

7. Coping with crises: forced displacement in fragile contexts

Overview

In 2016 forced displacement continued to be a major challenge to human security, most notably in the Middle East and Africa, which together currently host over two-thirds of the world's displaced populations. In recent years the number of forcefully displaced persons has increased significantly—to over 60 million—when compared, for example, to population growth or general migration. This rise has been caused by new displacement crises such as in Yemen and South Sudan, coupled with protracted crises such as in Syria and Afghanistan, and low numbers of returnees. The clear majority of these displacement crises have been generated primarily by armed conflicts.

The challenges are particularly pronounced due to the concentration of forcefully displaced persons in small, confined geographical spaces—in a city, at a border, in a camp or along a narrow transit route—and overall across a small set of countries. Such concentration leads to coping issues, for example, overcrowding and associated problems including inadequate physical protection and healthcare, increasing constraints on resources, and loss of livelihoods and educational opportunities.

State-centric structures for addressing forced displacement and the lack of a commonly agreed international legal framework are serious obstacles to successfully addressing both short-term human security needs and long-term challenges such as the legal status of displaced persons in a host country and the consequences that has on livelihoods and other opportunities. While existing international law offers protection to those fleeing their home country and seeking protection in other states, most major refugee-hosting countries have not signed the United Nations Convention on Refugees. Furthermore, the UN Convention does not apply to internally displaced persons—the group that makes up the vast majority of those forcefully displaced.

This chapter argues that the most useful way of understanding current displacement dangers, and therefore addressing them in more adequate ways, is viewing them in their shared context of large-scale displacement in fragile, violent situations. While fragility refers to societies' heightened exposure to risks combined with a low capacity to mitigate or absorb them, violent conflicts were also closely associated with all the major displacement crises in 2016. The chapter discusses and situates forced displacement in fragile, violent contexts

using examples of recent developments from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, South Sudan and Nigeria.

The depth and breadth of the ongoing displacements may have spillover effects on societies and countries beyond those that are considered to be sources of the crises. In order to address the humanitarian challenges of displacement and concerns of refugee-hosting and other states, regional and international processes have been initiated. In 2016 the UN General Assembly took the first step towards a political process for an international framework on safe migration, including more equitable burden sharing with regard to hosting and supporting refugees. Other examples of processes, in particular those presented by the European Union (EU), have on the other hand risked undermining the international legal framework that is currently protecting refugees. On at least two occasions in 2016, the EU sought to reach political solutions with major refugee-hosting states without any written or legal basis.

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