Forced displacement: refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons (IDPs)

Facts & Figures

- **65.6** million people are forcibly displaced worldwide: 22.5 million refugees, 40.3 million internally displaced by conflict 2.8 million seeking asylum.

- Largest sources of displaced people: Syria, Palestine, Colombia, Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan

Sources: UNHCR 2016 Global Trends Report; IDMC 2016 Global Overview Report

- **EU (DG ECHO)** funding of €1972 million to help forcibly displaced populations in 2016.

- A new development-led approach to forced displacement

Key messages:

- Each year millions of people are forced to leave their homes and seek refuge from conflicts, violence, human rights violations, persecution or natural disasters. The number of **forcibly displaced persons** (refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons) has continued to rise in 2016, calling for increased humanitarian assistance worldwide. The majority of today’s refugees live in the developing world, which means that they flee to countries already struggling with poverty and hardship.

- The EU is a leading international donor in forced displacement situations. **In 2016 it gave over €1972 million** for humanitarian assistance dedicated to refugees and IDPs. This funding covers projects that help the forcibly displaced access shelter, protection, food and other basic services such as health, nutrition, water, sanitation and education.

- In April 2016, the European Commission adopted a new **development-led approach to forced displacement**, aimed at harnessing and strengthening the resilience and self-reliance of both the forcibly displaced and their host communities. The new approach stipulates that political, economic, development and humanitarian actors should engage from the outset of a displacement crisis, and work with third countries towards the gradual socio-economic inclusion of the forcibly displaced. The objective is to make people's lives more dignified during displacement; and ultimately, to end forced displacement.
Major needs of the forcibly displaced

Each year millions of people are forced to leave their homes and seek refuge from conflicts, violence, human rights violations, persecution and natural disasters. The number of forcibly displaced persons has continued to rise throughout 2015 and 2016, calling for increased humanitarian assistance worldwide. Up to 84% of the forcibly displaced find refuge among people who already struggle with poverty in low- and middle-income countries. Their survival depends on the availability of assistance provided by local communities and international organisations.

Over 65.6 million people worldwide are in need of protection and assistance as a consequence of forced displacement. Forcibly displaced populations include refugees\(^1\), internally displaced persons (IDPs)\(^2\) and asylum-seekers\(^3\). Globally in 2017, over 40.3 million people are internally displaced as a result of conflict (source: IDMC 2016 Global Overview Report), while 22.5 million are refugees and 2.8 million are asylum-seekers (source: UNHCR 2016 Global Trends Report). An estimated 31.1 million people were internally displaced in 2016 alone due to conflicts and natural disasters; this is the equivalent of one displaced person every second. 51% of the global refugee population are children under 18 - the highest proportion in a decade.

Finding durable solutions for the forcibly displaced is a challenge. Voluntary repatriation to their home countries is the preferred long-term outcome for refugees; but the lack of political solutions to conflicts prevents many from doing so. Forced displacement is no longer a temporary phenomenon; it lasts on average 20 years for refugees and more than 10 years for 90% of IDPs. Those who are internally displaced (IDPs) also face challenges in terms of protection, access to shelter, food and other basic services. Both refugees and IDPs in urban areas struggle with poverty, lack of psycho-social support and difficulties in normalising their status. Violence, abuse and exploitation against them often peak in the aftermath of new emergencies.

Each year on 20 June, the world focuses on the plight of all people who are forced to flee their homes. World Refugee Day has been a significant event since 2001, when the UN General Assembly designated it on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

A development-led approach to forced displacement

In April 2016, the European Commission adopted the Communication ‘Lives in Dignity: from Aid-dependence to Self-reliance. Forced Displacement and Development’, outlining a new development-led approach to forced displacement. The EU’s objective is to strengthen the resilience and self-reliance of both the displaced and their host communities through a multi-actor approach from the outset of displacement crises. Its focus is on working with host governments, at the national and local level, towards the gradual socio-economic inclusion of refugees and IDPs. The new approach, applied in practice through joint analysis and programming, aims to harness the productive capacities of refugees and IDPs by helping them to access education, housing, land, livelihoods and services.

\(^1\) A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her home country and is unable or unwilling to return due to fear of persecution. The 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees gives refugees legal protection under the international refugee law. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is mandated to respond to refugee needs.

\(^2\) An internally displaced person (IDP) is someone who was forced to flee his/her home but who did not cross a state border. IDPs benefit from the legal protection of international human rights law and, in armed conflict, international humanitarian law.

\(^3\) ‘Asylum-seekers’ are those who have made a claim that they are refugees and are in the process of waiting for it to be accepted or rejected. ‘Stateless’ people are not considered as a national by any state (‘de jure’) or don't enjoy fundamental rights in their homeland (‘de facto’). [source: UNHCR]
The European Union’s humanitarian response

In 2016, EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid gave more than €1,972 million, or some 87% of its annual budget, to projects helping the forcibly displaced and their host communities in 56 countries (Turkey, Greece, Syria, Iraq and South Sudan being the top 5). This helps to:

- meet the most pressing needs of these extremely vulnerable populations;
- protect and support displaced people during their displacement and when returning to their homes;
- increase the self-reliance of displaced people and reduce their dependency on aid.

The Commission’s assistance to the forcibly displaced is making a difference in the lives of many: Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Greece; Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan; Somali refugees in Kenya; Congolese refugees in the Great Lakes region; Palestinian refugees; Myanmar refugees in Thailand; Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh; and Sahrawi refugees in Algeria. Vulnerable internally displaced persons are equally targeted by Commission assistance, particularly in Syria, Colombia, South Sudan, Iraq and Yemen.

The Commission channels its financial support to forced displacement situations through organisations dealing with refugees, IDPs, vulnerable migrants and (in some cases) host communities. Its main partners include UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Finally, the European Commission has an important role in advocating for and enabling durable solutions for refugees and IDPs, especially with regards to fulfilling their right of return to their countries of origin. The EU recognises that meeting the needs of refugees and IDPs requires targeted humanitarian aid combined with sustainable development assistance. Together with its partners, the EU also advocates for the full recognition of the new opportunities and benefits for national and local economies which forcibly displaced people can create.

Examples of crises - and how the EU contributes:

Entering its seventh year, the Syrian conflict has triggered the world’s largest humanitarian and displacement crisis since World War II. Population displacement within Syria is widespread (with over 6.3 million IDPs), and the number of refugees has passed the 5.5 million mark. The European Union and its Member States are collectively the leading providers of international aid to this crisis. To date more than €9.4 billion has been mobilised for humanitarian, stabilisation and resilience assistance to support Syrians inside the country, and in neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt. A further €3.7 billion has been pledged together by the EU and its Member States for 2017. (The Commission has pledged €445 million in humanitarian assistance to the Syria crisis for 2016, and €280 million for 2017.)

This funding provides medical relief, protection, food and nutritional assistance, water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter, health, and logistics services to the most vulnerable. Beyond the Syrian border, EU funding ensures that people fleeing the country will receive life-saving assistance such as health, food, shelter, hygiene kits, water and sanitation services, and protection. The EU’s funding to the victims of the Syrian crisis is channelled through UN agencies and international partner organisations.

Afghanistan is still the country of origin of the second largest number of refugees in the world after Syria. Almost four decades of violence have led to large-scale displacement within the country, and to neighbouring Iran and Pakistan. Intensified conflict continues to force people out of their homes; in 2016 alone, more than 623,000 people became internally displaced. Pakistan continues to host the largest number of Afghan refugees (around 1.6 million), while Iran hosts over 850,000. Conversely, over 200,000 Pakistani refugees live in Afghanistan. The European Commission has been funding humanitarian operations in Afghanistan since 1994, reaching a total amount of over €751 million. The Commission’s support provides food, shelter, water and sanitation, health and protection services to forcibly displaced persons. It also supports the reintegration of Afghan refugees into their new homes, or other long-term solutions where the conditions for safe return are not met.

4 Funding from EU institutions, excluding funding from Member States.