneven, exacerbating imbalances between developing and more developed countries and further creating mobility from the former to the latter.[18]

***Global Compact for Refugees***[ii]

Global protection needs and complex challenges require integrated actions by various stakeholders, including governments, international organisations, and civil society and community organisations. In recent years, a number of important steps have been taken to this end. The adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants by the UN General Assembly in 2016 set out the key elements for the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework to ease pressure on host countries; enhance refugee self-reliance; expand solutions in third countries; and support conditions in countries of origin for safe and dignified return.[19] Subsequently, the Global Compact for Refugees was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2018, and its Programme of Action set out concrete steps for responsibility, from the reception and admission of refugees to addressing their needs and supporting host communities in a sustainable way.[20]

To review progress made under the compact, in December 2019 the Global Refugee Forum brought together governments, international organisations, local authorities, civil society organisations, the private sector, host community members and refugees to exchange best practices, commit financial and technical support, and discuss policy changes to help reach the goals of the compact.[21] Many EU services and agencies, including EASO, participated in the event. Discussions at the forum centred around enhancing resettlement and complementary legal pathways to third countries, alleviating pressures on host communities, improving protection for refugees, integration, access to education for refugee children and involving refugees in policy development.[22] During the forum, the EU reiterated its strong commitment to providing life-saving support to millions of refugees and displaced people, as well as fostering sustainable development-oriented solutions.[23]

Multilateral collaboration to seek better solutions for international protection needs continued in 2020. Approximately 1,400 pledges were made at the Global Refugee Forum, which have fed into relief responses and development projects for displaced populations, and additional support has been provided to host communities. By August 2020, more than
300 progress updates from governments, organisations, businesses and other entities were received by UNHCR, with more than two-thirds reporting headway in implementation.

Projects varied in scope and nature, such as the provision of early childhood education for children affected by displacement; creation of jobs and sustainable livelihood opportunities for refugees and host communities; facilitating access to higher education; building synergies in research, teaching and scholarships; provision of legal aid and information to refugees; and efforts to address root causes of displacement through sustainable development.[24]

By thematic areas, progress achieved under the Global Compact on Refugees in 2020 included:

**Protection capacity:** In the aftermath of the Global Forum for Refugees, a number of mechanisms to share expertise and provide protection were created. The Asylum Capacity Support Group (ACSG) was established to strengthen capacity in countries with large displaced populations. The ACSG secretariat, along with governments and international partners such as UNHCR, have worked toward prioritising and matching support request and offers. In 2020, three offers and requests were matched between France and Chad, France and Niger, and Canada and Mexico. An online portal is under development to coordinate the sharing of information, knowledge and expertise. In the area of statelessness, a number of pledges have already been

implemented, including accession by countries to the UN Statelessness Conventions, the establishment of statelessness determination procedures and the adoption of national action plans to address statelessness.[25]

**Education:** For displaced children of school age, education may offer a life-changing opportunity and facilitate integration in host communities. Access to secondary, tertiary and vocational education can build the foundation for better labour opportunities. In 2020, projects in this area included financial contributions to increase and improve access to education; construction of schools; inclusion of refugees in national education systems; and increasing teacher expertise, especially when dealing with refugee children.[26]

**Durable solutions:** Even amid challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, progress was made under the Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complimentary Pathways. Some countries adapted their modalities and carried out resettlement or pledged to increase their targets in the coming years. New community sponsorship programmes emerged and complementary pathways were expanded through new partnerships with civil society organisations. Efforts were also made in the area of integration to involve refugees in national development programmes.[27]

**Clean energy challenge:** Initiatives in this area focus on replacing unsustainable energy with clean energy sources that can be used by households, community services and humanitarian operations in an effort to bring systemic change in areas at risk to induce displacement due to the climate and local environment. In 2020, significant contributions were made by diverse stakeholders by providing financial, political, technical and operational support to introduce and promote solutions for the sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems in humanitarian settings.[28]

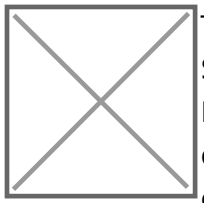
**Development:** Development initiatives aim to provide structural solutions to stabilise fragile regions and foster human development and economic growth. The initiatives aim for comprehensive development through integrated efforts in areas such as education, employment, energy and infrastructure, local governance capacity, preparedness in forced displacement settings, service delivery systems for refugee populations, and conflict prevention through strengthening social cohesion. UN agencies, multilateral development banks and national governments are key contributors to these projects.[29] The majority of the work is accomplished through three regional support platforms launched at the Global Refugee Forum: 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). The regional support platforms bring together a diverse alliance of stakeholders to work toward: i) galvanising political commitment for prevention, protection, response and solution; ii) mobilising financial, material and technical assistance and enhancing legal pathways to safety; and iii) facilitating coherent responses to refugee situations.[30] The EU is a major contributor to these projects and has been an active member of all three regional support platforms, mobilising financial support as well as expertise.[31]

**Health:** Naturally, the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the need for equitable access to health services and clean water and sanitation. In 2020, activities in this area focused on COVID-19 preparedness and response. In conjunction, steps were taken to include refugees in the

national health systems of host countries, provide health insurance and improve medical infrastructures.[32]

**Jobs and livelihoods:** Despite the adverse socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, steps were taken to foster inclusive economic growth for refugees and host communities alike through job creation and entrepreneurship programmes. A key string of activities centred on including refugees into national labour markets, while the contribution of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector was significant in providing employment opportunities.[33]

### *High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement*



The High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, which was established by the UN Secretary General in October 2019, began its deliberations in February 2020. Members of the panel represent every geographical group and include countries directly affected by internal displacement. The panel is tasked with identifying concrete recommendations on how to better prevent and respond to the global internal displacement crisis, covering the following areas:

- Strengthening the capacity of countries, the UN system and relevant stakeholders to ensure adequate protection and assistance to IDPs;
- Advancing collaboration between humanitarian, developmental and peace organisations;
- Advancing the participation and inclusion of IDPs and displacement-affected communities in achieving the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development;
- Improving the collection, analysis and use of quality data relevant to internal displacement; and
- dentifying innovative financing and funding mechanisms to address internal displacement.

Comprising eight members, the panel is co-chaired by the former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and the Chair of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Donald Kaberuka. It will deliver its final recommendations to the UN Secretary-General in September 2021.[34]

### *The European Union's role in migration and asylum*

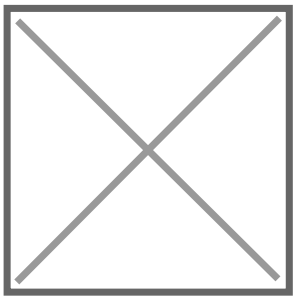
The EU has undertaken a key role in international efforts to provide protection solutions worldwide. Since 2015, the EU has provided EUR 9 billion for the funding of refugee and migration-related programmes.[35] In recent years, most of the EU's humanitarian budget (80% of EUR 1.2 billion in 2018 and of EUR 1.6 billion in 2019) was allocated to projects helping the forcibly-displaced and their host communities to meet their immediate, basic needs in conflict, crisis and protracted displacement.[36]

The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility is the overarching framework for the EU's engagement with non-EU partners in the areas of migration, mobility and asylum. A number of tools and schemes are used to plan, coordinate and deliver protection-, humanitarian- and development-oriented solutions at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels, including the EU

Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the Bêkou Trust Fund, the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, the African-Caribbean-Pacific/EU Partnership and the EU External Investment Plan.

Work in these areas is coordinated by the European Commission and the EU External Action Service, in cooperation with relevant EU agencies and institutions. The proposed new Pact on Migration and Asylum includes a strong external dimension and sets forth a number of concrete areas of action, including protecting those in need and supporting countries which host large numbers of refugees; building economic opportunities in addressing root causes of irregular migration; assisting partner countries in managing migration; fostering cooperation on readmission and reintegration; and enhancing legal pathways to protection in the EU (for example resettlement, complementary pathways and community sponsorship) *(see Section 2)*.[37]

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.[iii] 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.



[i] It is important to note that 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.

[ii] Applicable to all countries that have endorsed the Global Compact on Refugees.

[iii] Two areas which attracted increased attention in 2019 and were highlighted in the 2020 edition of the EASO Asylum Report were statelessness and human mobility due to climate- and environment-related reasons. For more information, see EASO Asylum Report 2020, Section 1.

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