

Human Rights Council

Addressing forced displacement due to conflict



Forum:	Human Rights Council
Issue:	Addressing forced displacement due to conflict
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Introduction

Over the last decades, the global stage has seen an alarming increase in mass displacement, primarily caused by armed conflict and violence. Over 117 million people were forcibly displaced at the end of 2023. These individuals and families are forcefully uprooted from their homes, seeking refuge within their own country or across borders. This phenomenon not only disrupts the lives of those directly affected but also puts serious stress on global stability, humanitarian efforts and sustainable development.

Political instability, ethnic and religious tensions, economic disparities and climate change are some of the causes of mass displacement. At times, this displacement occurs because of armed conflict that leads to violence against civilians by warring parties and the destruction of infrastructure in a climate of fear and insecurity.

Understanding the dynamics behind mass displacement is important for effective humanitarian response, policy formulation, as well as international cooperation. It therefore demands an all-round exploration of what drives it and how it impacts people, including legal frameworks and protective measures that can be put into place for its mitigation. This research report aims to give a comprehensible overview of the topic of mass displacement due to conflict and aid delegates in finding solutions to this topic.

Key Terms

Delegates need to understand the (legal) nuances regarding people moving from region to region. Therefore, this section starts by explaining three different types of migrants.

Migrant

A migrant is a person who has left their region of origin to move to a different one. This can be for a multitude of reasons, including economic, cultural or to seek safety. Migration can be either external - meaning moving from country to country- or internal, staying within the same country. The term migrant can therefore be used as an overarching definition regarding persons leaving their region of origin.

Refugee

A refugee is a person who has crossed international borders and seeks safety in a different country. The term can only be used if it is not safe for the refugee to return to their region of origin. The reason can include a wide variety of situations including climate change, political dangers or conflict.

Asylum Seeker

An asylum seeker is someone who has fled their country of origin in search for safety. An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for the status of refugee or is waiting to do so. Therefore, all refugees were once asylum seekers but not all asylum seekers become refugees.

Internally Displaced Person

An internally displaced person (IDP) is someone who has been forced to flee their home but who has not crossed any international borders. IDPs can therefore be viewed as internal refugees.

Forced displacement

This is the definition of forced displacement according to the Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons: “Forced displacement occurs when individuals and communities have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of or in order

to avoid the effects of events or situations such as armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights abuses, natural or man-made disasters, and/or development projects.

It includes situations where people have fled as well as situations where people have been forcibly removed from their homes, evicted or relocated to another place not of their choosing, whether by State or non-state actors. The defining factor is the absence of will or consent.”

Armed Conflict

Armed conflicts are, regarding international humanitarian laws, periods where involved states have different rights and duties than during normal times. International law distinguishes two types of armed conflict. International Armed Conflict (IAC) is between different states whilst Non-International Armed Conflicts (NIAC) is between different organised armed groups.

General Overview

Forced displacement due to conflict is a complex issue driven by various different factors. Most of these factors are encapsulated by one cause: human rights violations. Because of the unstable environment a conflict creates, human rights violations are frequent in these areas. These conditions compel people to flee their homes, searching for safety and protection. The next section will explore the primary causes of forced displacement in conflict zones.

Causes of displacement

As mentioned before, in a conflict, human rights violations often occur. Some violations are caused by a country not having enough resources to take care of its people, and some are caused by the brutal tactics the different sides of a conflict utilise.

Indiscriminate attacks on civilians unfortunately often occur during conflict. Warring parties frequently focus on civilian targets, which leads to high casualties and widespread fear. The bombing of residential areas, schools, hospitals and other non-military objectives force people to flee to avoid the threat to their lives.

When crucial infrastructure such as water and electricity supply is destroyed, it leaves communities without the basic necessities. This vulnerability often compels people to abandon their homes in search of these necessities somewhere else. Both parties in a conflict sometimes resort to forcibly recruiting civilians into their armies. This fear of being dragged into the conflict can also be a cause for people to look for safety in another region.

Consequences of displacement

Communities fleeing conflict zones are faced with many different threats including physical violence, health issues, loss of independence and lack of access to basic needs. These are all caused by their sudden departure and the immense stress this causes. Physical violence can further increase health issues caused by malnutrition and lack of treatment. After losing their jobs, people become dependent on outside help such as financial aid, making it difficult to escape their situation.

Regions that receive many displaced persons are also faced with numerous troubles. A sudden arrival of many (foreign) people can cause unrest and a strain on resources. This can lead to tensions, resentment, food shortages and economic problems. These regions therefore require aid from the international community to be able to help the displaced people.

Major Parties Involved

Syria

Syria has seen a prolonged civil war since 2011. This year, it remained the largest country in terms of displacement, with over 12 million individuals still forcibly displaced in the region. The earthquakes last year also significantly worsened the situation by putting more strain on the already limited resources available for refugees.

Myanmar

The Myanmar military, amidst the various NIACs, has been accused of a devastating campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya population. This campaign involves mass killings, sexual violence and arson, leading to mass displacement to neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The DRC is going through conflict involving government forces and various rebel groups. This fighting has caused a very unstable situation. As the fighting keeps going, more and more IDPs are forced to seek shelter elsewhere in the country.

South Sudan

Since its independence in 2011, South Sudan has been plagued by civil war. A preliminary peace treaty had been signed in 2018, but violence between communities is still frequent. Needless to say, this civil unrest, in addition to the oppression from the government, has caused mass displacement.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The UNHCR provides protection and assistance to refugees and IDPs worldwide. It works to ensure basic human rights and to find durable solutions for many displaced populations.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

The ICRC offers humanitarian assistance and protection to victims of situations of violence such as armed conflict. The ICRC supports many refugees worldwide and strives to ensure universal respect for international humanitarian law.

Timeline of Key Events

28 July 1951	The Refugee Convention is adopted, defining rights for refugees globally
17 April 1998	The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement are introduced to protect IDPs
26 December 2004	Indian Ocean Tsunami causes significant displacement across affected countries
15 March 2011	The Syrian civil war begins
2014-2016	Europe goes through a migrant crisis
August 2017	Rohingya flee Myanmar in fear of persecution
2020-2022	The armed conflict in Ethiopia leads to significant displacement

UN Involvement and Other Treaties

The United Nations and other international organisations have discussed this topic numerous times in the past. This includes the first official mention of mass displacement due to conflict in the Geneva Convention, and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, on which many national laws have been based. These and other treaties are mentioned below.

- Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (IV), 12 Aug 1949. Articles 44, 49 and 147
- Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol 1), 8 June 1977, article 73 and 85-4-a
- Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), 8 June 1977, article 17
- Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 28 July 1951, Geneva
- African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) to the Status of Refugees, 31 January 1967, New York
- Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, adopted by the Colloquium on the International Protection of Refugees in Central America, Mexico and Panama, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, 22 November 1984
- Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

As you can see, there have been many treaties and conventions on this topic, and this section will elaborate on some of them.

Geneva Convention IV

The Fourth Geneva Convention was adopted in 1949 and is one of the core instruments of international humanitarian law, specifically pertaining to civilian rights during times of war. It addresses various aspects of conflict, including the treatment of civilians and it protects them from harm from hostilities. There are some articles directly about mass displacement which seek to mitigate its impact. These articles can be found in the **UN Involvement and Other Treaties** section.

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951

The 1951 Refugee Convention has had a profound impact on the protection of refugees worldwide. The convention established a legal framework defining the status, rights and obligations of refugees and the responsibilities of states. The convention also promoted international cooperation on the topic by setting universal standards for refugee protection. Since this conference, many countries have incorporated the principles of the convention into their national legislation, increasing legal protection for refugees.

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

The Guiding Principles are a set of non-binding, advisory principles on internal displacement. These principles have severely improved the protection and assistance of IDPs. As mentioned before, it is not legally binding, but it has greatly influenced national legislation around the globe. Many humanitarian organisations also use these principles to shape their programs and actions.

Possible Solutions

In attempting to solve this issue, delegates must remember some key points. Firstly, most mass displacement is caused by a violation of human rights. Solving these violations will help greatly in reducing displacement. Secondly, in times of conflict, human rights are often not upheld, leading to mass displacement. Therefore, another key point is preventing and resolving conflicts. While not an easy task, protecting civilians during conflicts is paramount. Lastly, delegates must remember that it will be almost impossible to prevent all displacement. Thus, delegates must also work on humanitarian aid and medical care for the refugees and IDPs.

Protecting and restoring human rights.

As mentioned, protecting human rights will lower the displacement rates by making the regions of origin less hostile. Protecting and restoring these human rights includes monitoring human rights abuses, advocating for accountability, and providing legal and physical protection to vulnerable populations.

Preventing and resolving conflicts

Preventing conflicts is by no means an easy task, as has been proved many times over in the past. However, if delegates prioritise diplomacy, mediation and peacebuilding efforts, they might be able to prevent and resolve some conflicts that lead to displacement. Preventing and resolving conflicts makes for a more permanent decrease in mass displacement, and should therefore be one of the top priorities of delegates.

Humanitarian aid and assistance

When populations get displaced, their whole world suddenly changes. They are no longer financially stable, and they often do not have access to good healthcare facilities. This means they are often not able to take full care of themselves anymore. Therefore, increasing global awareness and giving united support to these victims is very important. Delivering effective humanitarian assistance to the displaced populations, including shelter, food, water and healthcare, helps many victims of forced displacement.

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Appendix

- Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons, [pdf](#)
- UN library, [United Nations Digital Library System](#)
- UN official website, [Welcome to the United Nations](#)