

Sustaining peace and forced displacement

Introduction

The global scale of forced displacement today reflects the complexity and multiplicity of conflict and instability. The increasing number of people forcibly displaced, an absence of sustainable solutions, including voluntary repatriation, and the protracted nature of displacement itself, paint a worrisome picture of peace and stability in many parts of the world.

In this context, conflict and forced displacement are increasingly intertwined and linked to other drivers of instability. Root causes of violent conflict can be found in ethnic, religious and/or cultural discord, deep inequalities, injustices and marginalization within society, weak or corrupt governance and institutions, poverty and, increasingly, climate and environmental factors. If left unaddressed, these factors can contribute to instability, conflict and large scale forced displacement both within and across national borders. Conflicts can be self-perpetuating, causing continued internal displacement or the outflow of refugees¹.

As such, addressing the drivers of forced displacement, protecting rights and promoting durable solutions for those who are affected by forced displacement are necessary to prevent the outbreak, escalation, recurrence or continuation of conflict and thus to restore and sustain peace, and achieve solutions to displacement². Conversely, not integrating forced displacement considerations in humanitarian, development and peacebuilding interventions is likely to leave conflict triggers unaddressed and can even reinforce or create them. The social, economic and human cost of not addressing the underlying drivers of displacement – through preventive or ameliorative action – are very significant.

Global commitments and instruments provide a valuable framework to better integrate forced displacement considerations into wider efforts of sustaining peace. For example, the **Global Compact on Refugees** (GCR) calls for the prevention and resolution of forced displacement within humanitarian, peace and development activities. It also explicitly calls for “operational cooperation on the ground” across the United Nations system. The GCR notes that tackling root causes of protracted forced displacement, including through heightened international efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, constitutes the most effective way to achieve solutions for displacement.

The interrelationship between forced displacement and sustaining peace, and the associated responsibilities of the international community, are also recognized in global policies and campaigns on statelessness and internal displacement³, the **2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the Agenda for Humanity, the Resolutions on Sustaining Peace, and the OECD DAC recommendation on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus**.

Conceptualizing forced displacement within the conflict cycle

Like the conflict cycle, displacement cycles are generally non-linear with different overlapping stages. People are often displaced multiple times or go back and forth from the hosting area to the area of origin depending on circumstances on the ground. Countries affected by systemic conflict and human rights violations, can simultaneously host protracted internally displaced or refugee populations and be

¹ UNHCR, Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2018, 19 June 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-2018-media.html>

² Sustaining peace as defined and explained in Report of the Advisory Group of Experts for the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture and S/RES/2282 (2016).

³ For instance, the #IBelong Campaign on statelessness, the recently revised *Guidance Note of the United Nations Secretary General on Statelessness*, the recently established UN Inter-Agency Working Group on Statelessness and legal identity working group, as well as the *20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement Plan of Action (GP20)*.

faced with a refugee influx or large number of returnees. These multiple phases of displacement relate to and influence conflict in different ways. As with any type of assistance, humanitarian assistance in support of forcibly displaced populations can also be instrumentalised by conflict actors or feed into conflict drivers in unintended ways.

Interventions to prevent and address inequalities, exclusion and injustices between and within different population groups are essential throughout the displacement cycle. Promoting equal and inclusive access to rights and services and ensuring grievances are addressed are the foundations to prevent, address and resolve forced displacement⁴. Similarly, interventions that address group-based grievances arising from inequality or social exclusion are also most impactful in preventing the outbreak, escalation, recurrence or continuation of conflict.

UNHCR's protection interventions⁵ focus on ensuring access to rights and seek to prevent and address exclusion and injustice across these areas of contestation⁶. In many instances UNHCR has played a catalytic role that has, in collaboration with partners, contributed to a reduction in violence and contributed to broader sustaining peace efforts. Examples in key areas are provided below.

Community-based protection and peaceful co-existence

Community based protection⁷, and in particular the promotion of peaceful co-existence between displaced and host communities in both refugee and IDP contexts, focuses on fostering social cohesion and mitigating the negative effects that the presence of large displaced populations may have on equal and sustainable access to key resources such as water, agricultural land, firewood and general infrastructure. Community based protection interventions are central to promoting solutions and preventing further displacement. They also contribute to sustaining peace particularly in areas and regions where conflict is widespread and its root causes are associated with limited resources and services, and interethnic violence and tensions. Their strength is in empowering displaced and host populations to identify concerns and a response. Community based protection must be supported by institutional frameworks for rule of law and governance.

For instance, in **Kyrgyzstan**, UNHCR in collaboration with development partners supported youth and women to integrate their needs into the development plans of local self-government bodies and promoted conflict resolution measures that resulted in a significant decline of the number of inter-ethnic conflict cases from the baseline measurements⁸. Similarly, in **El Salvador**, UNHCR, UNDP and IOM engaged communities and strengthened 11 Local Municipality Offices for Assisting Victims (OLAVs) to support victims of violence, including displaced populations to address their psychosocial and legal needs. 9,415 people benefitted from OLAVs between 2017 and 2019 and as a result of their success the Government is establishing additional OLAVs. In **Iraq**, among other operations, UNHCR leads the protection cluster and supports UNMAS work to clear mines and provide mine risk education, as a key step to reinstate access to services and livelihoods.

⁴ World Bank - United Nations, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, 2018.

⁵ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (70th session), Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda: Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee International Protection, *Note on international protection*, 1 July 2019, A/AC.96/1189, <https://www.unhcr.org/excom/announce/5d5fcc694/70th-session-executive-committee-note-international-protection-aac961189.htm>; Global Protection Cluster, *Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2018 review), April 2019, <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wpcontent/uploads/CoP-Review-2018-screen-1.pdf>.

⁶ *Note on International Protection*, ibidem; OSCE and UNHCR, 2014: *Protection Checklist, Addressing Displacement and Protection of Displaced Populations and Affected Communities Along the Conflict Cycle: a Collaborative Approach*, p.17 ss.

⁷ Community-based protection activities can be linked with Recommendation 37 of the SG's report on community-engagement strategies.

⁸ *Evaluation of the Peacebuilding Fund Project Portfolio in Kyrgyzstan, Final Evaluation Report 31 August 2017*

In implementing activities that find common values and interests between host and displaced communities UNHCR uses an [age, gender and diversity approach](#)⁹. Such activities include youth-led projects under the [Youth Initiative Fund](#)¹⁰ benefitting the entirety of a community and generating common values and a sense of belonging, and the creation of safe spaces for specific groups at heightened risks, such as persons with disabilities and LGBTI persons. These projects allow for the creation of shared support networks addressing relevant challenges, such as stigma and discrimination to enhance inclusion in services through capacity building of local authorities and joint awareness raising together. Peace education programmes engaging youth have helped reduce conflict in several refugee hosting areas¹¹. Based on their success and integrating lessons learned UNHCR is currently initiating two particularly ambitious peace education programmes: *the South Sudan Youth Leadership Regional Programme*, and *the Peacebuilding for Refugee Youth through Education*.

The promotion of peaceful coexistence between displaced and host communities is one of UNHCR's global strategic priorities. There are **65 refuge situations** around the world where UNHCR and partners identify peaceful coexistence as an objective. Among these, 26 operations report on a very supportive environment for displaced persons while only three of the refugee situations measured an unsatisfactory range of limited or tense interactions¹².

Displaced populations in political and peace processes

The participation of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in political and peace processes of their countries of nationality in post-conflict or transformative settings can add legitimacy to such processes, provide for the readmission of the refugee into the political community of the country of nationality, and assist in their voluntary return and integration^{13,14}. A political and peace process that is inclusive of displaced people reduces the risk of future instability, threats to peace and displacement. Refugees' and IDPs' participation in national elections constitutes the enjoyment of a human right and is an important step towards political reconciliation, peace-building and the sustainability of voluntary returns.

In 2015, UNHCR with the support of the electoral division of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the **Central African Republic** (MINUSCA) engaged in the facilitation of CAR refugee voting from neighbouring countries. UNHCR identified and proposed amendments to the former electoral law that would allow refugee participation in the process. As a result, 54,264 refugees representing 47% of potential voters in asylum countries, were able to register and approximately 61% took part in the referendum and the presidential elections. The political inclusion of refugees ensured inclusion, eventual repatriation and mitigated the risk of statelessness. It also defused the risk that the group would be marginalized because of a perception that they are not Central African nationals.

⁹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity, 8 March 2018, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bb628ea4.html>

¹⁰ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "On Their Own Terms" - UNHCR's Youth Initiative Fund: Supporting Youth-led Protection – Summary Report, 2018, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b7297e74.html>. These activities can be linked with Recommendations 41 and 42 of the SG's report.

¹¹ A. Obura, Peace education programme in Dadaab and Kakuma, Kenya: Evaluation summary, Geneva: UNHCR March 2002

¹² UNHCR, 2018 Global Strategic Priorities Progress Report, p. 49. Several factors are considered when measuring peaceful coexistence in an operation. These factors include (1) networks of media, civil society, local and national governments, and other actors raising awareness in support of displaced persons present in the communities; (2) occurrence of violence and instances of harassment; (3) degree of access for displaced persons to local community services and availability of shared services and structures; (4) regularity of interactions between displaced and host communities; and (5) access of the local community to same levels of support as offered to displaced communities.

¹³ UNHCR, Political participation of refugees in their country of nationality, November

¹⁴ , PPLA/2018/04, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5beaf3dc7.html>

In the context of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of **South Sudan** (R-ARCSS), the system is working to empower South Sudanese refugees and IDPs to participate in implementing the agreement. The strategy is to support confidence-building measures between refugees, IDPs and parties to the agreement, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union (AU) and other stakeholders within South Sudan. During the peace talks a delegation of South Sudanese refugee representatives influenced language retained in the Revitalized Agreement and expressed their hopes, dreams and aspirations to the parties in an open and candid manner¹⁵. On a separate occasion, when the Independent Boundary Commission visited Kenya¹⁶, refugees shared their views on the number of states and boundaries in South Sudan; a major outstanding issue which currently impedes the formation of a national unity Government in South Sudan. Refugees have participated in other peace initiatives such as the National Dialogue which was launched by President Salva Kiir in 2015. Refugees were involved in this dialogue through grass roots consultations led by the National Dialogue Steering Committee for Refugees and International Outreach. They expressed their views on plausible solutions for South Sudan. Plans are underway to ensure refugees and IDPs participate in the final National Dialogue Conference in 2020. UNHCR is working with refugee communities to create greater awareness of the content of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS)¹⁷. The Revitalized Agreement recognizes that refugees must also understand and feel ownership of the peace agreement.¹⁸

Addressing root causes and promoting durable solutions to sustain peace

Addressing the root causes and finding solutions to protracted displacement is one of the foundations for achieving a sustainable transition to peace. Durable solutions are dependent on national and local capacities. Self-reliance or return home is planned and managed with an emphasis on sustainability. This not only mitigates the risk of further displacement but also contributes to the prevention of new cycles of violence and exclusion.

In countries like **Ethiopia** and **Somalia**, the protection cluster takes a catalytic role in setting up durable solutions platforms that focus on supporting local actors to find sustainable solutions to internal displacement through legislative and policy capacity-building, institutional support and programme delivery through national partnerships.

In **Honduras** a collaboration between the government, Caritas, local parishes and UNHCR is introducing modern technology to document the housing and land that people abandon when they flee generalized violence and organized crime. This method supports the strengthening of the national property register in which this data is integrated, it reduces grievances as a result of violations of housing, land and property rights, and also facilitates the eventual return of the displaced populations.

Conflict-sensitive programming, or a *do-no-harm* approach to solutions requires careful use of overlapping frameworks in development, peace, and security, not only at national level but also multilateral, international and regional. In 2018, for instance, the Peace-building Fund (PBF) **Burundi-**

¹⁵ Refugees visited Addis Ababa and Khartoum as part of a Civil Society Platform

¹⁶ The Independent Boundary Commission visit was facilitated by UNHCR, with support of IGAD, UNISS and the Commission itself.

¹⁷ This is being done together with the National Pre-Transitional Committee (NPTC), the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission

(RJMEC), IGAD and South Sudanese Civil Society

¹⁸ Article 1.4.3.1. of Chapter I of the (R-ARCSS) pertaining to the general provisions applicable during the pre-transitional period explicitly calls for the parties to carry out “Dissemination of the Revitalized ARCSS to South Sudanese people inside the country, in different cities and refugee camps in neighbouring countries and in the Diaspora, so that people can understand, support and own it.”

Tanzania cross-border project¹⁹, implemented by UNDP, IOM and UNHCR, provided refugee returnees, IDPs and local communities from crossborder areas with immediate and tangible assistance for sustainable voluntary repatriation and returnee reintegration. In 2018-2019, a complementary PBF project, implemented in **Burundi** by UNHCR, UNDP, UNFPA and FAO²⁰, supported the Government and local communities to enhance access to rights and services and to increase livelihood and self-reliance of vulnerable house-holds in the major provinces of refugee returns, for improved protection, resilience and social cohesion.

When those who have fled are not sufficiently considered in political, peace and other efforts to stabilize and resolve the conflict, new or reinforced conflict triggers can arise. Similarly, new conflict triggers and further forced displacement can arise when communities that receive and host forcibly displaced populations are strained in resources, capacities and social capital. With the meaningful engagement of displaced populations and host communities, solutions to displacement are likely to be more sustainable, which in turn contributes to sustaining peace initiatives.

UNHCR, 17 January 2020

¹⁹ PBF Cross-border Project, *Preventing conflict and building peace through addressing the drivers of conflict and instability associated with forced displacement between Burundi and Tanzania*, 15 November 2018, annual report. Key achievements included the establishment of peace-making and conflict resolutions systems and assistance to 300 cases, as well as socio-economic reintegration support through short-term employment and job training for 625 persons.

²⁰ PBF Project, *Peacebuilding for Sustainable Reintegration and Sustainable Reintegration for Peace in Burundi*, 31 December 2019, annual report.