

### "Leaving them behind" - global trends in forced migration

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# "Leaving them behind"—Global trends in forced migration

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## Trends

### \ Without ending long-lasting violent conflicts, the current vast influx of refugees will continue to be high

Regions with civil wars will continue to be characterised by endemic violent conflicts and forced displacement in the coming decade. Accordingly, the number of displaced people from war-like contexts will increase.

### \ The number of forced migrants that are affected by protracted refugee situations (PRS) will rise markedly due to demographic growth alone, even if no new conflicts emerge

Due to the absence of durable solutions the number of forcibly displaced people who informally remain in a receiving country without a chance of ever obtaining citizenship of that country will grow.

### \ The Global North is sealing itself off

Countries of the Global South are likely to follow the practices of the Global North and refuse reception of refugees or even enforce collective deportation. This makes it all the more difficult to implement international agreements to manage forced displacement.

### \ The increasingly restrictive attitude of many countries provokes irregular migratory movements

Forced migrants are increasingly seeking protection in urban agglomerations. This increases the risk that social services in the cities will collapse and societal tensions will mount.

### \ The aid policy towards forcibly displaced people will undergo a drastic change.

Against the backdrop of the increasing duration and cyclical recurrence of violent conflict, the operational separation between refugees and IDPs can hardly be maintained. In addition, the boundaries between humanitarian aid and development cooperation will blur ever more. Aid organisations will be caught in a situation in which their engagement in support of displaced people might at the same time contribute to accommodating donors' interests of channelling and impeding refugee movements.

## "Leaving them behind"—Global trends in forced migration

In 2030, the envisaged year of the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), millions and millions of displaced people will still be living under precarious conditions. It is already clear that the SDGs' guiding principle "leaving no one behind" cannot be fulfilled; forced displaced people will be left behind. This Policy Brief identifies global trends of forced migration that will challenge the international community in the coming decade. Forced migration is linked to the emergence, dynamics, and escalation of violent conflicts, and so it is difficult to predict or capture its actual scale. What is more, the extent to which climate change may affect new flows of refugees is also unknown. Nevertheless, it is clear that the number of forced migrants will not decrease in the coming decade, but rather continue to rise. To date, approximately 70.8 million people have fled their homes. Survival "in displacement" will become normal for the vast majority of forced migrants unless policy-makers radically change their course and find durable solutions for them. Based on many years of empirical research at BICC on forced displacement, the following five trends can be identified for the coming decade.

### **Trend 1: Regions with civil wars will continue to be characterised by large refugee movements; many more people will flee from violence in war-like contexts.**

Civil wars are the main trigger for large refugee movements. The persistently high number of civil wars worldwide is linked to the trend of increasing internal violent conflicts. Over the next two decades, regions in which domestic and, sometimes, cross-border civil wars have led to long-lasting refugee movements will continue to remain fragile. This problem prevails in the Great Lakes region (refugee movements since 1959), the Horn of Africa (South Sudan, Somalia, Darfur, Ethiopia), ACP and the Middle East (particularly in Syria). In the absence of political will to end these conflicts on the part of the conflict parties and the international community,

these conflicts are more likely to continue over the long term. In addition to civil wars, there is also a rapid increase in refugee movements as a result of organised violent crime—within countries and across national borders. The causes are twofold: For one, the state cannot guarantee access to protection, especially in regions where organised crime prevails. Second, war-like situations are often not recognised as such by the authorities and therefore not tackled politically. In the northern triangle of Central America and Mexico alone, the number of IDPs (internally displaced persons) was already estimated at about one million by the end of 2015. UNHCR (2020) currently counts nearly 400,000 refugees and asylum seekers from Central and South America who have primarily fled from violent crime. Despite the peace agreement, Colombia continues to be one of the countries with the highest number of IDPs across the globe. But in other regions, too, such as the Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso) or North Africa (Libya), the mix of organised violent crime, smuggling and violent conflicts is increasing rapidly. The number of those fleeing from criminal and war-like situations is likely to increase markedly in the next ten years.

### **Trend 2: The number and duration of protracted refugee situations (PRS) is increasing, while the options for durable solutions are decreasing**

In recent decades, the average duration of a war has risen to seven to twelve years—with an upward trend. Many countries with particularly high numbers of refugees—like Afghanistan, South Sudan or Somalia—have been at war for more than three decades. War and its destructive social and economic consequences are often the reason why people are forced to flee in the first place and cannot return. So the longer a war continues, the longer forced migrants have to wait for a durable solution. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), around two-thirds of all displaced people find themselves in protracted refugee situations (PRS) that last longer than

five years. The average duration of PRS has increased from around nine years in the 1990s to more than twenty in late 2015. While just under half of all refugees were in an acute emergency situation in 1993, by the end of 2018, nearly 80 per cent found themselves in a long-lasting displacement situation. This data does not even take into account the number of IDPs, forcibly displaced persons who are not yet registered or live in cities, stateless people, asylum seekers or refugees from regions from which less than 25,000 people have fled. More and more people will, therefore, continue to be trapped in PRS for longer periods of time over the next decade.

The rise in PRS is not exclusively due to new refugee movements but above all to the fact that solutions to these situations can only be found for a fraction of those affected. There has always been a comparatively small number of all forcibly displaced people who return to their country of origin and it has continued to decline in recent years. According to the United Nations, from approximately 70 million people who fled their home only about 600,000 refugees returned to their countries of origin in 2018, and 2.6 million IDPs returned to their homes. The possibility for re-settlement to third countries has been declining since 2016 as demand has increased: In 2017, only 100,000 people could be resettled in third countries; in 2018, that number fell to only 80,000—with 4.1 million needing to be resettled. Only three per cent of individuals who live in protracted refugee situations benefit from local integration in the sense of obtaining the citizenship of the country they have fled to. In other words, the number of forcibly displaced people who informally remain in a receiving or third country (such as Turkey, Lebanon, Pakistan, or Kenya) without a chance of ever obtaining citizenship of that country is growing. In the absence of durable solutions, the number of forced migrants that are affected by PRS will rise markedly due to demographic growth alone, even if no new conflicts emerge.

### **Trend 3: Isolation policies in the Global North are on the rise and make it difficult to implement international agreements coherently.**

An increasing trend is the decision to close national borders for forced migrants or to deport them from Europe and the United States. In recent years, the Global North has intensified measures of upstream border security by entering into agreements with countries of origin and of transit in Central America, North Africa, the Mediterranean area and the Sahel. Besides the increasingly rigid shut-off, more than 150,000 migrants were returned from EU-countries to their countries of origin in 2018. This figure includes migrants who returned through assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes. The United States deported over 250,000 people in the same year. BICC's research in Afghanistan, Ghana and Iraq, among other countries, shows clearly that, compared to those who returned to their country of origin voluntarily and independently, deportees are facing considerable challenges to integrate socially and economically and are often marginalised or under threat.

In the political arena, spillover effects from the Global North to the Global South towards a rigid refugee policy can be observed. This runs counter to international agreements on refugees or that massively hinder their implementation. Tanzania is a case in point which recently withdrew from the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). If framework conditions do not change, the tendency for countries of the Global South to withdraw from such agreements will increase, and these countries will continue to reference practices of the Global North to refuse or demand the collective deportation of refugees. The isolationist policies of many regions harbour the risk of exacerbating socio-economic disparities that are drivers of migration movements in general.

#### **Trend 4: Urban displacement and irregular migration will continue to increase in the future.**

The persistence and aggravation of the causes of forced displacement—in combination with a concurrent, more pronounced policy of isolation—will lead to an increase in irregular migration and the number of forced migrants without any protected status. Many displaced people will live in legal, political and social grey areas. Expanding and even longer-lasting refugee situations mean that accommodating refugees in camps will simply be no longer possible or affordable in the long run. The prevailing, often precarious conditions, the prospect of scaled-down assistance and an already existing trend towards rural exodus mean that a growing proportion of refugees avoid camps and registration in general. Already today, forced migrants are increasingly seeking shelter and livelihood in urban areas.

As many of these migrants are not registered, there are no reliable estimates available of the number of urban refugees worldwide. This is made worse by the fact that numerous manifestations of forced migration, such as intra-urban expulsion (primarily in Latin America), are hardly taken into account when drawing up the root causes of forced migration. Many countries also restrict the options for a legalisation of refugees systematically and thus drive those affected into informality. It is already clear that the number of new arrivals will overburden the urban infrastructure (education, water supply and health services) of many cities around the world. This, in turn, increases the risks of growing xenophobia and political and ethnicised tensions.

#### **Trend 5: The aid policy towards forcibly displaced people will undergo a drastic change**

Nearly two-thirds of forced migrants worldwide are IDPs. These over 40 million IDPs, in particular, are exposed to the consequences of conflicts, internal displacement and lack of protection as well as economic, political and social marginalisation because an international protection regime is missing. Unlike internationally recognised refugees, IDPs are under the responsibility and duty of care of the affected nation-state, which is often responsible for violent expulsions itself (Myanmar, Syria, for instance). In contrast to this categorical distinction, the boundaries between IDPs and internationally recognised refugees become blurred in practice in the context of protracted refugee situations. The separation in administrative and international human rights law between forced migration and internal displacement has hampered the development of holistic and cross-border approaches to tackling the situation of forced migrants in general. In dealing with forced displacement in the coming decade, politicians will increasingly have to address the situation of IDPs and the interrelations, parallels and transitions between internal displacement and displacement across borders.

Another group that will come into the focus of refugee aid in connection with PRS are those who are directly or indirectly 'held hostage' by violent conflicts and their consequences. Forced immobility affects forced migrants that are stuck in camps or stranded due to restrictive border regimes or the lack of papers, financial resources and networks; but it also affects those who are unable to escape the violence in the first place and are forced to remain in the midst of a violent conflict. The longer the situation lasts, the more they almost invariably need the same assistance as international refugees and IDPs. Yet, access to these people is comparatively difficult and will continue to be a major challenge for humanitarian aid in the future.

Finally, because of the duration, complexity and the cyclical recurrence of violent conflicts, development cooperation will increasingly find itself in situations that overlap with humanitarian aid. This will lead to a drastic change of the aid sector during the next decade. The normative frameworks and the programme structure of aid organisations, as well as the financial instruments of the donors, will need to be reshuffled. The current efforts of the donor community to establish the Triple Nexus between humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peace are paradigmatic of this change. In the future, aid organisations will be confronted with the challenge of accepting funding from national and international donors, who will increasingly link their support of displaced people with policies that prioritize national security and no-entry.

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