



Large Scale Forced Migration And The Massification Of Humanitarian Crises

Definition

Persecution, conflict, insecurity and climate change have forced people to flee their homes in record numbers. For decades, the multiplication of crises and the increasingly protracted nature of displacement has led a growing number of refugees worldwide. In 2018 there were approximately 25.9 million refugees who fled their country of origin and 41.3 million people who are internally displaced; 3.5 million are asylum-seekers¹.

People who are displaced across international borders are generally referred to as refugees. Their rights and the obligations of governments are defined in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Article 1 of the Convention defines a refugee as any person who:

“owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”²

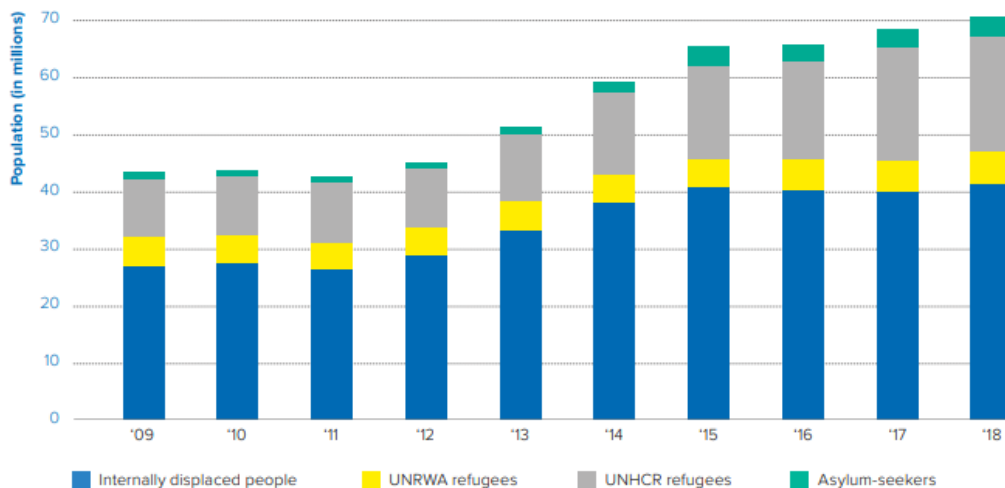
The Convention requires refugees to demonstrate personal persecution (on the grounds enumerated in the definition), it does not extend protection to people fleeing generalized violence, conflict, endemic poverty or the effects of climate change or disasters induced by natural hazards. People who are displaced by causes not included within the Convention on the Status of Refugees are entitled to limited international protection.

¹ UNHCR (2019) [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018](#)

² UN General Assembly (1951) [Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#), *United Nations*, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137



Figure 1 | **Global forced displacement** | 2009-2018



UNHCR 2018, Population Trend Chart

Key Insights

- **By 2030, displaced people will become the fastest growing subgroup in humanitarian need.**

The humanitarian sector will be faced with the needs of a growing number of beneficiaries. Due to the enduring flows of migration and displacement (particularly amidst concerns of climate induced displacement), displaced people will become the fastest growing subgroup in humanitarian need. The protracted nature of displacement and lack of durable solutions will necessitate long-term strategic planning, going further in including local NGOs, and establishing more partnerships with the private sector such as utilities companies to respond to refugees' needs and find solutions for them.³

- **By 2030, humanitarian stakeholders will focus more on strengthening the resilience of host communities**

To mitigate the risk of tensions between refugees and host communities, humanitarian stakeholders will need to develop a more comprehensive approach to address host

³ UK AID (2014) [Humanitarian crises, emergency preparedness and response: the role of business and the private sector: Final report](#)



communities' needs. Addressing conditions of displacement is a critical area where actors could work to bridge the emergency/development divide, especially where displaced populations are hosted in high-density or environmentally fragile areas.

➤ **By 2030, the migration agenda will be increasingly securitized**

There will be a growing tendency to mix military and humanitarian intervention as the migration agenda is further securitized. The narrative around migration will be focused on the security risk that large-scale forced migration poses to countries of transit or destination resulting in an escalation of detention and confinement and further pressure to stem the flow of migrants regardless of the humanitarian cost.

➤ **By 2030, the legal framework for the protection of displaced communities will be out dated and unable to address the vulnerability of particular categories of people on the move**

The legal framework defining the criteria for who is eligible for protection may not reflect the realities of the communities made vulnerable through displacement. Those fleeing conflict, endemic poverty and natural shocks will have limited if any rights under international law and the rights of those who do qualify as refugees will rarely be met.

Changes by 2030: main trends & breaks, weak signals

➤ **Protracted nature of crises and violence**

Armed conflicts involve an increasingly wide range of actors and transnational criminal and terrorist networks. Reaching a political settlement has become more complicated and conflict is becoming increasingly entrenched. Civilians have been targeted by armed groups or are caught between different warring parties. Lasting violence which targets civilians is pushing more and more people to flee and creating substantial refugee flows. Insecurity in Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, Burundi, the Central African Republic and Ukraine are among the conflicts in fragile states that are likely to persist and continue to feed a steady flows of refugees.

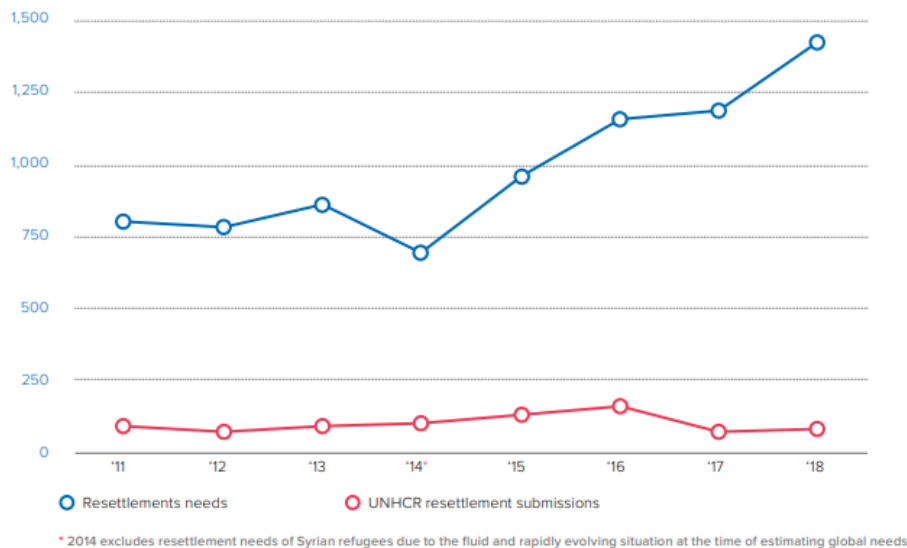
Organized crime and gang-related violence resulting from decades of conflicts and instability are also driving displacement. In the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras), the consequences of the 1980s civil wars (violence, fragile institutions, lack of



opportunities) and some of the highest rates of violent crime in the world is driving flows of migrants⁴. This trend is likely to continue.

➤ **Climate change uncertainties**

Climate change is increasing the number and severity of disasters induced by natural hazards (floods, earthquakes, etc.) and the pressure on already scarce resources (water, livestock, crops, etc.). As a result, people are forced to move as their areas of origin become uninhabitable. In turn, this is fostering resentment with environmental refugees and host communities competing for scarce resources, creating tensions and increasing resource scarcity, making areas of refuge more environmentally vulnerable. For example, in the Lake Chad basin, the receding of water has led to conflict and displacement, threatening peace and security in the region.



UNHCR 2019, Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018, Resettlement of Refugees 1993-2018 (end-year), retrieved 14 November 2019

➤ **Increasing duration of exile**

UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as a “situation as one in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five or more years in a given asylum country.”⁵ In 2018, 15.9 million refugees were in a protracted situation.

⁴ Renwick, Danielle (Jan. 2016) [Central America's Violent Northern Triangle](#), Council of Foreign Relations

⁵ UNHCR (2019) [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018](#)



The durable solutions available to refugees in a protracted situation are limited: return to their country of origin, integrate into the local population where they have sought refuge or resettle to a third country. Without peace and security, refugee repatriation becomes almost impossible. Even after a peace agreement, lack of access to social services (health care, education, psycho-social support) and difficulties in reclaiming land and property discourage refugees to return to their homes.

Large scale protracted displacement leads to the politicization of the refugee problem in hosting countries as local integration, the second durable solution, is highly unpopular. The intense media-coverage of the crisis in Europe (for a relatively small number of migrants) has shown how refugees have been caught up in domestic politics and security concerns. This trend is expected to continue or even grow due to the massive presence of refugees in volatile and developing regions.

The rates of resettlement to a third country are marginal compared to the overall population of concern for UNHCR – less than 1 per cent of the total number of refugees were resettled in 2018⁶. Though many countries have increased the quota of refugees that they will resettle this increase has not kept pace with the rising number of applications⁷.

Given the difficulties in resolving conflicts, mitigating the consequences of climate change and finding durable solutions for refugees, protracted displacement is likely to continue.

➤ **Massification and regionalization of needs**

In December 2015 the number of refugees, IDPs and asylum seekers worldwide surpassed 60 million people for the first time⁸. With limited access to durable solutions and a perpetuation of the circumstances that forced people to flee their homes this population likely will grow. Displaced populations can be some of the most vulnerable groups - more than half of the world's refugees are children⁹.

Currently, a majority of displaced people are hosted in developing countries. In 2018, countries in developed regions hosted 16 percent of refugees while one third of the global population (6.7 million people) were in the Least Developed Countries¹⁰ Hosting countries are

⁶ UNHCR, [Resettlement](#) webpage

⁷ UNHCR (2016) [Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2017](#) pg 13

⁸ UNHCR (2016) [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015](#)

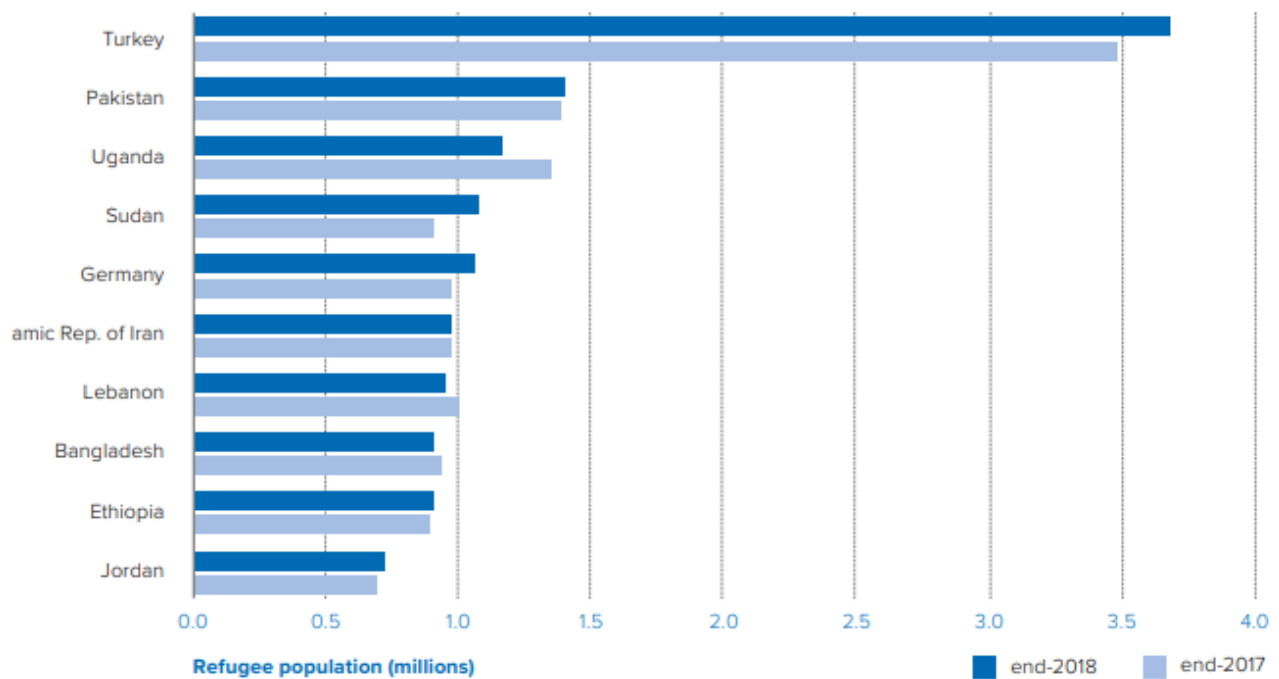
⁹ Domonoske, Camila (2016) [Refugees, Displaced People Surpass 60 Million for the first time, UNHCR says](#), National Public Radio



predominantly located in the neighboring states of conflict. The added burden of hosting significant displaced populations can create tensions and conflict with host communities over resources, deteriorating already fragile and volatile environments, making it a highly political issue. The concentration of displaced populations in the regions surrounding highly fragile states and those at the forefront of climactic shocks creates a regional dynamic to crises.

By 2030, the protracted nature of conflict and the increasingly severe consequences of climate change will drive flows of refugees to neighboring countries, likely increasing the concentration of needs in the countries surrounding conflict and fragile states and turn increasing the instability for hosting countries.

Major host countries of refugees | end-2017 to end-2018



UNHCR 2019, Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018, Major refugee-hosting countries 2017-2018 (end-year), retrieved 14 November 2019

¹⁰ UNHCR (2019) [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018](#)



➤ **Continuing urbanization of refugees**

Displaced populations are becoming increasingly urban. At the end of 2018, approximately 61 per cent of the world's refugees live in urban environments.¹¹ This trend is likely to continue and accelerate as conditions in camps are not improving and displaced populations are rebelling against “warehousing”¹², seeking opportunities for gainful employment in urban centers. However, urban displaced populations are highly vulnerable as they have limited access to legal employment or basic services.

Urban displaced populations create a more challenging environment for humanitarian actors to provide assistance. The continuing urbanization of the refugee crisis will challenge the traditional humanitarian response.

➤ **The economics of large scale forced displacement**

The political controversy around state responses to large scale forced migrations is likely to continue to emphasize the short-term costs of integrating migrant communities as opposed to the longer-term economic benefits. Integrated migrant populations rarely result in a reduction in GDP for hosting countries and can often be a boost to the economy¹³.

The migrant crisis is a lucrative business for criminal organizations. Migrants are exploited by smugglers and other unscrupulous employers using them as illegal workers on migration paths or in hosting countries. They are also often taken advantage of due to their irregular status, especially for housing,¹⁴ increasing their vulnerability.

Uncertainties

➤ **Whether the legal structure created in the wake of the second world war is incompatible with the modern dynamics of displacement**

¹¹ UNHCR (2019) [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018](#); UNHCR (2016) [Urban Refugees](#)

¹² Warehousing describes the result of the encampment policy which limits the rights of refugees to work, own property or move freely

¹³ Kollewe, Julia (January 2016) [IMF says refugee influx could provide EU economic boost](#), The Guardian and Cassidy, John (November 2015) [The Economics Of Syrian Refugees](#), The New Yorker

¹⁴ Loewenstein, Antony (October 2015) [How private companies are exploiting the refugee crisis for profit](#), The Independent



The legal structure which outlines the rights of displaced people and the obligation of states hosting them is failing to adequately protect forcibly displaced people – it is not being used as a “living document”¹⁵ and as such may not sufficiently evolve to reflect the changing dynamics of displacement. The Refugee Convention was not intended to respond to mass migration and the limited interpretation of who constitutes a refugee - those fleeing persecution not generalized conflict or climactic shocks – covers a very limited number of the 70.8. million persons of concern to UNHCR¹⁶. Though supplementary regional legal frameworks (such as those in the African Union and the European Union) have expanded the definition of refugees, granting protection to a majority of those fleeing conflict, there are still large discrepancies in the level protection accorded to different classes of migrants globally. As the dynamics of displacement continue to evolve (increasing number of climate migrants, extension of protracted situations), if left unaltered the legal protection framework will look increasingly anachronistic. Given the dominant reactionary attitude to responding to mass migration, there could be significant resistance to expand the rights accorded to displaced persons over the course of the outlook. This will leave tens of millions of displaced people with limited recourse to solve their displacement and will be a significant source of humanitarian need.

¹⁵ Newland, Kathleen (2015) *Rethinking Global Protection: New Channels, New Tools*. Migration Policy Institute, Washington D.C. pg. 2.

¹⁶ UNHCR (2019) [Figures at a Glance](#)