03.05.2022 - Brussels, in-person & online

TRAFIG Final Conference

"Nothing is more permanent than the temporary?"

Understanding protracted displacement and peoples' own responses

Conference Report

(TRAFIG Deliverable D8.7)

Agenda

Introductory Session | 9:30 – 10:30 CEST

The promise of mobility and networks for overcoming protracted displacement

The conference was launched with a session highlighting TRAFIG's key research findings and pinpointing their implications for policy and practice. It critically re-examined the question: What could solutions for protracted displacement look like?

Speakers:

- Benjamin Etzold, Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC), Germany
- Albert Kraler, Danube University Krems, Austria
- Laura Morosanu, Sussex University, United Kingdom
- Anila Noor, Global Refugee-Led Network, The Netherlands

Moderator: Elvan Isikozlu, BICC, Germany

Panel 1 | 11:00 – 12:30 CEST

Moving forward: Improving responses to protracted displacement in major host countries

Panellists discussed key trends regarding strategies displaced people are using to regain their footing, including local networking and mobility, drawn from TRAFIG work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Jordan, Pakistan, and Tanzania. They also identified ways that the European Union and its Member States can scale up support for major refugee-receiving countries to improve access to solutions in neighbouring and third countries.

Speakers:

- Delphine Drapeau, European Commission, Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA)
- Jens Hesemann, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- Mudassar M. Javed, Society for Human Rights & Prisoners' Aid (SHARP), Pakistan
- Patrick Milabyo Kyamusugulwa, Institut Superieur des Techniques Medicales de Bukavu (ISTM-Bukavu), DRC
- Fawwaz Ayoub Momani, Yarmouk University, Jordan
- Markus Rudolf, Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC), Germany
- Janemary Ruhundwa, Dignity Kwanza, Tanzania

Moderator: Carolien Jacobs, Leiden University, The Netherlands

Panel 2 | 13:30 – 15:00 CEST

A new day on the horizon? Options for strengthening policies on forced displacement in the EU

This last panel explored how protracted displacement manifests in Europe, drawing on TRAFIG research conducted in Germany, Greece, and Italy. Speakers shared how forced migrants are attempting to find their own solutions and how they can be further supported by policies and programmes. They also shined a spotlight on more recent displacement from Ukraine and what this may mean for the future of asylum in Europe.

Speakers:

- Benjamin Etzold, BICC, Germany
- Panos Hatziprokopiou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
- Desislava Ivanova, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- Ferruccio Pastore, International and European Forum on Migration Research (FIERI), Italy
- Birte Schorpion, Danish Refugee Council
- Cecilia Verkleij, Asylum Unit, DG for Migration and Home Affairs

Moderator: Martin Wagner, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), Austria

The recording of the webinar can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHhv2669XgY.

Background

For the past three years, the Transnational Figurations of Displacement (TRAFIG) project has investigated long-lasting displacement situations in Africa, Asia, and Europe and analysed options to improve displaced peoples' lives by enhancing their chances of building sustainable futures. Undertaking more than 2,700 interviews with displaced people, policymakers, and practitioners in 11 countries, TRAFIG has studied the reasons why people end up in protracted displacement situations and what coping strategies they use, identifying possible courses of action for policymakers and solutions that are better tailored to the needs and capacities of displaced persons. The project focused on long-lasting displacement, but its findings also provide important lessons for preventing new displacement from becoming protracted.

At this final conference, TRAFIG researchers shared what they learned, and representatives from refugee communities, academia, the policy world, and practitioners contributed their insights on how more displaced people can access more and better solutions. Speakers also discussed the war in Ukraine and what lessons from TRAFIG can be applied to address displacement in this context.

Summary

Following a brief video of the TRAFIG Project, **Elvan Isikozlu, Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC)**, set the scene of the conference by painting a picture deriving from TRAFIG interviews with hundreds of displaced people, who attempt to build a new life after displacement being constantly confronted with hurdles, barriers, dead ends. Constant twists and turns, confusion, and disorientation - a labyrinth of temporary solutions, year after year. But, what if displaced people could move freely towards their networks of support? What if they were *enabled* to move towards the people they choose; What if they were *supported* in widening their connections to people and encourage to use multiple pathways out of this labyrinth to start a new life? In such a vision, forced displacement – and not

solutions to it – may in fact be 'temporary' and the permanence of 'temporary solutions' that we see today would disappear.
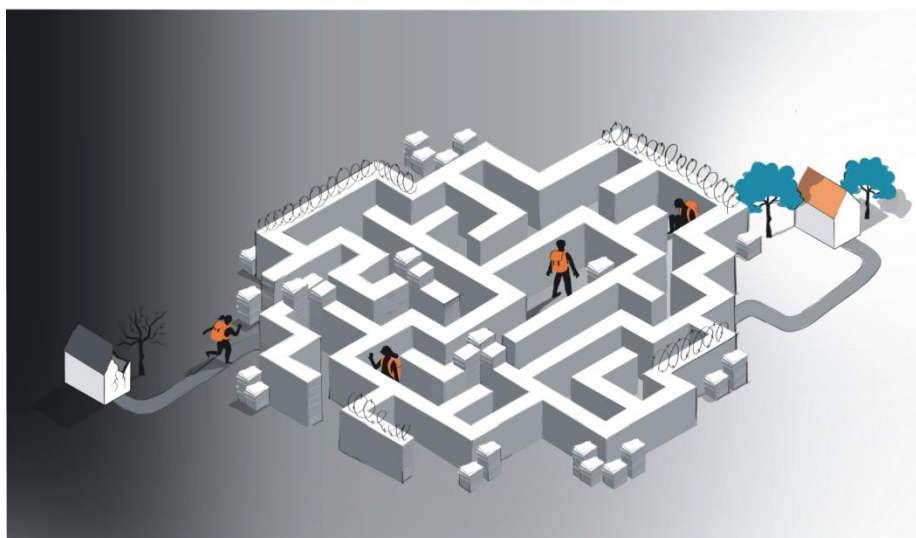
With setting this vision of the TRAFIG project, **Ms Isikozlu** invited TRAFIG panellists to share their main findings stemming from the 3-year project.

Benjamin Etzold (BICC), TRAFIG´s scientific coordinator, highlighted the main reasons why protracted displacement is a topic of such relevance. He gave the example of Tekeste, a 30-year old Eritrean refugee interviewed by the project in Addis Ababa. According to Tekeste, he has wasted almost 13 years of his life, between being imprisoned in Eritrea and experiencing endless waiting as a refugee in Ethiopia, whereas he wants to start a more productive life, one in which he could be actually self-reliant. For the last 7 years, he has been applying, without any success, for an opportunity to resettle in the US or Canada. The sad truth is that Tekeste is just one of 15.7 million people around the world in a protracted displacement situation. This means that over 15 million people cannot return to their place of origin while they face enormous obstacles to local integration (in first countries of asylum) and lack access to resettlement to third countries. For Mr. Etzold, the situation of global protracted displacement is not only a result of conflict and persecution, but also a failure of states and the international community to provide durable solutions.

The discussion then shifted from **why** protracted displacement is an important topic to **how** TRAFIG approached the topic in a more original, or less explored, way. The project was rooted in a people-centered perspective, based on the idea of the strength of the human agency and on the power of displaced peoples' social networks. In a nutshell, for TRAFIG, the two key factors for moving out of *protractedness* are connectivity and mobility. **The central hypothesis was that, the more connected and mobile refugees and IDPs are, the less likely it is that they end up in a situation of protracted displacement**. Finally, **what** the TRAFIG consortium did to learn whether the hypothesis mentioned above is true or not was detailed to the in-person and virtual audience. The project researched 11 countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe and interviewed and engaged with over 3,000 interviewees, the vast majority were displaced people, mainly from Afghanistan, DRC, Eritrea, and Syria.

In order to better understand protracted displacement, **Albert Kraler, Danube University Krems,** highlighted how the current concept of displaced people in protracted situations has evolved to include asylum applicants and irregular migrants, unlike the concept that first appeared at the beginning of the 2000s (in a UNHCR report), which only referred to refugees. Importantly, people are still considered in protracted displacement even when receiving humanitarian aid, since it is the lack of real durable solutions that perpetuates the situation. According to Mr. Kraler, protracted displacement is a multidimensional limbo that entails economic precariousness, marginalisation, rightlessness, future uncertainty, and immobilisation at a place. Just as the concept of protracted displacement has changed during the years, so has the definition of durable solutions. Initially, return to the country of origin, local integration, and resettlement were seen as the main pathways out of protracted displacement. However, Mr. Kraler stated that they might not be as durable as first thought because the physical move *per se* is not enough to guarantee individuals a fulfilling life. This premise is one of the reasons why complementary pathways as solutions outside the triangle of return, integration, and resettlement have surged.

Laura Morosanu from Sussex University explored how the governance regimes of aid and asylum might be intensifying and prolonging people´s displacement. According to Ms. Morosanu, governance regimes might be worsening protracted displacement instead of tackling it, mainly due to the patchy nature of protection systems due to the limited capacity of states and limit interest in protection systems; the uneven provision of support and simultaneous restrictions; and constantly changing and extremely complex regulations. Most displaced people do not have access to durable solution or will stay in a situation of displacement for many years, on average around 11 years. As governance regimes tend to limit rather than provide opportunities, displaced people tend to circumvent them, usually through risky, emotionally and materially draining strategies.

According to Mr. Etzold, a way to actually overcome these obstacles and try to leave a situation of protracted displacement behind, in some cases despite the existence of governance regimes of aid and asylum, is the use of peoples' social connections and networks. These are at the centre of TRAFIG´s research: the role of networks (friends, family, neighbours, business partners, etc.) in the place of living (local networks), within the country of reception (translocal networks), and across international borders (transnational networks). Such connections are based on different aspects (family, nationality, ethnicity, etc.), which are extremely dynamic, becoming more or less important depending on where a displaced person is.

Anila Noor from the Global Refugee-Led Network (GRLN) urged the participants to listen carefully to refugees and other displaced persons and how they reflect upon their experiences of being displaced and excluded – often for many years. But learning from their stories and taking their reflections seriously would not be enough. It would be necessary to include people with own experience of displacement in research projects like TRAFIG and thus doing studies *with* and not *about* displaced people. Maybe even more decisive would be, however, to include displaced people in the design and implementation of humanitarian interventions and complementary pathways to protection, and in political decision-making, in general. To underscore this claim, the GRLN coined the slogan "Nothing about us without us", which they are actively promoting in high-level dialogues political fora such as the Global Refugee Forum that accompanies the implementation of the Global Compact for Refugees.

Panel 1 | 11:00 – 12:30 CEST

Moving forward: Improving responses to protracted displacement in major host countries

With:

Delphine Drapeau, European Commission, DG INTPA
Jens Hesemann, OECD
Mudassar M. Javed, SHARP
Patrick Milabyo Kyamusugulwa, ISTM-Bukavu
Fawwaz Ayoub Momani, Yarmouk University
Janemary Ruhundwa, Dignity Kwanza
Markus Rudolf, BICC

Moderator: Carolien Jacobs, Leiden University

In moderating, **Carolien Jacobs from Leiden University**, set the scene for the first panel which looked into displacement situations in Ethiopia, Jordan, Pakistan, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Acknowledging the invaluable work by TRAFIG partners and researchers in these countries Ms Jacobs invited the first speaker to share the main research findings from Ethiopia.

Markus Rudolf from BICC explained how the existence of personal networks facilitates access to solutions for Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia. For Mr. Rudolf, such networks have been crucial in different ways, including finding employment and accommodation, offering support out of camps, and supporting access to education, among others. He also pointed out that, while mobility and networks did play an important role in facilitating access to solutions, their mere existence per se might not be always seen as a solution or be proposed as such. The quality of networks must be taken into consideration when thinking of those connections as possible solutions for protracted displacement.

Patrick Milabyo Kyamusugulwa from the Institut Superieur des Techniques Medicales de Bukavu reflected on how Congolese IDPs use mobility as a livelihood strategy. According to Mr. Milabyo, IDPs in the DRC tend to be mobile mainly through three strategies: by relying on precarious jobs with low social status; through faster integration by gaining access to stable housing or jobs in the case of IDPs with better financial or social situations; and through access to commodities in the community of origin, such as by selling honey, charcoal, etc. In that way, newcomers also help the local economy. This third strategy was the focus of his presentation.

The reasons why mobility can be a way to ensure a livelihood lie mainly in two factors. First, the failure to have good connectivity in host communities means that mobility becomes an option for survival. Second, some prefer to maintain contact with the area of origin or elsewhere. At the same time, the possibility of mobility can be hindered by insecurity in the areas where IDPs would move to or by the shame of being labelled as a failure by those who stayed home. By understanding why mobility can be an option and when it might not work, Mr. Milabyo highlighted the main strategies that should be considered in order to improve responses for protracted displacement in DRC:

- Identification and integration: set-up mechanisms to identify IDPs and refugees; contact them with host families, churches, and associations; and ensure they have access to activities that can facilitate their social and economic integration
- Descent physical space: create space for IDPs or refugees in areas of the city with access to basic services, such as water and electricity
- Enhance security in rural areas: end conflict and create an enabling environment for returnees

Mudassar M. Javed from the Society for Human Rights & Prisoners' Aid (SHARP) then presented the research on Afghans displaced in Pakistan, a situation that has existed for over forty years now, and how both communities have been co-existing for so long. According to Mr. Javed, the relationship between host and refugee communities in Pakistan is very unique and, despite the lack of a refugee law in the country, tends to be mostly smooth due to the common values shared by both countries and the fact that displaced Afghans also have relatively easy access to services such as health and education. However, when the security situations escalate either between Pakistan and Afghanistan or inside Afghanistan, as it has happened recently with the change of regime in Kabul, the pressure due to the increase of refugees in Pakistan (the country received over 200,000 people since August 2021) can make the situation more challenging. While sensitive to how the war in Ukraine has changed priorities for EU Member States, Mr. Javed called on developed countries, including the EU, for support in sharing responsibility regarding large inflows of refugees in developing countries such Pakistan (or Jordan), which are facing their own deep security and social challenges.

Janemary Ruhundwa from Dignity Kwanza shared her experience from working with Burundian and Congolese refugees in Tanzania. She explained how aid and asylum regimes have been shaping the network of refugees and migrants in Dar es Salaam. According to Ms. Ruhundwa, unlike in the 1980s and 1990s, Tanzania today has strict encampment policies, with only 0.1% of refugees given permission to live out of the camps and enjoy protection and support. Over 80% of the population of concern live in camps while the rest live in villages (8.7%) or settlements (7.7%). Therefore, those who leave the camps without permission – in search of opportunities – become "invisible" to asylum regimes and must rely solely on their personal networks. In these cases, trust replaces the lost formal protection and the alliances are built mainly with families and friends. Refugees then try to identify places where they could create such networks and also where they could offer something, such as skills or good behaviour, in order to guarantee their survival.

Ms. Ruhundwa pointed out that, although refugees usually manage to survive through such informal alliances, more durable and sustainable solutions should be found to avoid negative impacts of prolonged marginalization such as human trafficking and the risk of statelessness. Such solutions could be achieved through more research and projects to raise awareness of the existence of this (usually invisible) population; programmes to empower this population to access social and economic rights; promotion of positive refugee-

host relations for smooth integration in urban areas; and including this population in human rights and refugee discussions with host governments.

Delphine Drapeau from the European Commission, Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) reflected on the research findings and proposed solutions. She highlighted the importance of research to inform policy, remembering that the new [NDICI (Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI – Global Europe)](#), the financial instrument for 2021 – 2027, wants to ensure the means to put words into action across all EU engagement, including migration and displacement, areas which have up to 10% of NDICI resources due to the EU's recognition of the long-term impact of displacement in host countries. As for forced displacement, the EU will continue work in line with the [2016 Communication lives in Dignity](#) and [EU Consensus on Development](#), which work to provide development opportunities that guarantee that displaced persons can become self-reliant. Ms. Drapeau also emphasized the need to secure a good relationship with host communities and guarantee a win-win situation for displaced people and host communities through an area-based approach according to the needs of all actors in areas affected by displacement. Finally, Ms. Drapeau mentioned again the importance and value of TRAFIG research and that she will examine it further to inform EU policymakers.

Jens Hesemann from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) then spoke about the organisation's work on social protection and inclusion as part of the discussion of solutions. According to Mr. Heseman, social protection systems (including social assistance and labour market interventions) can be a bridge between humanitarian and development interventions, and as such, the inclusion of forcibly displaced people in these systems can create better – and more cost-efficient – solutions in the medium and long term rather than running parallel programmes for displaced people. This could address long-term basic needs, build self-reliance, and facilitate integration. For Mr. Hesemann, in an ideal world, if the displaced have access to the social protection system of the host country, but are also allowed to work (and therefore contribute to the social welfare system), they would end up covering their own costs and, thus, this model would be more cost-efficient than operating specific humanitarian programmes. Currently, from a legal perspective, this is already a reality in host countries; however, de facto access to the social protection system is very low (around 10% of displaced people). The reasons for this vary, but they are usually linked to political instability in the host country and high levels of informality in job markets. His main policy takeaways for enhancing the inclusion of displaced people in host country social systems were:

- Donors provide multi-year funding at the beginning of such inclusion until the system becomes self-reliable, as a way to overcome the fear of rising costs
- Closer coordination with governments of host countries
- Inclusion of displaced people in the social protection system´s database as way to facilitate the identification of needs

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Panel 2 | 13:30 – 15:00 CEST

A new day on the horizon? Options for strengthening policies on forced displacement in the EU

With:

Benjamin Etzold, BICC
Panos Hatziprokopiou, Aristotle University
Ferruccio Pastore, FIERI
Desislava Ivanova, UNHCR
Birte Schorpion, Danish Refugee Council
Cecilia Verkleij, Asylum Unit, DG HOME

Moderator: Martin Wagner, ICMPD

Introducing the second panel of the conference, the moderator, **Martin Wagner, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)** referred to the fact that "protracted displacement" is rather debated in displacement contexts outside of the EU but in fact – and this will be the main topic of the second panel – also exists within Europe in various forms as TRAFIG research has shown.

Reflecting on the screened short video filmed in Italy, part of a longer documentary, **Ferruccio Pastore from the International and European Forum on Migration Research (FIERI),** explained how mobility plays an important role for displaced people in Europe. He discussed how immobility and mobility are not only a binary problem-solution, but also how there are "grey areas" in the concept of mobility in the lives of displaced people. This means that, while mobility can be a possible solution out of protracted displacement, it can also be a movement that, despite guaranteeing some level of livelihood, does not move refugees out of situation

of protracted displacement. This would refer, for instance, to local and seasonal movements – within national borders - of refugees harvesting crops. In this case, refugees move for temporary jobs, and barely ensuring some livelihood, meaning they do not leave the 'maze' of protracted displacement. Eventually, circular movements can also happen, irregularly, at the intra-EU level.

Panos Hatziprokopiou from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, who coordinated the TRAFIG research in Greece, explained the situation in the country and how different types of restrictions (and mobility) play roles in displaced peoples' lives. In the

Greek case, the reception system was based on the hotspot approach and the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, in which geographical restrictions have been imposed for those arriving to the islands, where displaced people are forced to stay until the examination of their protection requests. This model has ended up creating different layers or hierarchies that filter displaced people´s mobility and make them (temporarily) immobile. For Mr. Hatziprokopiou, the fragility of the Greek case lies in the creation of an "asylum system" without the proper necessary structure. Back in 2015, Greece lacked the legal, institutional, and administrative infrastructure for the reception of asylum seekers – and in building such system without "proper foundations", Greece facilitated the existence of protracted displacement situations.

Benjamin Etzold (BICC), TRAFIG´s scientific coordinator, then brought the research in Germany into the discussion, reflecting on transnational lives and how these influence people trajectories on their way to as well as their lives in Germany. The research showed that transnational networks differ and include family networks but also business ties or connections made during earlier visits to Germany. Once people get displaced, such networks become important and may give guidance on how to travel to Germany or – when it comes to family reunification – the very legal basis to enter Germany. The quality of the networks play a crucial role here. Importantly to note, however, there are the legal barriers that prevent people to indeed make use of existing networks and this leads or exacerbates protracted displacement in other parts of the world.

Desislava Ivanova from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reflected on the role of UNHCR in preventing protracted displacement which, according to Ms. Ivanova, is one of their main challenges in the EU context. UNHCR works in close cooperation with EU institutions, highlighting the right to asylum and the need for adequate reception conditions and ensuring the creation of policies that would not allow for protracted displacement. Ms. Ivanova also mentioned the UNCHR proposal ([Better protecting refugees in the EU and globally](#)) for a new EU asylum system when discussions on a reform of the system started in 2016, and how such proposals are still extremely valid and needed. These proposals include access to protection for all, fair and fast EU asylum procedures to avoid protracted situations, more legal options to find safety in the EU (such as family reunification and complementary pathways), and an increase in integration efforts.

Birte Schorpion, Danish Refugee Council, reflected on the situation of displaced people arriving in Greece pointing to the fact that the reported push backs deprive people from exercising their rights which they have on paper, also referring to the illusion of a screening procedure of 5 days as proposed and discussed under the Pact on Migration and Asylum. Ms Schorpion further referred to the evidence provided – among others – by the TRAFIG project and encourages EU policy makers to listen and look at displaced people's account of their situation and consider those when negotiating EU asylum and migration reforms.

Cecilia Verkleij, Deputy Head of the Asylum Unit of the European Commission's DG for Migration and Home Affairs, reflected on the different topics raised during the conference and started by highlighting how different what the legal system proposes can be from the reality on the ground. According to Ms. Verkleij, such a gap can be explained by the challenges related to the extreme need for coordination among EU Member States and understanding a myriad of different policies, laws, and actions not only from Member States but also from associated Schengen countries. She believes the need to coordinate and dialogue with various stakeholders is a challenging and time-consuming process that might, sometimes, lead to these gaps between policy proposals and reality in the field.

In a concluding round, panellists reflected on the complexities of global, EU and national legal and policy documents, the ongoing discussions on externalisation and the importance of mobility and networks as strongly evidenced in the current displacement situation of people fleeing the war in Ukraine, where – different to other displacement situations – Ukrainians can move visa free within the EU and therefore, indeed, follow their networks or move to an EU country where they believe they may have the best chances to rebuild their lives.

In concluding the Conference, **Elvan Isikozlu, Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC**) called for a paradigm shift in which policies become more people-based, taking into consideration peoples' connections and networks as well as the potential and capacities they have – and for the creation of policies that reflect such an approach and actually provide solutions instead of worsening and prolonging displacement situations.