

Issues Paper

'Development, Refugees and IDPs'

Rationale for a development approach to forced displacement

Over the last three decades there has been little debate on the **relationship between displacement and development** (known as 'refugee aid and development debate' during the 1980s). The humanitarian aid-based approach has so far been the main response of the international community to forced displacement crises. Although providing vital emergency assistance, this approach stops short of delivering sustainable solutions for refugees, IDPs and returnees and has created dependency on continued humanitarian aid while maintaining the status quo. Paired with demographic trends, it has led to an exponentially growing pressure on humanitarian resources with no viable longer-term solutions and serious implications for security and stability.

Refugee and IDP assistance continues to be viewed primarily as a humanitarian issue on the assumption that once the initial crisis stabilises and immediate needs are met, longer-term solutions will be found to address the plight of the displaced. It should be noted, though, that **the transition from emergency response to development is not linear** and, as a result, developmental stakeholders would need to engage from the outset of a displacement crisis in order to ensure that the development dimensions of forced displacement are addressed.

According to UNHCR, 'the perception that displacement challenges can only be addressed by humanitarian means is ill-conceived which has either impeded or delayed in achieving the sustainability of solutions or resulted in protracted displacements finding difficulties to break from the cycle of dependence on humanitarian assistance and to move on with their lives and livelihoods'¹. Put simply, **protracted displacement is not only a humanitarian challenge but a developmental, political and economic one.**

Further, in a recent statement on its (Displacement) Solutions Initiative², UNHCR has pointed out that 'forced displacement due to armed conflict or other forms of violence affects over 44 million people worldwide. Perhaps even more remarkably, approximately three-quarters of displaced people are in situations of **'protracted displacement'**³'. Therefore, UNHCR calls for comprehensive and innovative approaches to address displacement in taking full account of the political, humanitarian, security and developmental dimensions of displacement.

While refugees and IDPs frequently benefit from humanitarian assistance, they are often excluded from programmes and activities carried out by development actors, with the result that their developmental needs may be neglected and efforts to achieve sustainable solutions receive inadequate attention. At the same time, host populations might not benefit from humanitarian assistance provided to refugees and IDPs, paving the way to potential conflicts between the two communities.

¹ UNHCR, Transitional Solutions Initiative, Concept note, p. 1.

² UNHCR, (Displacement) Solutions Initiative, Mission Statement, January 2014.

³ UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as one where refugees have been in exile for five years or more in a given asylum country (2008 Global Trends).

In addition, the development needs of returnees and long-term strategies to address them have often been overlooked once back in the country or area of origin. Refugees, IDPs and returnees should be seen as potential development and economic contributors rather than passive recipients of assistance only.

EU policy framework

Although refugees and IDPs present significant challenges for host countries and communities, European Commission's Communication on '*Maximising the Development Impact of Migration*'⁴ acknowledges that 'the presence of refugees and other forced migrants can also result in new opportunities and benefits for national and local economies through refugees' human capital, including by providing labour skills and creating demand for goods and services. Measures to harness the potential of refugees to drive development improve their self-reliance, and thereby strengthen the quality of refugees' protection, also to the benefit of the host countries'. In addition, the Communication includes a commitment to 'ensure that refugees and other forced migrants are included in long-term development planning', placing a specific focus on protracted refugee situations.

The Council of the EU⁵ acknowledged that the challenges that refugees and other forced migrants present for host communities and countries '*should be addressed through long-term development planning, targeted initiatives and enjoyment of their rights*'. Besides, it emphasizes that '*the EU and its Member States should urgently take steps to deepen knowledge and further develop policy on a number of challenges which deserve further attention, including integrating protracted refugee situations into development planning [...]*'

Further, the EU *Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries* (2013-2020)⁶ recognises the developmental needs of refugees, IDPs and returnees and advocates for longer-term approaches and strategies to address protracted refugee and IDP situations.

Objectives

The objectives of a paper on 'Development, Refugees and IDPs' will be to **prompt policy discussions, and inform consultations and further policy thinking** by examining issues, along the following lines:

- to assess EU humanitarian and development assistance – through case-studies of EU assistance projects to forced displacement, protracted refugee and IDP displacement and return – in order to identify **best practices/success stories** as well as **gaps/failures** in the response;
- on this basis – to examine the **development dimensions of forced displacement** and the **added-value** of a development approach to forced displacement, in particular

⁴ COM (2013) 292 final.

⁵ Council of the European Union, Conclusions on the European Commission's Communication on Maximising the Development Impact of Migration, 12415/13, 19 July 2013.

⁶ SWD(2013) 227 final .

looking into the creation of **self-reliance, livelihoods and socio-economic opportunities for refugees, IDPs and returnees and host communities;**

- to explore possibilities for **early engagement** from the onset of a displacement crisis with the aim to **prevent protracted displacement** as well as in situations of protracted displacement so as to **address and 'unlock' it;**
- in turn, to examine how humanitarian actors and development actors, could together strive to adopt a **socio-economic approach when designing interventions** by factoring in, when appropriate, self-reliance initiatives and economic opportunities.

A possible overarching objective may be to provide DG DEVCO and DG ECHO with orientations to consider developing a joint strategy on forced displacement with the goal of seeking firm engagement of development actors, including donors and governments via policy ownership and programming, as early as practicable with the aim to seek sustainable solutions for refugees, IDPs and returnees thus avoiding/reducing continued dependency on humanitarian aid. Consideration will also be given to building on links with the EU agenda on resilience and ensuring coherence with the EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises⁷.

The added value of a development approach to forced displacement

It is recognised that a development approach would have the potential of mitigating the negative costs and impacts that the presence of **refugees, IDPs and returnees** – be it in **camps, urban or rural settings** - may have on host countries and communities and could maximise their positive impact as potential development and economic contributors.

To this end, the paper will shed light on the added value of a development approach to forced displacement by addressing, *inter alia*, **questions** such as the ones put forward below:

- How would a development approach be implemented **from the onset of a displacement crisis** given the challenges that the latter represents?
- How would a development approach contribute to the improvement of the daily lives of refugees and IDPs **during their displacement**, in particular in situations of protracted displacement where the three "classical" durable solutions, namely resettlement, local integration and return, may not be available?
- How would **refugees', IDPs' and returnees' access** to social and economic opportunities, skills development, education, public health and freedom of movement be best addressed by programming and achieved? What role, for instance, could **advocacy and political dialogue** with local and national authorities play in improving their access?

⁷ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, JOIN (2013) 30 final, 11.12.2013.

- How could a **developmental, inclusive and integrated approach** to displacement would benefit not only the displaced but also the host communities and enhance economic opportunities and general development for the latter group?
- How could a development approach envisage **long-term strategies for sustainable (re)integration** of the returnees to the countries and areas of origin?
