

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Rights and well-beings of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)

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Introduction

Marking the largest single-year increase on record, by the end of September 2023, more than 144 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide; the global refugee and IDP crisis continues to be one of the most pressing humanitarian issues. With ongoing and new conflicts and humanitarian situations in Afghanistan, Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Latin America, Myanmar, Somalia, and Sudan accounting for an estimated 90% of new displacement globally, it is consequential that 1 in 73 people worldwide are forcibly displaced with 9 in 10 living in low- and middle-income countries. Refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, migrants are all depending on the availability of assistance yet often face protection challenges and lack access to shelter, food, and other basic services. Finding durable solutions is a challenge, as many cases of violence, abuse, and exploitation shortly follow in the aftermath of new emergencies against these populations. Voluntary returns to their home countries remain the preferred outcome, but a lack of political solutions, recurring violence, and instability is preventing many from doing so.

People forced to flee | 2009 – mid-2023

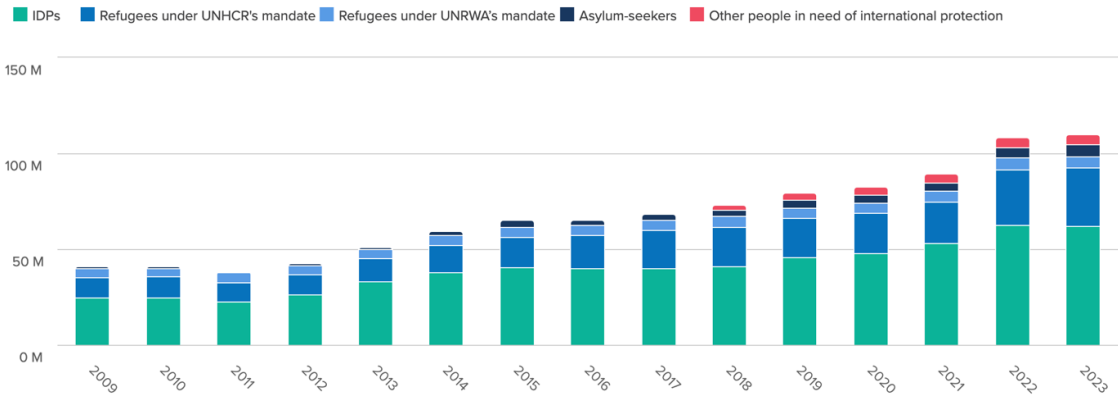


Figure 1: Graph presents data on different types of populations forced to flee from years 2009 to mid-2023

This report will examine the reality of refugees and IDPs' rights and well-being, delving into historical backgrounds and key factors driving the issue, analyzing roles and perspectives of major parties involved, reviewing past actions taken, exploring potential solutions, and incorporating relevant data to provide a comprehensive overview of this pressing global humanitarian issue.

Key Terminology

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Someone who is forced to leave their home (most commonly through conflict or disaster) but remains within their country's borders.

Refugees

A person who has been forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

Humanitarian situation

A crisis or emergency where a larger number of people require urgent assistance, such as food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Voluntary returns

The return of refugees or IDPs to their country or place of origin, one of their own free will and in safety and dignity.

Stateless persons

Individuals who are not recognized as citizens by any country, leaving them without the rights and protections afforded to citizens.

Background

The Evolving Refugee and IDP Crisis

At the end of World War II, massive displacement was evident and in response the 1951 Refugee Convention was established. This treaty defined the term “refugee” and set out rights of individuals and responsibilities of nations. The convention aimed to provide refugees with legal status and protection in hopes of countering the disadvantages of isolation from their own country until they could gain or receive protection. The drafters felt that it would be inappropriate to include IDPs as the convention gave support to those outside their country and simply wouldn’t make sense if granted to an IDP in a domestic context. The United States and France also raised concerns regarding the protection framework as IDPs may encourage their own states to evade responsibility, potentially increasing states’ obligations and inclining towards fewer participation in the 1951 Refugee Convention.

IDPs didn’t have any specific international agency to protect them until the post-Cold War era when the issue gained significant momentum. There was an ideological shift in how displacement was viewed and addressed in the sense that language of protection was being replaced by restrictive policies and states began using measures to limit refugee entry. Then in the 1970s, the problem gained international attention, leading to more formal recognition and documentation. The creation of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, the development of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (global standard of IDP protection), and establishment of regional IDP treaties in Africa are all seen as significant strides in this area. Although refugee and IDP issues have been recognized more over the course of history, it remains a global challenge with its ongoing and growing nature especially with other factors such as climate change, natural disasters, and extreme poverty adding more stress to the issue.

Countries that join the Refugee Convention of 1951 and the 1967 Protocol

- Parties to the 1951 convention
- Parties to the 1967 convention
- Parties of both conventions
- Non members

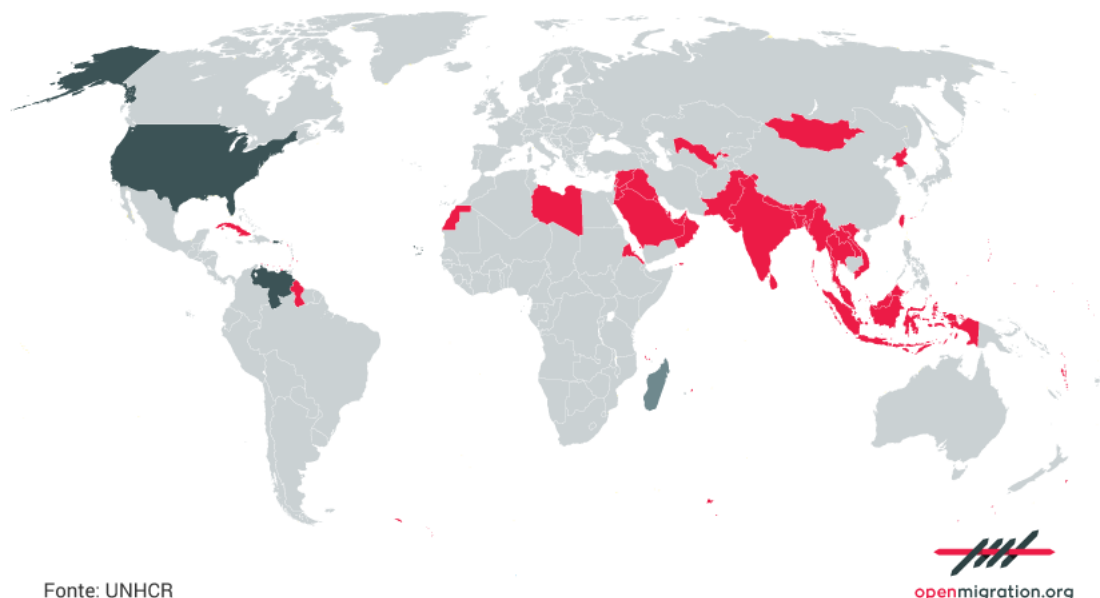


Figure 2: Graph shows a map of the world with certain colors indicting whether the country joined the Refugee convention of 1951

Key Challenges

Both groups are at risk of major human rights abuses, including violence, exploitation, and discrimination.

- Over half of all refugees are under 18 years old, causing them to be particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.
- While refugees have certain protection under international law, IDPs often lack similar safeguards as they remain under their own government's jurisdiction, potentially exposing them to further abuse.
- Many refugees and IDPs are vulnerable to labor exploitation, human trafficking, and forced recruitment into armed groups.
- IDPs frequently face discrimination in accessing basic services, employment, and housing in host communities.

- IDPs are often targets of physical violence, sexual assault, and other forms of abuse.

Economic and Social Impact

Economic	Social
<p>The global cost of one year of internal displacement was estimated at \$21 billion in 2020, including costs for housing, education, health security, and loss of income.</p>	<p>IDPs face challenges in accessing basic services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistical challenges – IDP camps or settlements may be in remote or difficult-to-reach areas, complicating the delivery of food and water supplies. This is common in parts of Yemen and Syria. • Resource scarcity – host communities may be overwhelmed by sudden influx of IDPs, leading to shortages of resources. For example, in Lebanon, the influx of Syrian refugees has strained local resources and public services, affecting both the refugee and local populations.
<p>Specific events can lead to economic losses. For example, the 2015 earthquake in Nepal resulted in a \$406 million loss in production due to internal displacement.</p>	<p>Displacement disrupts education for both displaced populations and host communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruption of education – many children may miss months or years of schooling due to forced relocation, which can delay their academic progress and affect their future opportunities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access to schools – IDPs often face barriers to enrolling in schools, including lack of documentation and overcrowded classrooms.
<p>Displacement significantly reduces income for affected individuals. For example, in Colombia, average household income dropped from \$825 to \$170, only recovering to \$410 after a year.</p>	<p>Displacement has specific impact on women and girls, often exacerbating existing gender inequalities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased risk of violence – one in five women in refugee camps experience sexual violence. • Cultural and social norms – many refugee camps have entrenched cultural practices that reinforce gender inequality.

Major Parties Involved

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the primary UN agency responsible for safeguarding the rights and well-beings of refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people around the world. Established in 1950 after World War II, UNHCR has a long history of providing protection and assistance globally. Over the decades, the agency has adapted its approaches to addressing evolving displacement crises, working closely with national governments, NGOs, and other partners. In recent years, UNHCR has made efforts to ensure meaningful participation of displaced and stateless people in decision-making processes that affect them. This reflects the agency’s recognition that those with direct experience of forced displacement should have a central role in shaping policies and programs. As the primary UN agency for these populations, UNHCR’s actions can significantly influence global refugee policies and practices.

UNHCR relies upon countries or country blocs for support in several areas, for example, funding from many countries. UNHCR receives many donations from Japan, the fifth most significant donor. The country often participates in emergency response. Japan also collaborates with the UNHCR on capacity-building initiatives (training programs, technical support, institutional development, etc.) aimed at strengthening the ability of host countries to manage refugee situations.

European Commission (EC)

The European Commission (EC) plays a crucial role in supporting refugees and internally displaced persons in Europe and its neighboring regions. The EC's mission is to strengthen the resilience of both the displaced and their host communities, working with their host governments and local actors to promote the gradual socio-economic inclusion of refugees and IDPs. In 2023, the EC allocated a significant portion of its €1.7 billion humanitarian budget towards projects addressing the needs of IDPs and their host communities, helping to meet urgent needs and protect vulnerable populations during displacement and return. The EC's funding priorities have a substantial impact on the type of support available to refugees and IDPs in Europe, shaping regional and global approaches to displacement crises. Furthermore, the EC provides financial support to UNHCR, channeled through the European Union, and is the third largest donor.

Japan

Japan has also emerged as an influential player in the global response to humanitarian crises and forced displacement. The Japanese government has encouraged discussions on funding gaps for humanitarian assistance and committed to providing flexible funding and financial support to UNHCR. The country expresses concern over the rise of displaced persons due to global conflicts and supports a comprehensive, long-term approach address these challenges. In recent years, Japan has launched a multi-stakeholder pledge to reinforce the "humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach", which emphasizes the importance of integrating humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts to foster durable solutions.

Japan's stance and initiatives influence global strategies for addressing refugee and IDP issues, particularly in terms of prioritizing flexible and sustainable funding mechanisms.

Ukraine

The ongoing displacement crisis in Ukraine, caused by the Russian invasion, has thrust the country into the global spotlight. Ukraine is currently facing the immediate needs of its large internally displaced population, as well as those who have been forcibly moved to Russia. Working closely with UNHCR and other international partners, Ukraine is grappling with the immense challenges posed by the displacement of over 11 million Ukrainians. The scale and severity of this conflict-induced displacement crisis has significant implications for global discussions on refugee protection, humanitarian assistance, and long-term solutions for the millions affected by forced migration around the world.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description/Note
1948	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted by Eleanor Roosevelt, Pen-Chun Chang, Charles Malik, and with the assistance of the UN Secretariat, was adopted. Establishing fundamental rights for all individuals, including those displaced.
1950	The position of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created.
1992	UN appoints first Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, recognizing IDPs as a global issue.
1998	The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement was introduced.
2009	African Union adopts the Kampala Convention, the first legally binding regional instrument to protect IDPs.
2011	Syrian civil war begins, leading to one of the largest refugee crises in recent history.

2018	Global Compact on Refugees adopted, aiming to strengthen international response to large refugee movements.
2019	First Global Refugee Forum held in Geneva, bringing together various stakeholders to address refugee issues.
2022	Russian invasion of Ukraine leads to the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.
2023	Number of forcibly displaced people worldwide exceeds 100 million for the first time.

Previous Attempts/Solutions

Reintegrating refugees and IDPs is the UNHCR's primary method of solution. However, the impact of devastation among areas of conflict makes it difficult for these populations to return. One approach the UNHCR took was the Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) - a small-scale, low-cost project used in 1991, designed to assist reintegration of returnees and displaced persons in Nicaragua. Some Quick Impact Projects include infrastructure repair, water and sanitation, education, livelihood support, and health. The projects were successful in providing immediate relief and contributing to the stabilization of post-conflict areas. Helping with rebuilding essential infrastructure, improving living conditions, and supporting returning refugees and IDPs.

In recent years, the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) implemented several QIPs to rehabilitate schools, clinics, and other community facilities. UNITAMS saw improvements in several areas, for example, renovating a primary school in El-Geneina, providing a safe and functioning learning environment for over 600 students. QIPs were implemented most in the region of South-Sahara Africa due to having one of the highest levels of internal displaced globally caused by ongoing conflict. Despite these successes, QIPs face challenges such as limited funding, security concerns, and the need for coordination with other humanitarian organizations.

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UNHCR and its partners implemented a variety of programs to provide returnees and their communities with the means of re-establishing themselves. Many protection gaps and priorities were identified through returnee monitoring systems. In addition, legal assistance and capacity-building programs were introduced to help facilitate the recovery of land and property with hopes of lowering discriminatory access to services. UNHCR and partners also created several initiatives, for example, the Brookings Process, initiated in cooperation with the World Bank. The Brookings Process was an initiative launched in the early 2000s aimed to overcome shortcomings of earlier reintegration efforts, which had been fragmented and lacked sustained support and funding. It was named after the Brookings Institution, a prominent think tank in Washington, D.C., which provided a platform for policymakers, experts, and practitioners to convene and develop comprehensive solutions. Unfortunately, the Brookings Process didn't have the desired impact due to persistent institutional and funding gaps.

Prior to this, the UN General Assembly passed resolutions, such as Resolution 50/195 in 1995, which called upon member states and the international community to provide comprehensive support for the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of refugees and displaced persons. The UN Commission on Human Rights also adopted a series of resolutions emphasizing the rights of IDPs and the responsibility of states to protect and assist them. However, these resolutions often faced challenges in terms of effective implementation and securing sustained funding and commitment from member states.

Various regional and national governments, as well as independent organizations have also attempted to address this challenge. For example, the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Southeast Asia and the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA), both in the late 1980s by national governments (with help from donor countries and UNHCR) aimed to mobilize international support for refugee-hosting countries. The CPA was initially viewed as a success, as it helped facilitate the repatriation of over 800,000 refugees. Yet, still faced challenges in the long run as CPA struggled to ensure the sustainable reintegration of returnees in their home communities. Many returnees continued to face difficulties in regaining land, property, and livelihoods. While ICARA's initial conference was

successful in generating significant pledges of financial and material assistance they're follow up conference faced challenges in sustained support and funding.

Potential Solutions

Encourage further funding from delegates

- Access to necessities like food, water, shelter, and healthcare for refugees and IDPs
- Finance towards host countries and communities to facilitate and host these populations, including funding for housing, education, and protection services
- Address the lack of resources in many countries to adequately support the large influxes of refugees and IDPs
- Minimum countries funding should start at a 0.0007% of their GDP
- Urge wealthier countries to fund a minimum of 0.005% of their GDP

Increase attention and awareness towards refugee and IDP issues

- Many people are unaware of the scale and severity of this global issue, which is affecting millions of people. This might lead to governments not making this a priority and instead spending money on issues popular with voters, such as tax cuts.
- We must determine whether prioritizing refugee and IDP issues among the many global challenges is the right move
- Advocate for greater media coverage on the situation
 - a. Organize yearly press conferences and invite high-profile speakers (former heads of state, government ministers, or CEOs of major international organizations)
 - b. Engage with influential journalists and media outlets. Especially ones who specialize in international affairs or human rights. E.g., Christiane Amanpour, David Ignatius, Fareed Zakaria, etc.

Better monitoring of advertising and selling of weapons to governments or factions which are likely to use them in a way that would cause more refugees

- Monitoring these transactions can help pinpoint and limit weapons in countries, reducing the risk of conflicts escalating

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- However, determining which countries should be restricted and how many weapons a country is allowed is a complex challenge
- Work with weapons manufacturers and increase penalties or sanctions to ensure compliance.
- Raise the prices of weapons by 30% to discourage factions from purchasing them

Mediate between warring factions

- Diplomatic mediation efforts to resolve conflicts between warring parties could help prevent issues from escalating further
- Effective mediation could also decrease the financial burden on governments dealing with refugee and IDP crises
- Create 3,000 to 10,000 peacekeeping forces to be deployed

Strengthen international cooperation and burden-sharing

- Encourage more countries to share the responsibility of hosting and supporting refugees and IDPs. Currently 80-90% of refugees are living in 50% of the world's countries. It would be better if no more than 50% of refugees were living in less than 20% of the countries
- Establish clear frameworks and mechanisms for equitable distribution of resources and responsibilities
- Enhance coordination between national governments and international organizations
 - a. Conduct biannual assessment reports
 - b. Designate liaison officers to facilitate communication and coordination

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Appendix

<<https://refugeehistory.org/blog/2022/7/21/time-for-a-convention-on-internal-displacement-the-history-of-the-internal-displacement-protection-regime#:~:text=However%2C%20the%20IDP%20issue%20gained,origin%20to%20protect%20its%20nationals>>

This website provides some information on some countries' stand and opinions on the Refugee and IDPs laws. It also gives an extended version of the history and actions UNHCR took.

<<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FactSheet20en.pdf>>

This website provides a comprehensive overview of the human rights issues related to refugees. It touches upon international refugee law, including ones spoken in this report and others. The website also introducing human rights and violations against them, quoting many documents and UN officials.