

# Forced Displacement

## Policy Position

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### Summary

The ongoing plight of forcibly displaced children is a global crisis and represents a collective failure of the international community to prevent and adequately respond to known causes of displacement. Around the world today, 65 million forcibly displaced persons, half of whom are children, are trying to survive in increasingly resource scarce and hostile environments. This figure is the highest recorded since World War II.

Displaced children and their families are overwhelmingly relying on support from host communities and countries. As a result of their generosity, these countries themselves are vulnerable to losing hard-fought development gains.

Practical solutions and concrete commitments to protect children on the move and share responsibility for their care and fulfilment of their rights are desperately needed. These solutions must:

- Put children at the centre;
- Recognise that the primary barrier to the development of durable solutions is a political one;
- Actively counter the narrative which depicts displaced populations as “burdens”;
- Involve everyone in finding solutions.

In addressing movements of forcibly displaced children and their families, World Vision calls on all parties to uphold the rights of the displaced and the communities who welcome them by:

- Investing in resilience and sustainable development outcomes to address the structural causes of forced displacement, including timely and effective political solutions to prevent and resolve conflict;
- Prioritising and strengthening protection measures for children on the move;
- Developing and expanding policies to support self-reliance and mutual benefit between the forcibly displaced and host communities, and providing the necessary funding for implementation;
- Partnering with multi-stakeholder groups, including those within displaced populations and hosting communities, to develop context-appropriate durable solutions to protracted displacement.

## Context

Worldwide, 65 million forcibly displaced persons<sup>i</sup> are trying to survive in increasingly resource scarce and hostile environments. This staggering figure is the highest recorded since World War II and includes more than 21 million refugees, three million asylum-seekers and 40 million internally displaced persons<sup>ii</sup>. More than half of all displaced persons are children<sup>iii</sup>.

Forced from their homes for a myriad of reasons, displaced children and their families are thrown into situations of intense vulnerability and uncertainty. While many neighbouring communities and countries have opened their doors in solidarity and generosity, some countries have disproportionately borne the responsibility to care for what is truly a global crisis<sup>iv</sup>.

The ability of the international community to cope with and bring resolution to an ever-increasing rate of forced displacement has stagnated. Simply put, despite shocking numbers and agreement by governments that “something must be done”, the current system responding to and seeking to resolve forced displacement is not working. Collectively, we are failing the world’s most vulnerable children.

## World Vision’s position

Children make up half the population of refugees and displaced peoples. As a child-focused organisation World Vision believes children have the right to special care and attention.

Under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol (Relating to the Status of Refugees) children are afforded the same rights and protection as adults. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child they are entitled to the full protection of their rights, including access to education and health care, regardless of their country of origin or status<sup>v</sup>.

World Vision’s mandate calls on us to respond to the needs of forcibly displaced children and their families through high quality programming and linking this programming with local, regional and global advocacy to influence policy at all levels.

World Vision recognises that the drivers of displacement are multi-dimensional and multi-causal. At the same time, situations of forced displacement are increasing in duration and have far-reaching social, economic and political ramifications on the displaced and the communities that host them. Failing to move beyond the current short-term humanitarian response to the effects of forced displacement will continue to trap millions of children in situations of heightened vulnerability.

World Vision is calling for an integrated holistic approach that leverages the full spectrum of resources to address immediate and longer-term needs of forcibly displaced children and their families. In addressing large movements of displaced children and their families, World Vision calls on all parties to uphold the rights of the displaced and the communities who welcome them by:

- Investing in sustainable development outcomes to address the structural causes of forced displacement, including timely and effective political solutions to prevent and resolve conflict;
- Prioritising and strengthening protection measures for children on the move;
- Developing and expanding policies to support self-reliance and mutual benefit between the forcibly displaced and host communities;
- Partnering with multi-stakeholder groups, including those within displaced populations and hosting communities, to develop context-appropriate durable solution strategies to protracted displacement.

## Investing in sustainable development outcomes

Identifying and addressing the socio-political root causes of forced displacement keeps children and their families from falling victim to situations where they have no choice but to flee.

In many cases, forced displacement can be characterised as a development issue with humanitarian repercussions. While natural disasters undoubtedly force families from their homes, increasingly families are pushed into situations of displacement due to a broad range of negative political, economic and social developments including:

- Violent conflict
- Persecution (or threat of persecution)
- Climate change
- Environmental degradation
- Lack of economic opportunity, or
- A combination of these factors.

Current response to displacement has fallen largely on humanitarian actors who are neither best placed nor best prepared to address root causes. Relying on humanitarian response alone can result in protracting displacement crises.

Truly addressing the push factors that contribute to forced displacement requires an inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach that draws on a clear understanding of the political economy of each context. A better comprehensive joint context analyses that involve development, peace building and political sectors and civil society – including the faith community – is also required.

This joint work has to extend to the implementation of solutions and long-term programmatic strategies<sup>vi</sup> bridging the humanitarian/development nexus.

*“Meeting the sustainable development goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development would reduce the need for migrants to leave their homes in search of greater opportunities by addressing some of the root causes of involuntary movements of refugees and migrants.”*  
-Secretary General’s report on Addressing Large Populations Movements.

Similarly, rather than increasing humanitarian spending to address forced displacement after the fact, donors must increase Official Development Assistance (ODA) investment to achieve resilience and sustainable development outcomes. This includes peace building and conflict prevention, expansion of social safety nets, risk reduction and climate change mitigation, enhanced child-protection systems and economic opportunities for youth to more effectively eliminate factors forcing children and their families from homes and communities.

World Vision is fundamentally against a worrying trend within the international community where ODA is diverted for domestic use and in some instances may be contributing to preventing children and their families from seeking safety. This increasingly disturbing political approach violates children’s rights and goes against international laws, norms and conventions<sup>vii</sup>.

Preventative interventions are critical. When successfully implemented with local communities these interventions can spare generations from situations of protracted displacement (those who are displaced for six months are likely to remain displaced for at least three years). The average length of displacement is now estimated at 17 years<sup>viii</sup>.

### Addressing root causes

An escalation of violence in the Northern Triangle of Central America (Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala) has not only resulted in increased murder rates, but increased recruitment and murder of children and youth, kidnapping, extortion, and increased sexual and gender based violence. The consequences of unchecked violence have long-lasting implications in the region – high social and economic costs have generated, and have also given way to heavy flows of involuntary migration and asylum seekers to the United States.

World Vision has found violence pervasive at all levels – in the home, at school and in communities. Beyond violence, however, children and youth report inadequate educational opportunity, a lack of economic opportunity and discrimination toward youth in society.

World Vision's Hope at Home initiative seeks to address the key push and pull factors affecting and contributing to child and youth migration, especially violence, social exclusion, poverty and separation from family. This is done through a comprehensive programmatic and policy framework that responds to the needs of at-risk and migrant children and youth by:

1. Improving educational outcomes for children and adolescents
2. Improving economic opportunities for disadvantaged youth
3. Reducing domestic and community violence
4. Raising awareness regarding the risks of unsafe migration
5. Improving a sense of community identity and belonging in children and youth
6. Reducing the stigma associated with youth from at-risk backgrounds and neighbourhoods

In more than 500 youth and adolescent clubs in El Salvador, children and youth have been receiving life skills and leadership training, working together to address problems in their schools and communities, and receiving critical information about protecting themselves and the risks of unsafe migration.

World Vision programs also engage parents to teach positive parenting and non-violent discipline, with more than 24,000 parents engaged in Guatemala alone.

World Vision has been actively supporting the governments of these three countries to develop stronger child protection structures and services, and has worked with children, parents, teachers and community members to campaign against bullying and violence in schools.

In Honduras, together with local and private partners, World Vision's Bright Futures (Futuros Brilliantes) project is aiming to combat child labour by providing educational and vocational services to more than 5,000 children and youth. The program is also assisting over 1,500 households with children engaged in (or at risk of engaging in) child labour to access employment and economic strengthening services.

## Prioritising protection

Whether seeking asylum as a refugee, internally displaced person or migrant, in all cases, regardless of their legal status, children must be protected.

Protection risks increase exponentially for displaced children on the move. Children are more vulnerable to being separated from their families, trafficked, neglected or subjected to violence, exploitation and abuse<sup>ix</sup>. Physical and emotional strain from the journey alone can negatively impact child wellbeing outcomes, requiring greater attention to a child's physical and psychosocial recovery.

International norms and laws protecting children<sup>x</sup> are not suspended once a child leaves their home. Therefore, states must do more to live up to their obligations under international law. Regardless of their legal status, children and their families must be able to access quality essential services, timely information, legal counsel and be treated with dignity at reception centres. Detention of children for the purposes of assessing legal status must never be accepted as reasonable practice.

Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Many children have experienced violence, sexual abuse and trafficking during their time in transit and can be further subjected to physical and psychological stress through detention and deportation processes.

In order to promote greater protection of displaced children, governments must collaborate to provide correct and consistent information to minors about correct procedures for identifying themselves, seeking protection assistance and accessing family tracing and reunification services. If family reunification is not possible or appropriate, long-term solutions should be considered in line with child protection best practices. These solutions must always reflect the best interest of the child.

While family separation can occur along transit routes, good practices which prevent family separation should be introduced at all points along the routes, including practices that allow families to be processed and moved together.

Parents and children should never have to fear being criminalised for seeking asylum or being forcibly returned to the volatile conditions they fled. Regardless of the way in which they arrived, those seeking refuge must be assured that their fundamental human rights will be respected and that they will be able to access humanitarian assistance.

To ensure this, the international community must do more to truly live up to the promise to "share responsibility" by ensuring predictable, multi-year and flexible funding for humanitarian appeals so that hosting countries and communities can extend and expand opportunities for those seeking refuge and those who are opening their doors. The international community must also commit to significantly increasing the number and range of legal pathways for admission and resettlement.

### Protecting children on the move in Serbia

Due to the limited availability of critically-needed child-focused interventions in provision of effective protection and psychosocial support to refugees in Serbia, World Vision targeted assistance to families with children, pregnant and lactating women and unaccompanied and separated children. World Vision opened its first Child Friendly Space (CFS) and space for Women and Young Children (WAYCS) at the Serbian-Croatian border. To address the change in refugee routes, these spaces were moved and then expanded to other border crossings. In addition to these two spaces, World Vision established one mobile CFS and WAYCS team.

World Vision staff in CFS and WAYCS identified and supported the assessment and referral of 34 children at high risk of abuse and exploitation to the appropriate service providers and in some cases, developed safety plans to mitigate risks.

To meet an increased need for specialised case management services for the most vulnerable refugees, World Vision initiated and led a mobile case management team aimed at supporting cross-border and in-country referrals, family tracing and follow up support. The Child Protection program also included a cross-border mobile case management support to the most vulnerable refugees, including adults and the elderly.

### Expanding self-reliance

Inclusion of forcibly displaced populations in all spheres of social, cultural and economic life produces far-reaching benefits. The current narrative which depicts displaced populations as resource drains must be reversed.

While there are short-term costs associated with the influx of displaced persons, when given the opportunity, these populations can make substantial contributions. This includes expanding consumer markets for local goods, opening new markets, bringing in new skills, creating employment and filling empty employment niches<sup>xi</sup>. Expanding policies to grant displaced populations access to local markets and social services, such as education, not only supports the local economy, but can reduce marginalisation and promote social cohesion.

Even as they endure situations of displacement, children should never miss out on basic services that all children are entitled to – particularly education that will help pull them into a brighter future. Regardless of their legal status, children must be able to access free primary and secondary education, equal in quality to that provided to nationals.

Education is a life-saving intervention: it provides a safe place for children to learn and play, provides protection from further discrimination, violence and exploitation (such as forced labour, sexual exploitation and abuse, early child marriage and recruitment into armed groups) and other life-threatening, often criminal activities<sup>xii</sup>. It is also clear that having children and youth continue their learning gives them a chance to become productive members of their society and host community. Additionally, it gives their home country a better chance at reconstruction in post-conflict situations.

Displaced children must never be forced to choose between preparing themselves for the future by going to school or providing for their families by going to work. Parents and caregivers must be able to provide for the children under their care by accessing the labour markets.

### Building social cohesion in the Central African Republic

Following the conflict between predominately Christian and Muslim groups in the Central African Republic, World Vision prioritised the integration of social cohesion into all programming.

Working with local faith leaders, World Vision decided to rethink the design of two Child Friendly Spaces. The original design called for the development of two separate CFSs – one for the Muslim internally displaced children and another for the Christian host community children. Faith leaders and the community themselves advocated, however, for the establishment of a common CFS for both groups.

The CFS was built in the Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camp and was made available to both host community and IDP populations, physically bringing these once separate communities into a common space and creating bonds between groups. The goodwill fostered through this inclusive approach has since carried over into all World Vision projects across all project locations in the country.

Following the dismantling of the IDP camp, the host community made it possible for the predominately Muslim IDP families to resettle in Yaloke, a previously Christian neighbourhood and register their children in the local schools.

## Develop context-appropriate durable solutions

As the scale of need continues to outstrip resources to respond, more courageous durable solution approaches are needed.

Traditional durable solution approaches which focus on voluntary repatriation, resettlement or integration options have not been developed or implemented anywhere near the rate of displacement, leaving more and more children and their families in semi-permanent states of limbo.

When solutions are developed, repatriation is disproportionately emphasised over resettlement or integration. Unable to return to the contexts from which they fled due to ongoing or worsening violence and instability, yet restricted from finding a place to resettle and thrive, both the displaced and those hosting them are being pushed into increasing desperation.

The international community must do more to bring together political, business, academic, religious, humanitarian, development and civil society actors to design more courageous, context-appropriate durable solutions that benefit the forcibly displaced and communities hosting them.

These solutions must recognise the primary barrier to the development of durable solutions is a political one. The vast majority of forcibly displaced children and their families remain displaced due to political impasses<sup>xiii</sup>. Even as humanitarian and development actors work to meet the needs of the displaced, national, regional and international interlocutors must commit to expending political capital to address and resolve conflict. This is so forcibly displaced children may have a viable option to return home, should they wish to do so.

While looking to the future, solutions to displacement must also provide for the immediate. Ignoring both the needs and potential contributions of displaced populations in development planning can result in their becoming a source of instability in a hosting community<sup>xiv</sup>.

The needs and capacities of displaced populations must be systematically incorporated into national development plans of concerned host governments and supported by the international community. This requires hosting communities to shift towards integrative approaches to displaced populations, which in turn requires a significant shift in the way the international community offers support. No longer can support be expected from humanitarian funding mechanisms alone; new financing architecture to address immediate and long-term outcomes is needed<sup>xv</sup>. Funding must be multi-year in nature, be predictable and flexible.

Lastly, both host communities and forcibly displaced populations themselves, including children and youth, must be meaningfully included in the early development of durable solutions. Causes and cycles of displacement are complex and very seldom do blanket solutions work. Displaced and hosting populations must be appropriately informed of all decision-making processes related to their wellbeing, be allowed space and opportunity to contribute their perspectives and actively participate as partners in the development of mutually-beneficial solutions.

### Child participation

In August 2016, with World Vision's support, children from South Sudan, Uganda and other East African countries met with policy makers in Nairobi at the East African Community Conference on the Rights of the Child.

At the event, children voiced their strong desire to work with policy makers to develop solutions to address the many drivers of forced displacement. These child representatives also pressed policy makers to work with them to ensure the effects of displacement do not negatively define the futures of the displaced and those who are hosting them.

*"We want all individuals, communities and governments to protect children. When children are hurt by others, they will grow to hurt others. But if children are protected and treated with respect, they will grow up to protect and treat others with respect."* – Ludia, age 14, South Sudan.

## Recommendations

### **Invest in sustainable development outcomes to address the structural causes of forced displacement.**

The international community must:

- Analyse displacement dynamics and key actors via a thorough and ongoing context analysis to understand the context dynamics and determine a systemic approach that is conflict sensitive and responsive to the needs of forcibly displaced children and their families;
- Identify and address push and pull factors and increase investment to address root causes of forced displacement so children and families are not forced to seek refuge away from home:
  - Commit to investing political capital to prevent, address and resolve conflict;
  - Meaningfully address violations of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law;
  - Strengthen good governance and rule of law efforts;
  - Invest in and promote conflict prevention and integrate peace building into humanitarian and development programming;



- Invest in and actively promote adaptive Disaster Risk Reduction programming to protect families from climate related shocks.

### **Prioritise and strengthen protection measures for children and their families on the move.**

The international community, national and host governments must:

- Decriminalise seeking of asylum;
- Regardless of legal status, children must be protected and their rights upheld in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Ensure adequate preparation and training of border crossing officials to deal with displaced persons – especially children – with dignity. This includes ensuring all arrivals have immediate access to essential healthcare, care for psychosocial needs and protective services;
- Ensure safe and unimpeded access for the provision of assistance to displaced populations and host communities, irrespective of their country of origin, ethnicity or religion. Forcibly displaced people should also be ensured freedom of movement and provided with transparent, timely and accessible information on access procedures and requirements at points of entry into new areas;
- Protect displaced children from discrimination, exploitation, recruitment and abuse during conflict. During and following transit, children should have the ability to access specialised child protection services. Child protection must be mainstreamed in immediate and longer-term responses, including humanitarian assessments, with a corresponding strengthening of capacity and improved coordination among formal and informal actors involved in reporting, referral and provision of child protection assistance;
- Provide comprehensive and sustained assistance, tailored to the context and needs of displaced children, ensuring they have access to nutritious food, are cared for, educated and protected. Particular prioritisation must be given to the setup of family tracing and reunification with interim care arrangements for orphans and children separated from parents, and mental health and psychosocial support for children exposed to traumatic events;
- Prioritise document replacement services for refugees and ensure access to birth certificates for displaced children born in transit or in the receiving countries. Displaced persons often do not have essential documentation with them such as passports, nationality or birth certificates or identity cards, or the ability to replace or retrieve them. This can present problems accessing services and is a particular protection concern for children whose births go undocumented.

### **Develop and expand policies to support self-reliance and mutual benefit for displaced and hosting communities.**

National and host governments must:

- Provide displaced children with the opportunity to learn in their temporary location through expanded protective emergency learning spaces and ensure access to appropriate forms of quality education in the longer term;
- Expand livelihood and skills development opportunities for caregivers and older adolescents. This includes an emphasis on life skills and promoting access to vocational training that corresponds with current and future needs of the labour market in their country of residence;

- Facilitate means for refugees to support themselves and their families. Allow them to be productive members of their new communities, whether their situations are temporary, semi-permanent or permanent.

**Partner with multi-stakeholder groups, including those within displaced populations and hosting communities, to develop context-appropriate durable solutions strategies to protracted displacement.**

Donor governments must:

- Quickly translate all pledges for humanitarian funding into fulfilled commitments to ensure the humanitarian community is able to meet the needs of the displaced;
- Commit multi-year and sustained support that strengthens longer-term recovery, keeps hosting communities from slipping into vulnerability and supports social cohesion efforts;
- Prioritise development grants over loans to governments and support government-provided public services to ensure they are affordable, accessible and of sufficient quality for displaced populations and host communities.

National, host governments and the humanitarian community must:

- Ensure good coordination and management of displacement responses, especially in contexts where there is a mixture of refugees and IDPs. Coordination and management should be based on vulnerability and needs (not status of displacement) with clarity of roles, decision-making rights and responsibilities;
- Involve communities in durable solutions conversations – both returnees and hosting communities – to ensure full buy-in and inclusive transitions. Include local government, faith communities, and civil society groups.

The international community must:

- Meaningfully share responsibility for hosting displaced populations by significantly increasing the number of resettlements and range of legal pathways for admission and resettlement. This includes expanding humanitarian admission programmes, temporary evacuation programmes and flexible arrangements to facilitate family reunification;
- Reject any solution that involves refusing asylum applications and effecting returns on the basis of the safe third country concept, with respect to a third country that has not:
  - Ratified and does not observe the provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol;
  - Maintains any geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

All individual cases must be examined to ensure there is no risk of chain non-refoulement, as rooted in customary international law.

## References

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<sup>i</sup> Forcibly displaced persons include but are not limited to those who are required to leave their homes due to conflict, disaster, climate change, violence or threat of violence and include refugees, internally displaced peoples, asylum seekers.

<sup>ii</sup> UNHCR, "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015" ([http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7\\_](http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7_))

<sup>iii</sup> UNICEF, "Protecting Children on the Move Briefing Note". November 2015.

([http://www.unicef.org/emergencies/files/Refugee\\_and\\_Migrant\\_Crisis\\_Advocacy\\_Web\\_12\\_11\\_15.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/emergencies/files/Refugee_and_Migrant_Crisis_Advocacy_Web_12_11_15.pdf))

<sup>iv</sup> According to UNHCR, 86% of all refugees are being hosted by developing countries. Least Developed Countries provided asylum to 4.2 million refugees. Top hosting countries include Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Islamic Republic of Iran, Ethiopia, and Jordan. (<http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7>)

<sup>v</sup> World Vision Public Policy Positions, 2013

<sup>vi</sup> World Vision Context Ready, 2015

<sup>vii</sup> "How the refugee crisis is hurting foreign aid" <http://www.irinnews.org/report/102225/how-refugee-crisis-hurting-foreign-aid>

<sup>viii</sup> Secretary General, 'One humanity: shared responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit' United Nations, 2 February 2016

<sup>ix</sup> *ibid*

<sup>x</sup> Including, but not limited to, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Optional Protocol, the nine core human rights treaties

<sup>xi</sup> Australia Refugee Council, "Economic, Civic, and Social Contributions of Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants – A Literature Review", p.7;

[http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/Contributions\\_of\\_refugees.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/Contributions_of_refugees.pdf)

<sup>xii</sup> "Education is Life-Saving" – Top Line Messages and Proof Points EiE 14<sup>th</sup>

<sup>xiii</sup> Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, Protracted Refugee Situations, Standing Committee, 30th Meeting [http://tiny.cc/UNHCR\\_ExCom](http://tiny.cc/UNHCR_ExCom)

<sup>xiv</sup> UNHRC "Framework for durable solutions for refugees and persons of concern" 2003.

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/partners/partners/3f1408764/framework-durable-solutions-refugees-persons-concern.html>

<sup>xv</sup> OCHA, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and the World Bank, 'Addressing Protracted Displacement: A Framework for Development-Humanitarian Cooperation' *Center on International Cooperation*, December 2015

[http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/addressing\\_protracted\\_displacement\\_a\\_think\\_piece\\_dec\\_2015.pdf](http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/addressing_protracted_displacement_a_think_piece_dec_2015.pdf)

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision is dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. World Vision serves all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

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