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## Forced Migration

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### Overview

Since the end of the Cold War, forced migration has been a phenomenon largely affecting developing countries. By the end of 2008, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) reported that globally there were 15.2 million refugees and 26 million internally displaced people (IDPs). The sheer magnitude of the numbers of refugees and IDPs poses significant challenges to governments and international institutions.

This topic guide will be examining some recent research exploring the anxiety and uncertainty that refugees and displaced people suffer from as they try and reorganise their lives; as this topic guide explores this can be caused by lack of adequate healthcare, ambiguity about repatriation, or problems around property rights. It offers journalists an insight into the effects of ongoing displacement, and the similarities that exist between different displacement experiences.

Since the drafting of the UN Refugee 1951 Convention Refugee and IDP situations have changed significantly. There are temporary connotations attached to the terms 'refugee' and 'IDP', the UN convention assumes that people would only be displaced for a limited amount of time. But this doesn't reflect the situation on the ground, with many refugees and internally displaced people living in increasingly protracted situations, where, for example, they either can't return to their country of origin, or are not able to properly settle in their host country.

Growing up in protracted refugee situations, away from traditional social structures and in hostile host communities, inevitably affects a person's perception of their own identity. Identity and gender issues in refugee studies have predominantly focused on the female experience, leaving the male perspective under researched. The summary report, *Sudanese refugee youth 'gangs' in Cairo* published by Forced Migration Review, studies Sudanese male refugee youth living in Cairo. The loss of traditional social structures as a result of flight coupled with marginalisation in their host community has left many young Sudanese refugee men feeling emasculated. To reassert power and form substitute social structures, gangs have been flourishing amongst Sudanese refugee youth. Although most gangs are not aggressive, violence can sometimes erupt. Clashes between rival gangs offer a way of reasserting power and re-interpreting social order. In the absence of social provisions, gang structures can often fill the gap in positive ways.

Healthcare in protracted refugee situations can be difficult to access, especially those requiring specialised treatment. According to the summary report, *Women and Sexual and Reproductive Health in Colombia* published by Forced Migration Review, found that displaced women have very limited access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care in Colombia. Internally displaced women experience higher levels of domestic violence, including sexual violence, than women who are not displaced. Additionally displaced women have more children than the national average and lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services has left many displaced women in a precarious position.

The UNHCR ultimate goal is to end the situations that cause forced migration as soon as it is possible to do so. There are three durable solutions: allowing refugees to return to their area of

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Kawsiha, a displaced 12 year old Tamil whose mother was summarily executed by unknown forces, Sri Lanka / Robin Hammond - Panos pictures

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origin (known as repatriation), local integration or resettlement. Since the UN refugee convention was signed there have been many civil wars that have lasted decades, as well as a number of natural disasters making it hard for durable solutions to be implemented. Without durable solutions refugees are placed in a vulnerable position and whilst international law protects the rights of refugees and displaced people the considerable strain their situation puts on host countries means that these rights are sometimes not respected as they should be.

According to the study, *I don't know where to go: Burundian refugees in Tanzania under pressure to leave*, the Tanzanian government is pushing for Burundian refugees to return to their home country or be naturalised into Tanzanian citizens by the end of 2009. Burundian refugees have been entering Tanzania on and off for almost 40 years. The report stresses that Burundian refugees are not under legal obligation to return to Burundi and should only do so voluntarily. If the Tanzanian government pushes hard for repatriation, it may fuel further instability in the region leading to more displacement.

When refugees and displaced peoples return home, the worst is sometimes not over. Many refugees are confronted with problems such as housing, land and property rights when they come home. A report by the Center on Housing Rights and Evictions report, *High Security Zones and Rights to Return and Restitution in Sri Lanka*, found that many displaced people in Sri Lanka returning to their homes in the Trincomalee district were unable to access their houses and livelihoods as the area had been designated a High Security Zone (HSZ). High Security Zones were created by the Sri Lankan government for security reasons. The report however, suggested that HSZs were imposed for the sake of military convenience or to reduce land costs rather than for national security issues. The lack of access to their houses continues these people's displacement adding to their uncertainty and vulnerable position.

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## Key issues

Below are the key issues raised by the different pieces of research considering the different aspects of forced migration raised in the overview.

### Male youth identity in protracted refugee situations:

The summary report *Sudanese Youth Gangs in Cairo* published by the Forced Migration Review covers the issues facing young Sudanese refugee living in the Egyptian capital. Egypt holds signatory status to the 1969 OAU Convention on the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, which binds it to certain responsibilities towards refugees and asylum seekers within its territory. However, it also has a number of reservations regarding the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, such as limited refugee access to public education, employment and social security. This stipulation has caused tensions between the Sudanese refugee population living in Cairo and the local community, which resulted in a violent upsurge in 2007 when young Sudanese refugees were killed during a protest outside the UNHCR office. The report found that gang culture has arisen in response to a lack of social support and structures.

- The presence of predominantly male gangs demonstrates the struggle of young men in exile to redefine concepts of masculinity and agency, which are inevitably altered by the removal of previous support systems. Traditional male roles can erode in exile to the extent which gender relationships are inverted and long-established social structures dissolved.
- Sudanese youth gangs in Cairo strongly identified themselves with mainstream gangsta rap, a cultural example of the underdog's success in the face of racism, harassment, disrespect, hopelessness, social marginalisation and lack of opportunities.
- Most Sudanese youth gangs are not violent, but whenever this occurs it is often the result of wider structural problems. Interestingly, violence is directed at rival gangs rather than the Egyptian population, as a way of expressing power and potency amongst the Sudanese refugee community.
- Gangs provide many young men with security and a community to belong to in a hostile environment. They operate as social institutions in which young Sudanese can access direct livelihood support systems based on immediate relationships.

### Displaced women's sexual and reproductive health in Colombia

The summary report *IDP Health in Colombia: needs and challenges*, published by Forced Migration

Review, highlights the problems of providing sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRH) to Colombia's internally displaced population. Unlike others around the world, internally displaced people in Colombia are dispersed throughout the country and do not live in camp structures. This limits the reach of organisations that provide sexual and reproductive healthcare to them. Compared to non-displaced Colombian women, displaced people carry a disproportionate burden of sexual health problems. Profamilia, Colombia's leading sexual and reproductive healthcare provider, has been tackling some of the challenges facing displaced people in the country.

- Domestic violence is prevalent throughout the country, but 51 per cent of Colombian displaced women experience domestic violence (including sexual violence) compared with 41 per cent of non-displaced women. Displaced women ranging from 13 to 49 years old have a rate of unintended pregnancy that is 40 per cent higher than that of non-displaced women.
- In rural Colombia displaced people's health issues are exacerbated by a lack of access to health facilities. Organisations such as Profamilia send out mobile health brigades to provide healthcare to people in remote areas.
- In urban setting displaced people can access the national health system. However, many are unaware of their eligibility. Tensions can arise between local communities and displaced populations in urban settings. Internally displaced people that receive special services because of their status may spark resentment from the area's non-displaced, but similarly impoverished urban residents.
- Profamilia has implemented many policies to improve sexual and reproductive health in the displaced community by helping them to access the national health system in urban areas and working with non-displaced populations to foster local integration.

## Repatriation

Repatriation raises several issues regarding durable solutions for the protracted displacement of a population. The report *I don't know where to go: Burundian Refugees in Tanzania under Pressure to Leave*, published by the Centre for the Study of Forced Migration (CSFM) and the International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), is a study about Burundian refugees in Tanzania. In October 2009 the (UNHCR) announced the last of the so-called 1972 Burundi refugees, who fled ethnic conflict almost 40 years ago and had been living in Tanzania since then, were returning to their home country. According to the UNHCR, around 54,000 Burundians displaced by the 1972 conflict were repatriated from Tanzania. However, the CSFM/IRRI report raised a series of concerns about the legality, durability and effectiveness of the repatriation campaign led by the UN and the Tanzanian government:

- 1972 Burundian refugees who had been living in settlements and camps in Tanzania were given two options: apply for naturalisation or return to Burundi by the end of 2009.
- The fact that many refugees don't believe it is safe for them to return to Burundi might result in forced expulsion. If they stay in Tanzania and are denied naturalisation, they become 'irregulars'.
- Those who return to Burundi may find themselves unable to secure land and without access to livelihoods or any resources.
- The report's conclusion is that the refugees don't legally have to leave Tanzania, and if they do this should be done voluntarily. Any coerced approach to repatriation risks breaching refugee rights, undermining the region's stability that could spark fresh displacements to Tanzania or other nations.

## Housing, land, property rights and displaced people

The report *High Security Zones and rights to return and restitution in Sri Lanka* published by the Centre on Housing Rights and evictions looked at property rights problems that Sri Lankan displaced people are facing as the result of the country's two decade long civil war. The report found that without fair and long-term solutions to housing, land and property rights based on international law and norms, displaced people are at greater risk of suffering human rights violations and making future conflict more likely. The Sri Lankan government implemented High Security Zones (HSZs) that prevented displaced people returning home for security reasons. However, the issue of HSZs has been highly criticised due to a lack of transparency in implementation. The report has found that:

- The combination of development and security imperatives are a potentially dangerous mix that requires transparent protection if human rights are to be respected.
- Displaced people who returned to the Trincomalee district found that their homes were

within HSZs. They were not informed why the HSZ was implemented nor for how long. The returning displaced people were extremely vulnerable to human rights violations such as disappearances and other abuses as they could not access their homes and livelihoods.

- The report found that HSZs were frequently imposed in Sri Lanka for the sake of military convenience or to reduce land costs and procedural delays, rather than for national security issues.
- It also suggests policies to protect the rights of IDPs and calls for more transparency in the implementation of HSZs, as well as proper legislation to dissolve them.

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## Resources

### Questions to ask politicians and policy makers

- How is your government currently working to protect refugees?
- Where does the funding for refugee issues come from?
- What is your government policy regarding protracted displaced populations living in your country?
- What is the role of the state in receiving refugees from neighbouring countries?

### Questions to ask refugees and internally displaced people

- What made you flee your home?
- Do you want to return to your home? Why?
- Are you able to support yourself, and your family, now that you live in this new community?
- How has displacement affected you as an individual and your role in your family/community?
- What access do you have to social services (such as health care and education) in your new community?
- Do you identify yourself as a national of your home country or your host country? Why?
- Do you feel you are accepted by your new community? Why?

### For host communities

- How did the arrival of refugees affect this community?
- What relationship has the community established with these refugees?
- How integrated have the refugees become into the community?

### Questions for NGOs and civil society organisations

- What services are you providing to support refugees?
- How much government involvement is there in your refugee-related activities?
- How have refugees been coping with the challenges of their displacement?
- How is the host community dealing with the arrival/permanence of refugees?
- What options could be offered to provide durable solutions for protracted refugee situations while respecting basic refugee rights?

## Glossary

**Refugee** is a person, who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to accept the protection of that country.

**Internally Displaced Person (IDP)** is a person forced to flee their homes but who, unlike refugees, remain within their country's borders

**Non-refoulement** is part of international law that forbids the expulsion of a refugee into an area where the person might be again subjected to persecution

**Repatriation** is where a refugee returns to their country of origin or citizenship. The UNHCR prefers this durable solution.

**Protracted refugee/ IDP situation** is where a person finds themselves in a long standing and intractable state of limbo as a forced migrant.

**Resettlement** is the assisted movement of refugees to a safe third country who are unable to return home. This is the UNHCR's least preferred durable solution.

**Local integration** where refugees or IDPs are integrated in their host country/community.

**Naturalisation** is when a person acquires citizenship or nationality from a country where they were not born.

**Asylum seekers** is a term that describes people that are seeking refuge in another country but have not been granted refugee status yet. Host government agencies decide whether a person is eligible of refugee status.

**Irregulars** refers to those refugees who stay in a host country without being officially accounted for.

**High Security Zone (HSZ)** these are areas of land that the Sri Lanka government has marked out supposedly for security reasons during the civil war after people fled the areas.

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## Links

### Research cited

Lewis, T., [Sudanese Youth Gangs in Cairo](#) published by Forced Migration Review:

Wassel, T., [High Security Zones and rights to return and restitution in Sri Lanka](#) published by Centre On Housing Rights and Evictions

[I don't know where to go: Burundian Refugees in Tanzania under Pressure to Leave](#), published by the Centre for the Study of Forced Migration (CSFM) and the International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI):

Quintero L, A., and Culler, T A., [IDP Health in Colombia: needs and challenges](#) published by Forced Migration Review

### Legal Documents and further information

- [1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol](#)
- [OAU Convention 1969 Africa](#)
- [1984 Cartagena declaration applies to Latin American countries](#)
- [Guiding principles on internal displacement 1998](#)
- [The United Nations high commission on refugees](#)
- [Refugees International](#)
- [Norwegian Refugee Council](#)
- [Refugee Council](#)
- [High security zones](#)
- Pacheo Sanchez C I., and Enriquez C., [Sexual and reproductive health rights of Colombian IDPs](#)
- Forced Migration Review (2009), [Protracted Displacement](#)
- UNHCR (2009), 2008 [Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons](#)

### News

- Sudanese youth gangs: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/6915187.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6915187.stm)

- Burundian refugees in Tanzania intimidated into returning home:  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/burundian-refugees-tanzania-intimidated-returning-home-20090629>
- Sri Lankan Refugees freed October 23rd 2009: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HV0aTcCcMkU>
- Let it be known: Internally Displaced Colombian's speak out:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8vJ7ZsPeaM>

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