




## High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges: Protection and Resilience during Pandemics

### A written statement by the World Bank – UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement

1. The global COVID-19-induced recession will have severe impacts on the lives and livelihoods of forcibly displaced people and their host communities
  - ***The recession is inflicting the worst setback in a generation to the quest to end extreme poverty.*** It is expected to push between 88 million and 115 million people globally into extreme poverty in 2020. The human costs will be immense.
  - ***Forcibly displaced people are expected to be severely impacted,*** albeit with variations between countries, within countries, and between population groups. While poverty rates are difficult to estimate, those forcibly displaced are among the most vulnerable due to a lack of assets, reliance on informal jobs, limited access to safety nets, among other constraints. Evidence from eight major hosting countries shows that in recent years 60 percent of employed refugee worked in highly impacted sectors, such as manufacturing, retail, and food services.<sup>1</sup> Many have had to rely on humanitarian assistance for years to meet their basic needs.
  - ***About 85 percent of the forcibly displaced live in low- and middle-income countries which experienced a sudden and deep recession in 2020,*** with an uneven recovery predicted for 2021. Data from 23 low- and middle-income countries with at least 300,000 refugees or 700,000 internally displaced persons indicates that **all these countries are expected to see a drop in their rate of GDP growth from 2019 to 2020.** Moreover, 19 of them report

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<sup>1</sup> Dempster, Helen, Thomas Ginn, Jimmy Graham, M. Guerrero Ble, D. Jaysainghe, and Barri Shorey. 2020. "Locked Down and Left Behind: The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees' Economic Inclusion." Center for Global Development, Refugees International, and International Rescue Committee. <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/7/6/locked-down-and-left-behind-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-refugees-economic-inclusion>



negative GDP growth for this period.<sup>2</sup> The socio-economic consequences of the recession are expected to add to the pre-existing vulnerabilities of those forcibly displaced.

- ***With deteriorating fiscal balances and with health systems stretched to capacity***, development and humanitarian partners must collaborate with governments in countries where forcibly displaced people reside to prevent a further deepening of the global humanitarian crisis.

## 2. Policymakers must focus on both immediate crisis response as well as medium-term development challenges for those forcibly displaced

- ***Host governments, development and humanitarian partners must ensure that forcibly displaced people are adequately included in crisis-response plans and financial packages.*** If not, there is a risk that the forcibly displaced will be left even further behind, with severe human capital losses for people and communities who are already vulnerable.
- The crisis may offer ***an opportunity to review existing policies and the effectiveness of current assistance practices for those forcibly displaced.*** For host governments, this could include a review of the coverage of social protection systems, social safety nets, support to informal sectors, and the alignment of humanitarian assistance within national systems. For humanitarian and development partners, this is an opportunity to explore further synergies, through closer cooperation.
- ***Global policymakers should provide more concessional resources for development assistance to complement humanitarian aid for forcibly displaced people.*** The impact of the global recession requires an acceleration of development and poverty reduction efforts, including through additional Official Development Assistance. At the same time, host governments need to address the fundamental challenges to their economies.

## 3. Any course of action must be sensitive to the varied contexts where forcibly displaced people reside since consequences may differ

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<sup>2</sup> See Vishwanath, Tara, Arthur Alik-Lagrange and Leila Aghabarari, *Highly vulnerable yet largely invisible: Forcibly displaced populations in the COVID-19-induced recession*, JDC 2020, to be published at <https://www.jointdatacenter.org/resources/#publications>.

- **Forcibly displaced people live in very diverse conditions**, depending on their legal status, demographic characteristics, the country where they live, their location in camps or in urban settings, to name but a few factors.
- **Policymakers will need to promote recovery efforts in the main economic centers and in peri-urban or remote areas.** People who are most integrated into the global economy are likely to be severely impacted. At the same time, the large numbers of forcibly displaced who live in regions that lag behind national averages economically will also require significant investments.
- **Hence, attention is needed for those forcibly displaced who were previously thought to be relatively less vulnerable**, including those in urban settings. Those forcibly displaced who have managed to integrate themselves (typically in cities) tend to be self-employed or informally employed, with little ability to absorb shocks. The crisis may cause a reversal of fortunes as humanitarian aid can play the role of social protection for the poorest, while those who were more self-reliant face the risk of greater disruptions.
- **The COVID-19 response to the needs of the forcibly displaced to be gender sensitive.** Forcibly displaced women and girls may be particularly affected by the socio-economic consequences, not least through escalating gender-based violence. Some face both refugee and gender-specific pre-existing constraints in the labor market, increasing their risk of engaging in negative coping mechanisms. These risks might be particularly high for widows and female heads of households.

#### 4. With violence and fragility increasing, the refugee protection and inclusion agenda must be strengthened

- **Various push factors have recently influenced the flows of those forcibly displaced.** Early evidence suggests an increase in violence and fragility globally, which may be correlating with changes in the flows of forcibly displaced people. These trends can be observed in the Sahel and several northern states of Nigeria. Further, COVID-19-related push factors may have increased flows of returnees, including 500,000 or more returning from Iran and Pakistan to Afghanistan between January and September 2020.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, border closures have also restricted mobility, which is

<sup>3</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM). 2020. "Afghanistan – Return Of Undocumented Afghans Weekly Situation Report (20 – 26 September)." <https://migration.iom.int/reports/afghanistan-%E2%80%94-return-undocumented-afghans-weekly-situation-report-20-%E2%80%94-26-september>



reflected in the large drop in refugees resettled, dropping from over 44,000 between January and August 2019, to nearly 12,000 for the same period in 2020.<sup>4</sup> Strengthened protection is paramount.

- Efforts to ***maintain and further strengthen the recently achieved consensus around inclusion of refugees in national systems will be critical***. This applies to inclusion in national statistics, public health or education systems, or labor markets—all of which underpin the *Global Compact on Refugees*.

5. **The forcibly displaced are largely invisible data-wise, and thus more and better socio-economic data is required to inform action**

- The current crisis has further highlighted the ***scarcity of data and the extremely thin evidence base*** on pre-existing living conditions of those forcibly displaced and the impacts of the recession on their lives and on host communities.
- ***The paucity of data makes it difficult to design and implement efficient, effective and inclusive programs*** targeting the right populations for the support they need, whether by host governments or their development and humanitarian partners. To address this gap, greater collective efforts are therefore required to increase the quality, quantity and availability of data and evidence on forcibly displaced and host communities. The World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement will make a critical contribution to these important objectives.

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). 2020b. “COVID-19 and refugees.” October 2020. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/95cc3b65d9264cf3b80ffef0daa0358>