European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

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

What is it?

Millions of people are forced to leave their homes every year because of conflict, violence, human rights violations, persecution, and natural disasters. The number of forcibly displaced people continued to rise in 2018, calling for increased humanitarian assistance across the world. At the end of 2018, 70.8 million people were in need of protection and assistance as a consequence of forced displacement. This is the equivalent of a person becoming displaced every two seconds. Most refugees live in urban areas followed by those living in camps or rural areas. Those displaced inside their countries are often among the most vulnerable when a crisis erupts.

Why is this important?

Up to 85 percent of the forcibly displaced are hosted by low- and middle-income countries which puts a strain on host communities and resources. Their survival depends on the availability of assistance provided by the authorities, local communities and humanitarian organisations.

Both refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) often face protection challenges and lack of access to shelter, food, and other basic services. In urban areas in particular, both refugees and IDPs struggle with poverty, lack of psycho-social support and difficulties in normalising their legal status. Violence, abuse and exploitation against them often peak in the aftermath of new emergencies.

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, recurrent violence and instability prevent many from doing so. Forced displacement is no longer a temporary phenomenon as it has become increasingly protracted. Displacement lasts 20 years on average for refugees and more than 10 years for 90 percent of IDPs.

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How are we helping?

In April 2016, the European Commission adopted the Communication ‘Lives in Dignity: from Aid-dependence to Self-reliance. Forced Displacement and Development’, presenting a new development-led approach to forced displacement. The objective is to strengthen the resilience and self-reliance of both the displaced and their host communities, working with host governments and local actors to support the gradual socio-economic inclusion of refugees and IDPs. The new approach aims to harness the productive capacities of refugees and IDPs by helping them to access education, healthcare, housing, land, livelihood support, and other basic services.

The EU is a leading international donor in situations of forced displacement. In 2018, the Commission allocated approximately 75 percent of its humanitarian budget, or more than €1.2 billion to projects that address the needs of forcibly displaced and local communities in around 40 countries. This funding helped meet the most urgent needs of extremely vulnerable populations including women, children, and people with disabilities, protecting and supporting them during displacement and when returning to their homes. Projects implemented on the ground helped the forcibly displaced access shelter, protection, food and basic services such as healthcare, nutritional assistance, safe water, sanitation, and education.

More than 35 percent of the humanitarian aid reached refugees and IDPs in the form of cash (debit cards, mobile transfers, vouchers). Cash provides refugees and IDPs with a sense of dignity and independence and also serves to tighten links with local communities as aid money is spent in small local businesses. Around 50 percent of the EU’s 2018 humanitarian funding was allocated to situations where internally displaced were among the beneficiaries.

The European Union’s assistance to the forcibly displaced is making a difference in the lives of many: Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt; 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. EU assistance also targets IDPs in Syria, Colombia, South Sudan, Iraq, and Yemen among others.

The EU channels its financial support to forced displacement situations through organisations dealing with refugees, IDPs, migrants and – in some cases – host communities on the ground. Its main humanitarian partners include the United Nations Agency for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The Global Compact on Refugees, adopted in 2018, seeks to ensure a more predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing among states. It builds on the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) as outlined in Annex I to the New York Declaration, currently rolled out in 15 Latin American, African, and Asian countries. The European Union has supported the rollout of CRRF and the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees.

Finally, the EU strongly supports the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and systematically promotes the inclusion of these principles in international and national law. The EU also advocates raising international attention to IDPs.