

Research Report

Assembly: Junior General Assembly 2

Topic: The Question of Protecting Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in Conflict Zones

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Introduction

As armed conflicts continue to persist, people in conflict zones are forced from their homes to another region as an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) or another country as a refugee or an asylum seeker. Systemic vulnerabilities leave the displaced population exposed to violence, exploitation, food insecurity, inadequate healthcare, and disruptions to education, and these challenges are further intensified in active conflict zones. Although established international legal frameworks exist to protect refugees and internally displaced persons, significant gaps remain in implementation and enforcement. The protection of displaced populations must be strengthened to ensure the safety, dignity, and fundamental human rights during armed conflict.

Definition of Key Terms

Refugees

A person forcibly removed from their country because of persecution, conflict, violence, or other serious threats and is unwilling or unable to return safely (UNHCR).

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

A person forcibly removed from their home but has not crossed an internationally recognized border.

Asylum seeker

Someone seeking international protection (UNHCR).

Non-refoulement

The principle that individuals should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. This is a fundamental principle of international refugee protection.

Background Information

The scale of the global displacement crisis has reached unprecedented levels, at approximately 117.8 million people worldwide at the end of 2025 (UNHCR, 2025). This number includes 41.6 million refugees and 68.7 million people internally displaced (IDPs); meaning roughly one in every 70 people in the world have been forcibly displaced. Displacement disrupts livelihoods, separates families, and denies children access to education, creating long-term vulnerability even after conflicts end. The displaced population is not only exposed to humanitarian crises upon displacement, but also in returning due to the weakened security, infrastructure and basic services following the conflict. While refugees benefit from international legal frameworks centered on the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, IDPs lack a binding international treaty and face limited international intervention to aid them due to sovereignty concerns. In active conflict zones, both groups face extreme risks because of the often blocked humanitarian aid and refugee and IDP camps becoming targets of violence, recruitment by armed groups, or exploitation.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Primary United Nations agency responsible for protecting refugees and supporting forcibly displaced populations. Founded in 1950, UNHCR provides not only emergency assistance, but also support to host countries, and works with other organizations to create long-term solutions.

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

Body of the UN Secretariat that coordinates international humanitarian responses during emergencies and armed conflicts. Provides mobilized aid, information, and advocacy for crisis-affected communities.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Independent organization that provides humanitarian aid, including medical care, food, and protection to individuals affected by armed conflict.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)

Monitors internal displacement caused by conflict, violence, and disasters globally. Publishes the annual Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), tracking millions of IDPs and providing data and analysis on internal displacement.

Sudan

The ongoing armed conflict of Sudan has led to the displacement of over 14 million people, creating the world's largest displacement crisis.

Syria

The conflict in Syria has persisted for over a decade, resulting in the most prolonged displacement crises in the world. Long-term sustainability of refugee return is a critical issue as returning refugees face lack of safety and access to essential services.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description
December 14, 1950	The United Nations General Assembly establishes the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) to provide international protection and assistance to refugees after World War II.
July 28, 1951	The Refugee Convention is adopted. The convention establishes the legal definition of a refugee, outlines key rights, and sets out states' responsibilities toward refugees.
October 4, 1967	The Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees entered into force. Removed the 1951 Convention's original geographic and time limits, extending to protect refugees worldwide.
April 17, 1998	The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement are presented to the UN Commission on Human Rights. It compiles existing human rights and humanitarian law standards and explains how states must prevent arbitrary displacement, protect IDPs during displacement, and support their safe reintegration.
2005	The United Nations launches major humanitarian reforms, including the Cluster Approach, to improve coordination during emergencies.
October 23, 2009	The African Union adopted the Kampala Convention, the first legally binding regional treaty that focused specifically on preventing internal displacement and protecting and assisting IDPs.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- The *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* was adopted by the UN in 1951, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). It established the international legal definition of refugees and outlined basic rights and protection for refugees, including the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning refugees to places where their life or freedom is threatened.
- The *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* was adopted in 1967, expanding the 1951 Convention beyond post-WWII refugees. It removed the original geographical and time limitations to protect internationally displaced people regardless of when or where the displacement occurred.
- In 1998, the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* was introduced. As a non-binding framework for IDP protection, it addresses prevention, protection and solutions to displacement within the sovereign countries.
- The African Union adopted the Kampala Convention (2009) for internally displaced persons. This was the first legally binding regional instrument dedicated to preventing internal displacement and protecting and assisting IDPs, including those displaced by armed conflict and other situations of violence
- UNGA Resolution 60/128 (2005) responded to the chronic, large-scale displacement crises across Africa. Addressed the systematic gaps in protection and assistance for refugees and IDPs, calling for protection standards for these groups.
- UNSC Resolution 1296 (2000) addressed the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including refugee camps and IDPs. Recognizing the vulnerability of refugees and IDPs, the resolution emphasized Security Council attention on this peace-and-security issue.
- The first Global Refugee took place from December 16 to 18, 2019. The forum provided a platform for governments and stakeholders to make concrete commitments to support refugees and host communities.

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

To address the protection of refugees and IDPs in conflict, various international and legal measures have taken place. This includes the 1998 Guiding Principles and

Clusters Approach taken place to expand the UNHCR and the rest of the international community's responsibility to protect IDPs as well as refugees. Despite progress, significant gaps remain: IDPs lack a dedicated international agency, access to conflict zones are restricted for both refugees and IDPs, and humanitarian funding is insufficient.

Possible Solutions

Solutions should be focused on strengthening legal frameworks, such as encouraging more states to ratify existing treaties and promoting the incorporation of the Guiding Principles into national laws. Regional and international cooperation must be emphasized in supporting durable solutions to this multi-faceted issue, through financial and technical assistance to expand protection programs and facilitate burden-sharing. Most importantly, the international community must ensure implementation through adequate resources, humanitarian access, and accountability.

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