

Networks and mobility as tools for solutions to protracted displacement

Contribution by the TRAFIG project consortium to the Virtual Space of the 2021 High-Level Officials Meeting and the Digital Platform for the Global Compact on Refugees

An increasing number of refugees—**16 million in 2020, or four million more than in 2016**—find themselves in long-term situations of vulnerability, dependency and legal insecurity, in which they lack, or are actively denied, opportunities to rebuild their lives after displacement. With current policies struggling to find solutions to such protracted displacement situations, the European Union-funded **Transnational Figurations of Displacement (TRAFIG) project** is working to identify solutions that are better tailored to the needs and capacities of displaced persons. With a special focus on networks and mobility, TRAFIG's research supports Objective 2 (Enhance refugee self-reliance) and Objective 3 (Expand access to third-country solutions) of the Global Compact on Refugees.

Based on more than 2,800 interviews in ten countries in the *Middle East, East Africa* and *Europe*, TRAFIG findings illustrate that a paradigm shift is needed: Approaches should shift from a state-centred approach to one that centres on refugees' and internally displaced persons' social resources, practices and skills. Policies should acknowledge displaced persons' networks and mobility across multiple places and countries as part of the solution to protracted displacement and should enable displaced people to make use of their capacities and networks (see **TRAFIG practice note no. 1**).

TRAFIG findings that support Objective 2: Enhance refugee self-reliance

Displaced people engage in creating and finding solutions on their own and build on multiple local and international social networks in doing so. **TRAFIG practice note no. 4** explains how internally displaced persons in the *Democratic Republic of the Congo* rely upon networks of trust, support and solidarity in the city of Bukavu while often also maintaining relations with their home community. Sustainable pathways out of protracted displacement are frequently linked to local and translocal networks—and the quality of these networks is important for unlocking opportunities.

A secure legal status and access to rights, including mobility, are precursors to achieving self-reliance. Against the background of recent developments prompting new displacements from *Afghanistan* on top of more than four decades of displacement, **TRAFIG practice note no. 7** makes a case for a change in the government of *Pakistan*'s policies towards Afghans to better address new and persisting challenges.

Most displaced persons live outside of camps, in cities and rural areas, and are trying to sustain a living outside of protection and humanitarian aid systems. **TRAFIG practice note no. 6** explains how bolstering support for out-of-camp *Syrians* in *Jordan* increases their self-reliance and de-facto integration.

Strong local networks enable refugees to move out of camps, secure livelihoods and broaden future opportunities. **TRAFIG practice note no. 8** illustrates how local connections can unlock local solutions in Dar es Salaam, *Tanzania*. Meanwhile, **TRAFIG practice note no. 5** highlights the importance of strong relationships between refugees and receiving communities in supporting self-reliance and local integration in the Tigray and Afar regions of *Ethiopia*.

Promoting entrepreneurship is part of a multi-pronged livelihood strategy, in which connectivity plays a critical role. **TRAFIG policy brief no. 4** shares how refugees in *Ethiopia* and *Tanzania* are networking to create livelihood opportunities through entrepreneurship and puts forth ideas for those seeking to scale up refugee entrepreneurship.

Mobility can be a pathway to a solution if it is accompanied by rights. **TRAFIG policy brief no. 5** examines how and why *Afghan* and *Syrian* refugees in *Pakistan* and *Jordan*, respectively, are moving after their initial displacement and suggests how policymakers and partners can help Afghans and Syrians to tap into outward mobility to improve their upward mobility.

TRAFIG findings that support Objective 3: Expand access to third-country solutions

Expanding skills-, education- and family-based opportunities ('complementary pathways') can help more refugees to make use of their skills and networks to find a solution in another country. **TRAFIG policy brief no. 3** discusses the importance of networks and mobility for expanding complementary pathways to protection. It argues that facilitating movement based on refugees' human and social capital could become the key added value of complementary pathways.

Expanding community sponsorship can leverage more networks for refugee mobility and integration. This **TRAFIG commentary** explains how community sponsorship can become an effective tool to strengthen and leverage refugees' networks to foster mobility and integration via resettlement and complementary pathways. The example of **Humanitarian Admission Programmes in Germany** also shows that refugee protection via safe and secure pathways can successfully build on refugees' own networks and elements of community sponsorship.

TRAFIG findings on the Programme of Action

Imposing durable solutions top-down has never been particularly successful. **TRAFIG practice note no. 2** reviews the history of efforts to address protracted displacement and highlights key lessons learned, including the importance of bottom-up solutions that acknowledge displaced persons' own perspectives and priorities, as well as mobility and connectivity as resources rather than constraints.

Closing refugee protection gaps requires closer collaboration and coordination among stakeholders, a long-term development-oriented approach and sincere recognition of displaced people's rights and mobility needs. **TRAFIG practice note no. 3** analyses the different regimes of displacement governance and stresses that granting refugees rights allows them to contribute to their new communities and help them overcome protracted displacement.

Bridging the gaps—From protracted displacement to solutions



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