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A GLANCE AT INTERNATIONAL CHALLENGES OF REFUGEE CRISES IN THE NEW MILLENIUM

Marcela ROCHA / Eduardo Moraes SARMENTO

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intricate relationship between forced displacement and human development. By examining refugee outflows from key regions, this paper seeks to comprehend the factors driving these movements and their development implications. Employing a qualitative case study methodology, the research focuses on the five main refugee outflow countries in 2023. The paper finds that the most relevant factors that induce displacement are political violence, especially civil conflict, and climate change. Refugee emergencies have multiple aggravating elements, like economic crises, food insecurity, and infrastructure damage. Despite not identifying strong correlations between displacement and human development (measured through HDI), except for Syria, the study reveals that these emergencies are simultaneously humanitarian and developmental challenges. Repercussions are more prominent in the Global South since it is the origin and the destination of over 70% of displaced people. The findings reiterate the urgency for integrated policy responses that combine development and humanitarian efforts.

Keywords DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS, REFUGEE OUTFLOWS, FORCED DISPLACEMENT.

RESUMO

O presente estudo investiga a complexa relação entre deslocamento forçado e desenvolvimento humano. Utilizando uma metodologia qualitativa de estudo de caso, este artigo examina as saídas de refugiados de regiões-chave para buscar compreender os fatores que impulsionam estes movimentos e o seu efeito para o desenvolvimento. A investigação conclui que os fatores mais relevantes para a migração forçada são a violência política, especialmente os conflitos civis, e as alterações climáticas – agravados pelas crises económicas, a insegurança alimentar e danos nas infraestruturas. Apesar de não identificar correlações fortes entre deslocamento e desenvolvimento humano (medido através do IDH), exceto para a Síria, o estudo revela que estas emergências são simultaneamente desafios humanitários e de desenvolvimento. As repercussões são

mais proeminentes no Sul Global (a origem e o destino de mais de 70% das pessoas deslocadas). As conclusões reiteram a urgência de intervenções integradas que unam iniciativas humanitárias e de desenvolvimento.

Palavras-chave ECONOMIA DO DESENVOLVIMENTO, FLUXOS DE REFUGIADOS, DESLOCAÇÃO FORÇADA.

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Introduction

Refugee situations have become a major issue of the 21st century (Betts et al., 2017), as seen in the record levels of forced displacement worldwide (Loescher, 2021). During the past decades, countless individuals have been forcibly displaced for the most varied of reasons, many of which were not foreseen when the refugee regime was first established (Armiero & Bettini, 2023; Lischer, 2017; Madakoro, 2023; McDowell, 2014). This paper aims to investigate the relationship between forced displacement, its root causes, and human development. Considering this, the primary research questions are: (1) how has refugee outflow evolved internationally? Which regions or countries have contributed most to this situation? (2) does displacement, and its root causes, pose obstacles to human development? We also explore the following pertinent questions: (3) what are the main contributing factors to refugee outflows? (4) What has been the role of the UNHCR in this process? (5) What characteristics do refugee-sending countries share?

Comprehending factors that induce refugee situations can help advise better policy responses and humanitarian efforts to mitigate the negative repercussions and bring stability and peace to the most affected areas. Moreover, refugee movements have relevant economic implications for the origin and host nations (Choudhary, 2020), especially concerning development. Current refugee outflows can destabilize regions, fuel conflicts, and further displacement (Loescher, 2021; Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002; Weiner, 1996). This research contributes to academic knowledge by filling a gap in the existing literature and bridging refugee studies with development studies, specifically addressing refugee outflow causes through the development lens. The literature does acknowledge that development and migration, forced migration included, are connected but that policy responses remain separate (Choudhary, 2020; Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002; Zetter, 2021). There is limited awareness of the development needs and impacts of refugees, where the literature emphasizes the effects of refugee outflows to host economies and markets, such as labor, food, and housing, or demands for public services, like health and education (Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002), as well as the potential for positive

contributions that individual refugees can provide for host economies (Betts et al., 2017). Like other migratory phenomena, refugee outflows cause brain drains in their homelands since it deprives them of labor and skills (Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002). Yet, development initiatives that aim to resolve the root causes of refugee outflows are often undertaken separately from humanitarian projects that assist refugees during crises. Furthermore, by examining obstacles to human development related to refugee outflows, this research agrees with and reinforces current multidimensional approaches to development (Morgan & Bach, 2018; Thorbecke, 2019) and global goals, such as the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), further elucidating how refugee situations can be addressed in several dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. This research can also highlight lesser-known factors contributing to refugee outflows, including environmental changes and socio-economic disparities, which might be underrepresented in current discussions and policies.

A qualitative case study was conducted on the main refugee outflow countries of 2023 to ascertain an overarching pattern regarding the relationship between forced displacement and development. This research is structured as follows: first, a comprehensive literature review, on both development economics and forced migration, is explored. Second, the methodology is described and appraised. Third, the results are presented and discussed. Fifth, concluding remarks and avenues for further research are considered.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. CHALLENGES TO DEVELOPMENT

Even though development theories were already present in the works of classical economists like Adam Smith, Marx, and Engels and sociologists like Weber (Currie-Alder et al., 2014), many defend that the development doctrine¹ and the modern development field, in general, originated in the aftermath of World War II, and from the need for economic policies and theories that would help rebuild the West (Currie-Alder et al., 2014; Taylor

¹ Defined as “the accepted body of principles and knowledge within the development community at a given time” (Thorbecke, 2019, 13).

& Lybbert, 2020; Thorbecke, 2019). The study of development was also propelled by United States hegemony and its interest in economic opportunities with developing states and the Cold War (Currie-Alder et al., 2014). The decolonization of Africa and Asia in the mid-1900s and the creation of new independent states also marked the growing interest among scholars and policymakers in grasping the development process to design better development strategies and policies (Currie-Alder et al., 2014; Thorbecke, 2019). There was also the need for developed countries like France, the Netherlands, and Britain, to manage their relations with their former colonies (Currie-Alder et al., 2014). There has been a long-standing dedication towards development over the last decades, but one that has encompassed different notions, meanings, and scopes (Morgan & Bach, 2018). Many demonstrate an evolutionary trend regarding development policy strategies and theories since the 1950s, which has depended on the definition of the development process, influencing the development objectives, the state-of-the-art theoretical knowledge, and the available data systems (Thorbecke, 2019).

Going back to its early years, in the 1940s and 50s (Alacevich, 2018), development challenges were perceived as macroeconomic problems² (Morgan & Bach, 2018). Throughout the 1950s, economic growth – in terms of Gross National Product (GNP) – emerged as the primary policy objective for less developed states, with the belief that it would eliminate dualism and associated income with social inequalities (Currie-Alder et al., 2014; Thorbecke, 2019). The period's dominant view saw growth as equal to development, emphasizing the role of large-scale investment in growth, influenced by theories such as the 'big push', 'balanced growth', and 'take-off into sustained growth' (Taylor & Lybbert, 2020; Thorbecke, 2019). Development strategies focused on industrialization as the engine of growth, with import substitution policies to foster industrial growth. During the 1960s arose the idea of “planning development”, since “development did not just happen nor was it the result of simple recipes” (Morgan & Bach, 2018). Even though development had to be planned, it was still understood as a strategy for growth with standard stages (Morgan & Bach, 2018; Taylor & Lybbert, 2020). There

² Observable through growth rates, economies of scale, employment, the reconstruction of war economies, complementarities, and discontinuities (Alacevich, 2018; Morgan & Bach, 2018).

was much dispute regarding how and why previous theoretical approaches – like balanced vs. unbalanced growth – had not provided satisfactory countermeasures for underdevelopment (Alacevich, 2018). The development doctrine shifted towards economic dualism as an analytic framework, realizing the complementarity between the industrial and agricultural sectors in the development process (Thorbecke, 2019). Agriculture started being seen as an active sector rather than a passive one, emphasizing inter-sectoral linkages. Other than GNP growth, other development objectives were balance-of-payments equilibrium and employment. Development policies grew to include structural measures targeting inter-sectoral balanced growth, recognizing the agricultural sector's role in development, as well as fiscal reforms, export promotion, and foreign aid. Still, the state's key role as the agent of development – with these macroeconomic policy instruments as means of development – was barely questioned (Currie-Alder et al., 2014).

In the 1970s, the failure of the GNP-oriented strategy to address development issues in the Global South led to the re-evaluation of development objectives (Alacevich, 2018; Thorbecke, 2019). It started being acknowledged that the core traits of poor countries were fundamentally different from those of developed countries before they developed (Taylor & Lybbert, 2020) and that it called for new solutions (Currie-Alder et al., 2014). The expansion of the conceptualization of development included human and social indicators (Morgan & Bach, 2018). There were acute challenges such as rising un- and underemployment, income inequality, persistent poverty, rural-urban migration, and worsening external positions (Thorbecke, 2019). This led to the re-focusing on poverty reduction (Currie-Alder et al., 2014). Analytically, integrated rural development strategies³ gained traction, and the informal sector's role in fostering growth and employment regained focus, as did the relationship between economic and demographic variables (Thorbecke, 2019). Socioeconomic objectives, including employment and income distribution, were incorporated into investment criteria and project selection. Neo-Marxist underdevelopment and dependency theories emerged, challenging the existing power structure (Currie-Alder et al., 2014; Thorbecke, 2019). It was also during this period that different degrees of

³ Which aimed to modernize agriculture from the bottom up (Thorbecke, 2019).

development⁴ came into focus on the development agenda. With improvements in data availability – where surveys provided valuable information on employment, income, consumption, and savings patterns – development strategies were diversified (Thorbecke, 2019). There was a visible shift towards employment-focused approaches, like ‘redistribution with growth’ and ‘basic needs’⁵ (Thorbecke, 2019), and institutional theories like the new institutional economics (Taylor & Lybbert, 2020).

The 1980s saw a paradigm shift due to situations like the debt crisis in Latin America, which led to the emphasis on macroeconomic stability and structural adjustment under the leadership of the Bretton Woods Institutions (International Monetary Fund and World Bank) (Currie-Alder et al., 2014; Morgan & Bach, 2018; Thorbecke, 2019). With a greater understanding of human capital, trade, and the role of institutions, theories on development evolved (Thorbecke, 2019). New frameworks to measure poverty emerged, including Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, which argued that development should be thought of as the making of conditions that enable individuals to actualize their potential (Currie-Alder et al., 2014; Taylor & Lybbert, 2020). The three main elements of his framework are ‘functionings’⁶, ‘capabilities’⁷, and ‘agency’⁸ (Sen, 2003; Taylor & Lybbert, 2020). In this way, the development process can and should expand people’s agency and capabilities so that they can do or be things they value (Sen, 2003). The expansion of statistical systems enabled robustness in income distribution, household welfare, and poverty data (Thorbecke, 2019). Within the field of development, structural adjustment policies were widespread, emphasizing market forces and reducing government intervention. Despite the pressure to rely on private capital flows and minimize government involvement, international aid remained crucial.

4 More developed countries, less developed countries, least developed countries, etc.

5 Basic needs strategies aimed to address poverty through structural changes and redistribution, emphasizing essential services and land reform (Thorbecke, 2019).

6 Functionings are the actual things individuals can be and do.

7 Capabilities are the possible things individuals can be and do.

8 Agency is a person’s freedom to choose what he can be or do.

During the 1990s, there was a return towards poverty reduction, socioeconomic welfare, and good governance, especially after the Asian financial crisis and the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions in Eastern Europe (Currie-Alder et al., 2014; Thorbecke, 2019). This shift was associated with the growing interest in identifying institutions conducive to economic growth, as well as relevant concepts like social capital and total factor productivity growth. The factoring of good governance in the development process is derived from the earlier debates about the role of institutions in development. Research like North (1990) – and later works including North et al. (2009), Acemoglu et al. (2001; 2005), and Acemoglu & Robinson (2012) – demonstrate that institutional quality affects development, emphasizing that inclusive institutions can help foster economic growth. The 1990s saw an expansion of statistical information⁹ which provided depth into poverty and welfare dynamics (Thorbecke, 2019). The Asian Financial Crisis led to the challenging of the Washington Consensus and the re-evaluation of unrestrained capital and trade liberalization. The formal recognition of sustainable development and the combination of social dimensions alongside economic growth in this period was paramount to the progression of development economics as we perceive it today (Thorbecke, 2019). During this period also arose the need to study how economic growth “translates – or fails to translate – into human development” (UNDP, 1990). Based on the capabilities approach, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) created the Human Development Index (HDI) as an alternative measure of development by incorporating human development dimensions¹⁰ as indicators (Currie-Alder et al., 2014). The index and the UNDP’s Human Development Reports aimed to ensure that people were at the center of development policies (UNDP, 1990). Overall, the 1990s were marked by the transition in development objectives, rediscovering the human and social agenda (Morgan & Bach, 2018), as well as returning to poverty reduction (Thorbecke, 2019),

⁹ Including household expenditure, demographic and health surveys, and panel data (Thorbecke, 2019).

¹⁰ These dimensions are health (measured as life expectancy at birth), education (measured as mean years of schooling for adults and expected years of schooling for children), and income/standard of living (measured as Gross National Income [GNI] per capita adjusted for purchasing power parity) (Taylor & Lybbert, 2020).

alongside debates over the appropriate roles of the state and the market, the effectiveness of aid conditionality, and the lessons from successful development experiences such as the East Asian miracle.

The development objectives and agenda established in the 1990s persisted to the 2000s and the present, resuming a progressive track and creating global initiatives (Morgan & Bach, 2018). From the start of the New Millennium, the conceptualization of development embraced a more multi-dimensional and holistic approach, consequently recognizing its multidisciplinary nature (Thorbecke, 2019). Still, there was a visible shift towards more micro-oriented, experimental, and evidence-based research. By expanding Sen's capabilities approach, not only was it acknowledged that growth is necessary but not sufficient condition for development but also that human development (not limited to poverty reduction) should be the main development goal (Thorbecke, 2019). Human development is multi-dimensional, encompassing education, health and nutrition, information access, political regimes, and environmental sustainability. This is what led to the creation of the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 by the UN, which established measurable, universally agreed objectives for tackling extreme poverty and hunger, preventing deadly diseases, and expanding primary education for all children, among other objectives (UNDP, n.d.). The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all UN members in 2015, replaced the MDGs and served as a further commitment to the issues addressed in the MDGs and other pressing challenges, including climate change (UNDP, n.d.). The 2030 Agenda also incorporated inclusive growth strategies (in SDG 8) (United Nations, 2023), which aim to distribute the benefits of growth across society by addressing structural barriers, ensuring social inclusion, and investing in human capital (Thorbecke, 2019). Within the goal of reducing inequality within and among countries (SDG 10), when addressing safe and orderly migration (Target 7), there is only one indicator that references refugee situations – the proportion of refugees in each country of origin's population (Indicator 4), which was introduced in 2020 (Denaro & Giuffrè, 2022; United Nations, 2023). Despite the "Leave No One Behind" underlying objective – which prioritizes vulnerable groups including refugees, internally displaced, and other types of migrants – the 2030 Agenda has neglected displaced persons through the lack of acknowledgment in official SDG progress reports as well as national medium- and long-term development plans (Denaro & Giuffrè, 2022). Nonetheless, the

interconnection of all the goals, as well as their applicability to refugee situations, further demonstrates how, firstly, development is complex and entails multiple variables. Secondly, even though most progress needs to be seen in the Global South, collaboration and cooperation within the international community is paramount to the success of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

1.2. FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND REFUGEES

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – or the UN Refugee Agency – was established by the UN General Assembly after World War II (UNHCR, n.d.-a). Like its predecessors – the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the International Refugee Organization – the Agency was supposed to have a temporary mandate in resettling and aiding those displaced by the war (FitzGerald, 2023). It was tasked with supervising international conventions that protect refugees (United Nations, 1967) and safeguarding refugee rights (United Nations, 1950). Two non-European refugee groups recognized by the global refugee regime still in the post-war period were Palestinians and Koreans (FitzGerald, 2023). At the time, separate UN bodies were created to address these refugee emergencies, namely the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, and the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency. However, this led to the exclusion of these refugee groups under the UNHCR Mandate (FitzGerald, 2023). According to its Statute, the High Commissioner can adopt several measures including, promoting voluntary repatriation and refugee admission, facilitating organizations' efforts towards refugee welfare, and supporting measures that improve refugee situations through government agreements (United Nations, 1950). It is acknowledged that to address refugee situations, measures necessitate cooperation between states and the UNHCR (United Nations, 1967).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, agrees to a set of fundamental human rights that should be universally safeguarded. While not specifically tailored for refugees, it encompasses various relevant rights, including the right to life, liberty, and security (Article 3); the right to be free from inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 5); the right to equal protection before the law

without discrimination (Article 7); the right to freedom of movement and residence (Article 13); the right to seek asylum (Article 14); the right to a nationality (Article 15); among others (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, based on the essence of the UDHR, but especially on Article 14, aimed to address the 1.25 million refugees which resulted from World War II in Europe, particularly victims of the Nazi and fascist regimes (Kneebone, 2009). The 1951 Convention and, consequently, the UNHCR follow fundamental principles – non-discrimination, non-penalization, and non-refoulement¹¹ – that guide refugee protection (Bhattacharya, 2020; United Nations, 1967). The objective of the 1967 Protocol was to eliminate the temporal and geographical constraints of the 1951 Convention¹² and to urge states to adhere to its principles (United Nations, 1967). The 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants is another milestone in the global endeavor to address large refugee and migrant movements (United Nations, 2018). Not only does it reiterate the significance of responsibility-sharing and comprehensive international cooperation, but it also contributed to the creation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) (United Nations, 2018).

According to the 1951 Convention, a refugee is an individual who, for justified fears of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, affiliation to a social group, or political opinion, is not able or willing to return to their homeland (United Nations, 1967). Regional organizations, including the Organization for African Unity, in 1969, broadened this definition to include those fleeing from war or events seriously disturbing public order (Lischer, 2007; Loescher, 2021), like the case of Central and South America with the 1984 Cartagena Declaration (Loescher, 2021). Authors such as Madakoro (2023) highlight how the legal definitions of refugees only capture a fraction of the diverse dimensions of displacement, even before the 1951 Convention. Others emphasize how the term refugee has expanded beyond the Convention definition, covering individuals in need of assistance

¹¹ This principle protects refugees from being returned to a country where their life or freedom will be threatened, it is currently considered a part of customary internal law (Bhattacharya, 2020; United Nations, 1967).

¹² “Events occurring in Europe before 1 January 1951” (United Nations, 1967).

and protection, including those fleeing from violence, conflicts, and public disturbances (Loescher, 2021), those who face environmental stress (Loescher, 2021; Zetter & Morrissey, 2014), and those displaced by development initiatives (McDowell, 2014). Even though the forcibly displaced share a common experience and sense of insecurity, fear, and coercion (Madakoro, 2023); displacement has many facets and encompasses different groups of individuals, many of which do not benefit from refugee status and, consequently, do not possess the political legitimacy that enables their international protection (Lischer, 2007). Some of these include would-be refugees (such as asylum-seekers, those who have not received refugee status, and those who had their status revoked), internally displaced persons¹³ (IDPs), and stateless people¹⁴.

The experience of being a refugee is complex and entwined with shifting political, economic, and social factors (Adhikari, 2013; Madakoro, 2023). The refugee regime was first created to address mass displacement from interstate conflict; however, most refugee situations today are induced by civil conflict (Lischer, 2007). Loescher (2021) indicates that internal conflicts, ethnic cleansing, genocides and politicides, religious, cultural, and ethnic intolerance, severe socio-economic inequalities, conflict-induced famine, mass starvation, and climate change trigger most mass displacements today. Academics acknowledge that the causes of displacement are expanding (Bhattacharya, 2020) and that there is increasing concern about contributing factors such as climate change and the higher frequency of natural disasters (Armiero & Bettini, 2023; Zetter & Morrissey, 2014), state fragility and water insecurity (Betts et al., 2017), and increasing tensions and conflicts over resources (Loescher, 2021). Still, researchers like Armiero & Bettini (2023) and Zetter & Morrissey (2014) reiterate the importance of considering the environment within the context of social, economic, and political factors that induce or constrain people's decisions to migrate. Refugee crises frequently occur in unstable and conflict-prone regional clusters¹⁵, which engenders further violence, displacement, and cross-border conflict spillover (Lischer, 2014,

13 IDPs are not a new phenomenon but only started being recognized as an internationally significant issue by the UN in 1993 (Madakoro, 2023).

14 Those who do not possess a nationality of any country.

15 Referred to as "bad neighborhoods" by Weiner (1996).

2017; Weiner, 1996). It is widely defended that most current mass forced displacements are related to the increase of 'complex emergencies' that combine multiple of the factors already mentioned and are marked by medical shortages, and food insecurity (Loescher, 2021). Still, many defend that political violence¹⁶, especially genocide, politicide, civil war, and ethnic conflict cause most large-scale forced displacement, both across international borders and within the country¹⁷ (Fearon & Shaver, 2021; Lischer, 2007, 2014, 2017; Weiner, 1996).

Adapting to the evolving dynamics of conflict and the escalating challenges posed by environmental and demographic factors, the UNHCR has expanded its operational and protective efforts – even though victims of natural disasters, failed states or endangered migrants are not recognized as Convention refugees (Loescher, 2021). The UNHCR provides humanitarian assistance –food, water, shelter, and medical care– and cooperates with states to expand and monitor asylum and refugee policies and laws (UNHCR, n.d.-a). Over the years its scope began to comprise the support for refugees' return home (among other long-term solutions), IDPs, and stateless persons (Loescher, 2021; UNHCR, n.d.-a). The UNHCR is also the primary source of refugee information, providing a statistical database, reports, and other relevant information (Bhattacharya, 2020).

Most refugee populations originate from the developing world and are primarily hosted by neighboring low- and middle-income countries (Betts et al., 2017; Bhattacharya, 2020; Choudhary, 2020; UNHCR, 2023, 2024a). Consequently, refugees are frequently hosted by communities that also struggle with development challenges, including food insecurity, political instability, and limited access to basic goods and services. Furthermore, most refugees today find themselves in protracted refugee situations¹⁸, where the average length of exile is over twenty-five years (Betts et al., 2017; Choudhary, 2020; UNHCR, 2024a). Even though refugees and forced displacement are still seen as humanitarian challenges (Betts et al., 2017), they also affect development. Like other forms of migration, forced displacement deeply impacts both countries of origin and host or asylum

16 That arise from conflict, political instability, or economic crises (Lischer, 2017).

17 In the form of IDPs.

18 More than 25.000 refugees from the same country of origin that have been living in exile for over five consecutive years.

countries (Betts et al., 2017; Lischer, 2017; Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002). This leads to much debate concerning refugee policies and the implementation of durable solutions.

2. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is the data collection and analysis approach that relies largely on language- and arts-based (e.g. words and images) as primary data sources (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Tutelman & Webster, 2020). This research methodology produces descriptive data, including individuals' statements and observable behavior (van Bavel & Dessart, 2018). Still, it is not limited to these empirical materials, ranging from interviews and life stories to case studies to artifacts and visual texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Johnson et al., 2020; Tutelman & Webster, 2020). Furthermore, qualitative researchers can employ methods more typically associated with quantitative methods, like numbers, graphs, statistics, and tables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). These data types are analyzed to deepen the understanding of the research topic, based on specific experiences, observations, events, or perspectives (Johnson et al., 2020). Most frequently, this methodological approach is inductive, meaning that it builds knowledge "from the ground up", seeking patterns from observations (Nevedal et al., 2021), without imposing pre-defined structures or expectations on the insights (van Bavel & Dessart, 2018).

Many criticize qualitative methods as subjective, unsystematic, descriptive, and not very scientific (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017), as well as resource-intensive and time-consuming (or requiring a longer timeframe) (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2018; Nevedal et al., 2021). That is not to say that qualitative methods are not relevant. In fact, they generate complexity, richness, and depth in the investigation of social issues (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2018). Researchers also raise the issue of sample size, and, thus, generalizability. Because qualitative analyses are time-consuming and data-rich, usually sample sizes are smaller, especially compared to quantitative methods (Nevedal et al., 2021). Even though small sample sizes do not imply a small data quantity (Nevedal et al., 2021), it is frequently argued that findings based on these samples are not representative of the general population being investigated (Tutelman & Webster, 2020; van Bavel & Dessart,

2018). This is why qualitative researchers often rely on “transferability rather than generalizability” to demonstrate how their findings have broader applications (Tutelman & Webster, 2020). Still, some argue that small sample size is not a limitation but a trait of this type of methodology, as the data provides a deep and rich investigation of phenomena (Tutelman & Webster, 2020). These analyses explore human behavior holistically, without reducing it to limited variables (Nevedal et al., 2021; van Bavel & Dessart, 2018). Furthermore, they recognize that humans are social creatures, that social phenomena are complex and, consequently, that behavior and other variables cannot be isolated from their social context (Nevedal et al., 2021; van Bavel & Dessart, 2018). Qualitative research is significant since it brings diverse perspectives and information, contrasting quantitative methods (Nevedal et al., 2021). It can provide insights into diverse research areas (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2018; Bukve, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020; Knottnerus et al., 2020; Lanka et al., 2021; Madondo & Phiri, 2018; Nevedal et al., 2021; Tutelman & Webster, 2020), and into specific contexts as well as distinctions between them (van Bavel & Dessart, 2018). Furthermore, with the fulfillment of standards of rigor – such as peer review, triangulation, negative case analysis, and computer software – researchers can ensure the integrity, reliability, and replicability of their data analysis (Johnson et al., 2020).

This research is based on the case study methodology focusing on the main refugee outflow countries¹⁹ and uses a qualitative approach. Forced displacement and HDI data were sourced from the UNHCR Refugee Data Finder and UNDP Human Development Report Data Center, respectively.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents the results and discussion of this research, which aims to investigate the relationship between the root causes of refugee flows and development. The central research questions were: (1) How has refugee outflow evolved internationally? Which regions or countries have contributed most to this

¹⁹ As identified in UNHCR (2024a), these countries being Afghanistan, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Venezuela.

situation? (2) Does displacement, and its root causes, pose obstacles to human development? Other relevant questions addressed in this study are: (3) What are the main contributing factors to refugee outflows? (4) What has been the role of the UNHCR in this process? (5) What characteristics do refugee-sending countries share?

3.1. HISTORICAL TRENDS IN DISPLACEMENT

Before analyzing recent country-specific displacement trends, we examined UNHCR data on the historical outflow of forcibly displaced persons, to identify the most relevant analysis period and answer the first part of RQ (1) and RQ (4). Figure 1 shows that, since the establishment of the UNHCR, and its data collection on refugees, there has been a considerable, almost exponential, increase in displaced persons. The uptrend intensified in the 2000s, but especially in 2006. By the end of 2023, there were a total of 117,3 million forcibly displaced persons, of which 31,6 million were refugees under UNHCR's mandate, 6 were Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's mandate, 68,3 were IDPs, 6,9 were asylum-seekers and 5,8 of others in need of international protection (UNHCR, 2024a). It is amply recognized that the UNHCR and its volunteers provide much more than aid for crises, making large contributions to verify causes and present solutions for displacement (Choudhary, 2020). Apart from the Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's protection, the UNHCR provides assistance – be it humanitarian, legal, or bureaucratic– to over 110 million displaced persons (UNHCR, 2024a).

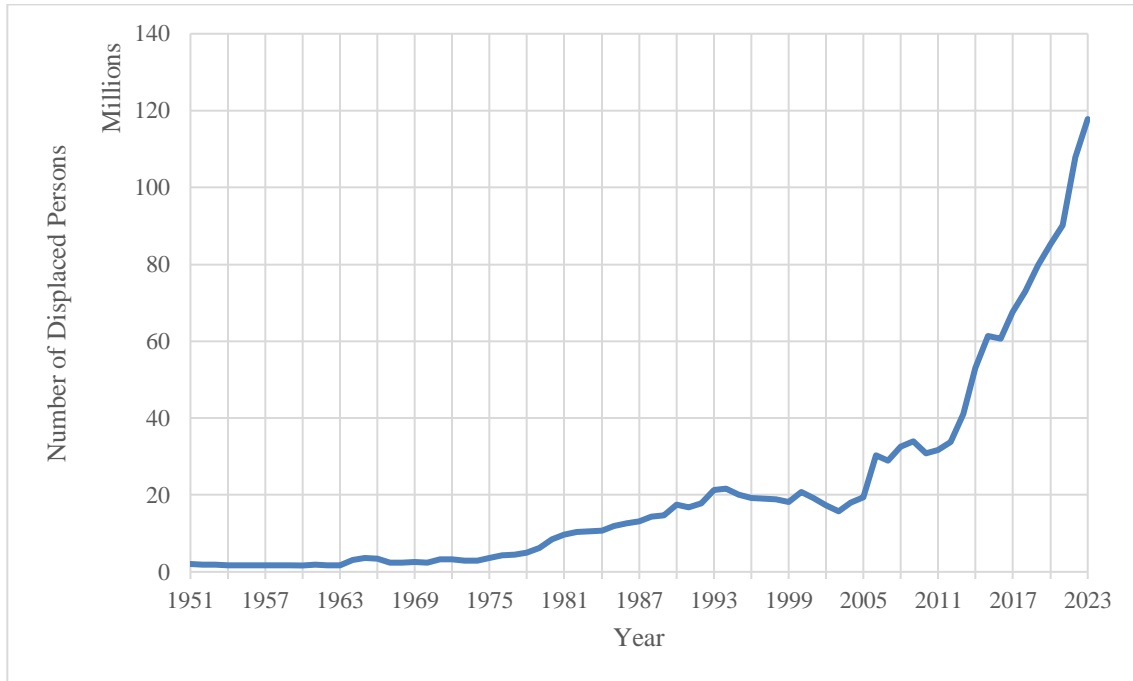


Figure 1 - Historical Evolution of Displaced Persons of Concern to the UNHCR. Source: UNHCR (2024b).

The UNHCR also prioritizes durable solutions²⁰, as a part of its mandate, the GCR and the UN Secretary-General’s Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. Some of the possible durable solutions include voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement to a third country (UNHCR, 2024a). UNHCR also improves refugee independence and self-reliance through education, skill development, and legal assistance (Choudhary, 2020). As of the end of 2023, the UNHCR has promoted the return of 6,1 million displaced persons (mostly IDPs and refugees), the resettlement of 158.700 refugees, and the confirmation and gain of citizenship for 32.200 stateless people (UNHCR, 2024a). However, these remain a possibility for a few displaced people. Furthermore, UNHCR estimates a continuous increase in forced displacement in 2024, by the end of April 2024 it is likely to be over 120 million forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2024a).

²⁰ These solutions seek to ensure the national protection of displaced persons’ civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights (UNHCR, 2024a).

From Figure 2 we observe an increase in all groups of displaced people worldwide, especially in IDPs. Notably, the sharp increase from 2005 onwards is likely due to the larger number of internally displaced. The data indicates that, currently, the largest displaced population group is IDPs – with over 60 million people – followed by Mandate Refugees – with more than 30 million people. Other than being the largest in number, IDPs are considered more vulnerable than refugees, since they are still under the protection of their homeland and are unable to benefit from international legal protection (Lischer, 2007). Many displaced population types, other than refugees, are not a new phenomenon but were only recognized by the international community recently (Madakoro, 2023). In addition, for many of these population types, data became available much later than for refugees²¹ (UNHCR, n.d.-b). It must also be considered that despite the UNHCR's best efforts to account for all displaced persons, the data may underestimate the real numbers of displaced populations due to lack of access to remote areas and conflict zones (especially in the case of IDPs), political and administrative obstacles, such as the underreport by governments, and because not all displaced are documented and officially registered with the UNHCR. This analysis will underscore more often Mandate Refugees, despite being the second largest group of displaced, due to the availability of historical data and greater accuracy to a certain extent in this population's data.

²¹ Data was first available for IDPs in 1993, for asylum-seekers in 2000, for stateless people in 2004, and other people in need of international protection in 2018.

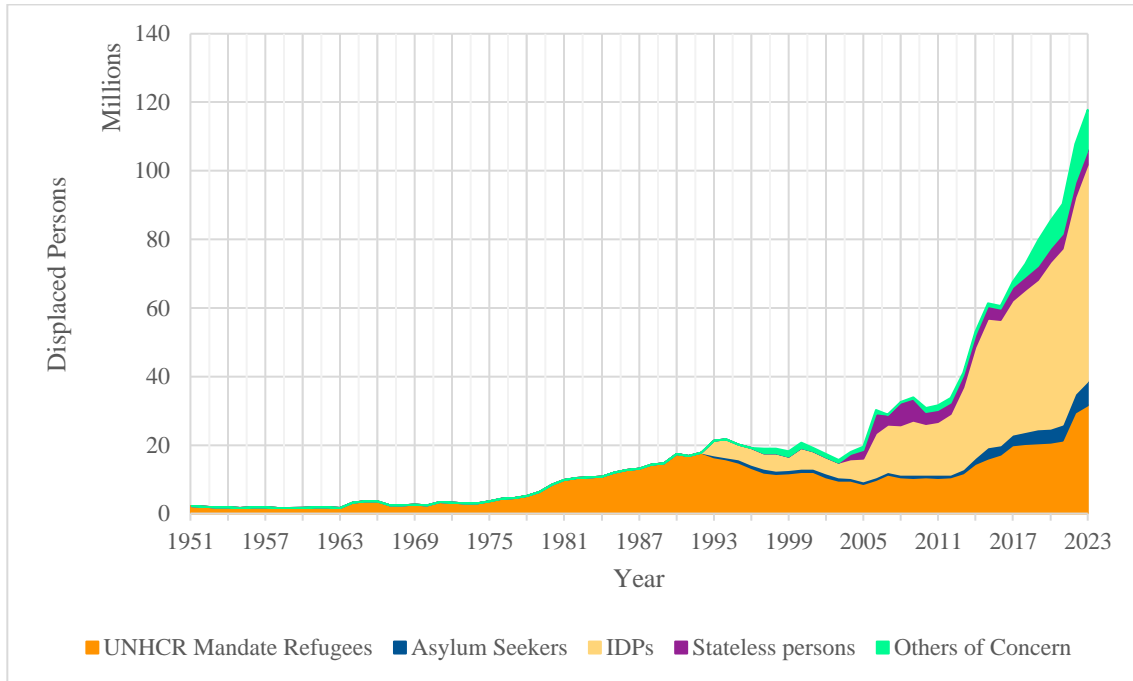


Figure 2: Total Displaced Persons of Concern to the UNHCR by category. Source: UNHCR (2024b).

3.2. MAIN REFUGEE EMERGENCY TRENDS

In this subsection, we answer the second part of RQ (1) by analyzing UNHCR displacement data on Afghanistan, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Venezuela, determining any overarching trends. Figure 3 presents the distribution of displaced persons for the five main outflow countries. Notably, Afghan displaced persons are considerable and consistent from 2000 to 2023. Due to the length of the crisis, Afghanistan has a 3,839% compound annual growth rate²² in displacement in this period, the lowest growth rate of the group. There have been displaced South Sudanese since it seceded from Sudan, increasing from 2013 on due to the civil conflict, where the displacement growth rate (2011-2023) has been 18,232%. Syrian displaced persons increased

²² Growth rates were calculated utilizing the compound annual growth rate formula ($CAGR = \left(\frac{V_{final}}{V_{begin}}\right)^{1/t} - 1$) so that results are easily comparable, accounts for compounding effects of the period and smoothens yearly variations. Henceforward, further references to growth rates imply a compound annual growth rate.

significantly after 2012 and remained consistently large after 2014, displaying a 41,702% growth rate of displacement from 2000 to 2023. Displaced Ukrainians surpassed 1 million in 2014 but only increased drastically in 2022, with the start of the war with Russia, reaching over 10 million in 2023, illustrating a 31,096% growth rate. A substantial increase in displaced Venezuelans started in 2018 and surpassed 10 million in 2023. From 2000 to 2024, Venezuela experienced a 52,547% growth rate, the highest of the main outflow countries. Forcibly displaced from these five countries have not been less than 10 million since 2012, and are, as of 2023, around 65,6 million. Several other refugee emergencies have significantly contributed to displacement in 2023 and previous years. Notably, considerable outflow from Sudan, due to the outbreak of conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces; Palestine, due to conflict and the deterioration of living conditions in the Gaza Strip; Myanmar, due to a military takeover in 2021 and escalating violence; Democratic Republic of Congo, due to the increasing hostilities in the eastern part of the country; and Somalia, due to extreme weather events and food insecurity (UNHCR, 2024a).

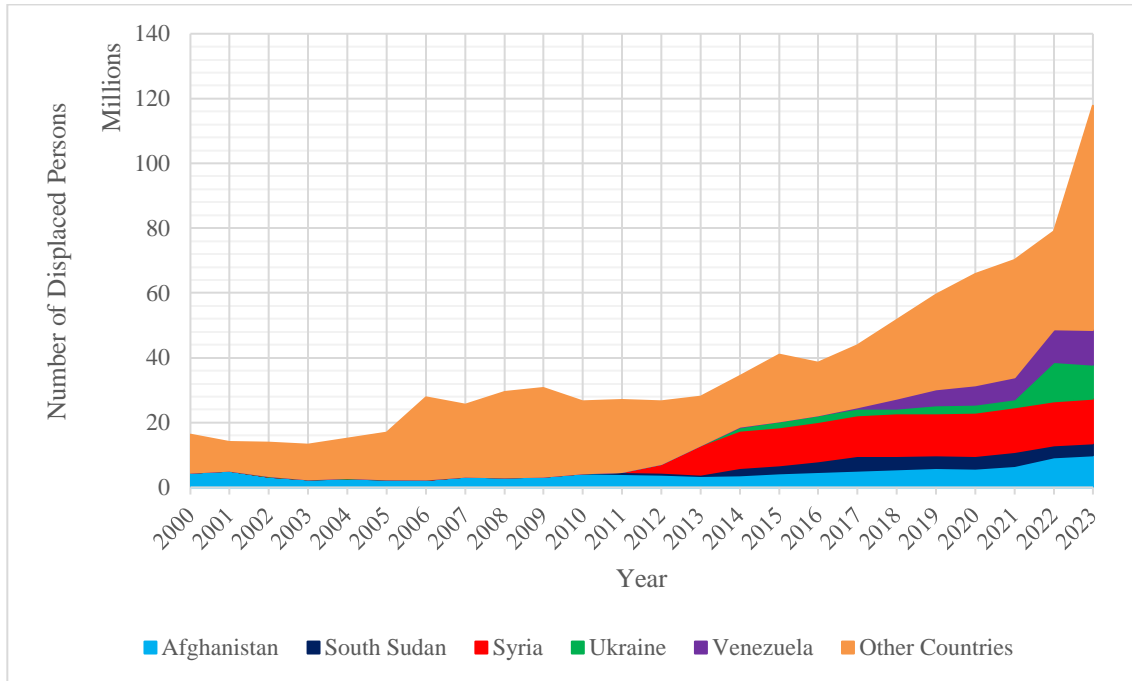


Figure 3: Displaced Persons of Concern to the UNHCR: Main Countries of Origin. Source: UNHCR (2024c).

Figure 4 illustrates the proportion of forcibly displaced people from the five main outflow countries. Until 2010, Syria, Ukraine, and Venezuela represented a minimal percentage of total displaced worldwide. Afghanistan, on the other hand, was the origin of a large proportion of total refugees since the beginning of the New Millennium, representing up to 25,8% of total forcibly displaced in 2001. South Sudan stood out only after 2013, reaching a high point of 6% in 2017. With the civil conflict in Syria, the country surpassed Afghanistan from 2013 on, representing up to 21,2% of the total displaced in 2023. Ukraine represented between 2,0 and 3,1% of the total displaced from 2014 to 2021, increasing to over 8% in 2022 and 2023 due to the war with Russia. In 2012, Venezuela represented 7,8% of the total displaced, and increased significantly in the following years, reaching 21,2% in 2023. The five main refugee outflow countries corresponded to the origin of over 30% forcibly displaced since 2013, representing 43,5% in 2023, and up to 47,2% in 2022.

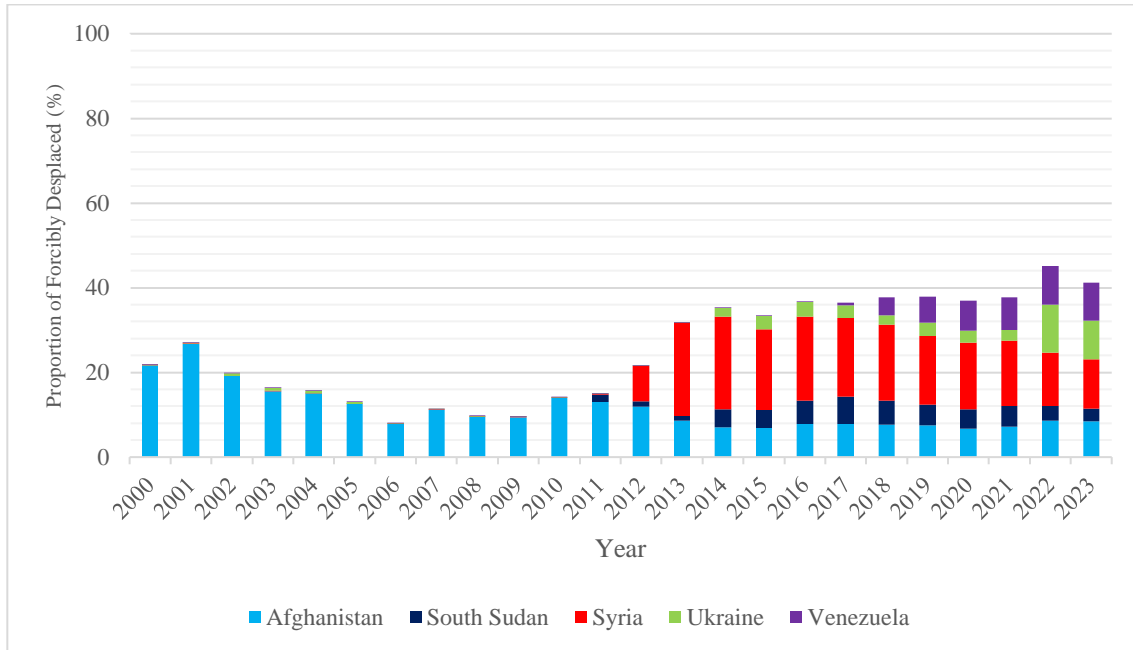


Figure 4: Proportion of Forcibly Displaced Worldwide by Country. Source: UNHCR (2024c).

Figure 5 presents the distribution of UNHCR Mandate Refugees for the five main outflow countries. Of the main refugee outflow countries, only Afghanistan is visible in the global distribution of refugees until 2011. Afghan refugees range from 2 to 3 million from 2000 to 2021, and over 6,4 million in 2023, displaying a 2,551% growth rate, the lowest of the group. South Sudanese refugees surpassed 1 million, in 2016, and reached up to 2,4 million in 2017, remaining over 2 million until 2023. From 2012 to 2023, South Sudan had a 34,635% growth rate in refugees. With the start of the Syrian emergency, refugees went from 729.011 in 2012 to 2,5 million in 2013. Syria reached its high point of 6,8 million refugees in 2021 and stood at 6,4 million in 2023. Syria experienced a 35,501% growth rate in refugees from 2000 to 2023. Between 2000 and 2021, Ukrainian refugees ranged from a couple of thousand (e.g. 5.154 in 2015) to over 320 thousand. In 2022, they drastically increased to 5,7 million and were almost 6 million in 2023. Throughout this period Ukraine displayed a 28,304% growth rate in refugees. Venezuelan refugees throughout the period remained mostly in the thousands, only reaching 347.695 refugees in 2023. Despite the smaller number of Mandate Refugees, compared to the other outflow countries, Venezuela experienced a 33,286% compound annual growth rate for refugees, 15,467% for others in

need of international protection (2018-2023), and 46,056% for others of concern to the UNHCR (2017-2023). UNHCR (2024a) reports a total of 6,1 million Venezuelan refugees. The drastic difference in values is likely due to the UNHCR's aggregation of refugees, refugee-like situations, and others in need of international protection into a single category. Starting in 2017, over 11,5 million refugees came from Afghanistan, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Venezuela. As of 2023, 21,4 million refugees come from those same countries. According to UNHCR (2024a), nearly three in four refugees came from the five countries here analyzed, and 87% of refugees came from only ten countries, data that has remained consistent from previous years.

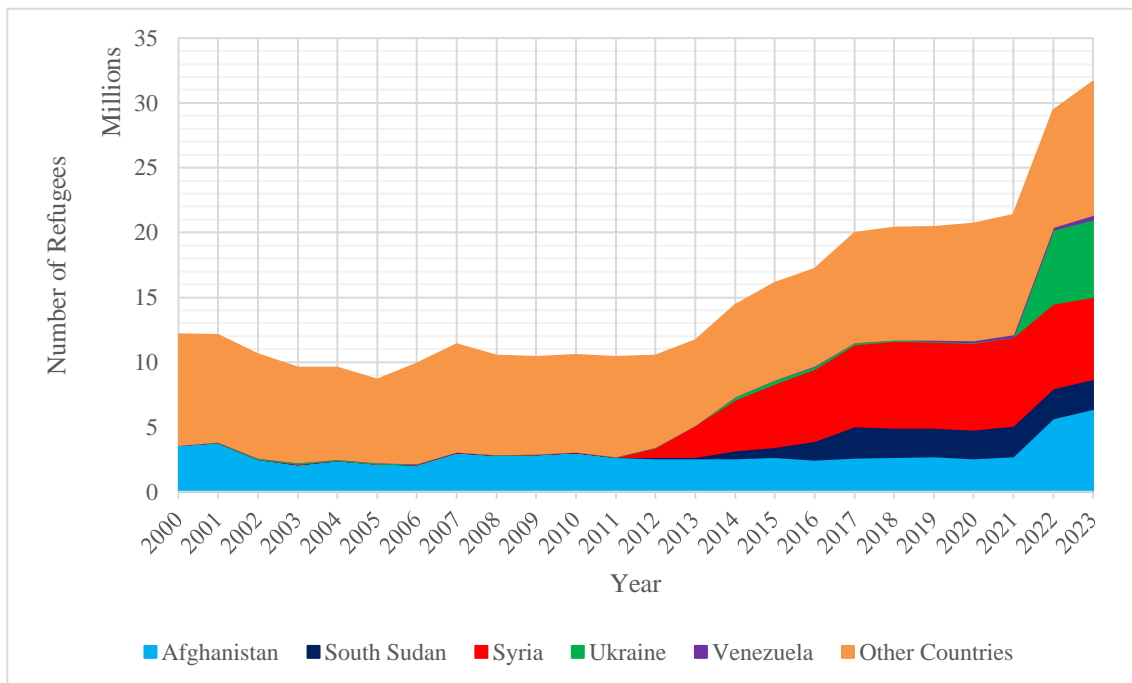


Figure 5: UNHCR Mandate Refugees: Main Countries of Origin. Source: UNHCR (2024c).

Figure 6 depicts the proportion of refugees from the five main outflow countries. Except for Afghanistan, all other countries represented a negligible proportion of refugees until 2011. From 2000 to 2013, Afghanistan was the largest refugee outflow origin of the group, representing up to 31,4% of refugees worldwide in 2001. From

2014 on, refugees from Afghanistan remained considerable, never representing less than 12%. In 2023, the country resumed as the first refugee outflow origin with 20,24%, passing Syria and Ukraine. According to UNHCR (2024a), Afghans were one in six of all UNHCR Mandate Refugees. In 2014, South Sudan represented 4,3% of total refugees, increasing to 12,2% in 2017. Additionally, the data indicates that the majority of forcibly displaced from South Sudan were IDPs: virtually 100% in 2011, 69,6% in 2015, and 34,8% in 2023. As the proportion of IDPs decreased, that of refugees increased from 19,3% in 2012 to 64,5% in 2023. Syrian refugees jumped from 6,9% of refugees worldwide in 2012, to 21,1% in 2013, and were the largest refugee outflow origin from 2015 to 2021, representing over 30%. In 2022 and 2023, they represented roughly 20% of refugees worldwide. Before 2022, Ukrainian refugees were at most 1,99% of total refugees in 2015, meaning that most forcibly displaced until the start of the conflict with Russia did not fit into the 'refugee' category and definition. In 2022 and 2023, Ukrainian refugees were 19,3% and 18,8% of refugees worldwide, respectively. Interestingly, Venezuela nearly disappears as a proportion of Mandate Refugees. That may be because the Venezuelan emergency is distinct from the other four since most individuals are not displaced due to political, ethnic, and religious persecution or conflict, and, hence, do not align with the 1951 Convention or UNHCR Mandate definition. That becomes clear when observing the Venezuela data for 2023, where Mandate Refugees represent 2,95% of all forcibly displaced, compared to 52,37% who are other people in need of international protection and 33,01% who are others of concern. The five main refugee outflow countries corresponded to over 20% Mandate Refugees since 2000, representing 67,5% refugees in 2023, and up to 69,4% in 2022.

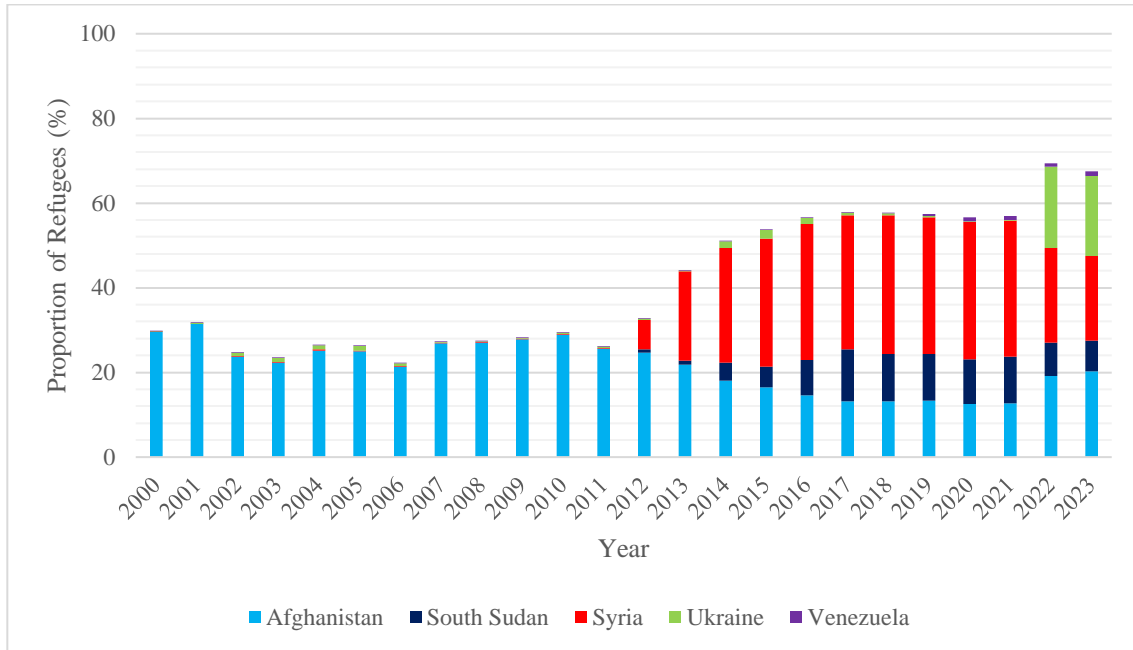


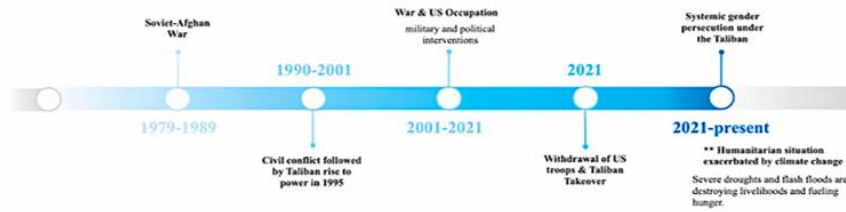
Figure 6: Proportion of Refugees Worldwide by Country. Source: UNHCR (2024c).

3.3. ROOT CAUSES OF DISPLACEMENT

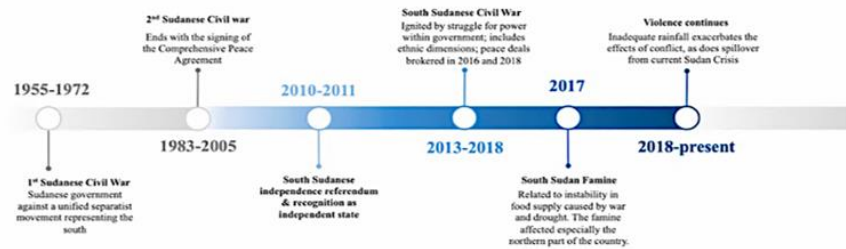
In examining the contributing factors and events reported by online media sources, we sought to address RQ (3) and (5). Figure 7 illustrates timelines for the main refugee outflow emergencies highlighting significant events for each crisis, later summarized in Table 1. Afghanistan’s refugee outflow started long before the New Millennium, often associated with the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989). Later developments, including civil conflicts, the American occupation, later withdrawal, and the return of the Taliban, have contributed to continuous displacement for over thirty years. The country also faces environmental risks associated with climate change, including flash floods and severe droughts that deteriorate the situation further. Afghanistan is also the only main outflow country to show that gender-based violence at the political level influences displacement – through the Taliban’s clear restrictions on women’s freedom and rights, forced marriages, and targeted attacks. South Sudan and its people have had a history of political violence, especially before gaining its independence from Sudan, where the First and Second Sudanese Civil Wars sought the separation of the

South. Not soon after independence, due to strife within the governing faction, a new civil conflict arose that still impacts displacement today. Unstable food supplies and famine – due to extensive conflict and severe drought – worsen the emergency. Syria’s over thirteen-year emergency was kindled by the violent repression of pro-democracy protests, which escalated quickly into a civil conflict with foreign intervention. Other factors that have exacerbated the crisis include the economic crisis and climate change – severe chronic droughts and the recent earthquake. Despite Ukraine’s refugee emergency having started more recently, with the conflict with Russia, several instances of internal tension – including pro-Russian and separatist movements – as well as territorial and resource disputes with Russia (e.g. the annexation of Crimea) have set the scene for the current situation. The Venezuelan crisis distinguishes itself from others primarily because it is the only one that does not have a larger-scale conflict. Its national income dependence on oil, tied to adverse economic conditions and a politically repressive government, has degraded living conditions and has forced people to flee. Furthermore, foreign intervention, such as the United States’ several sanctions, as well as chronic water stress have deteriorated living conditions further.

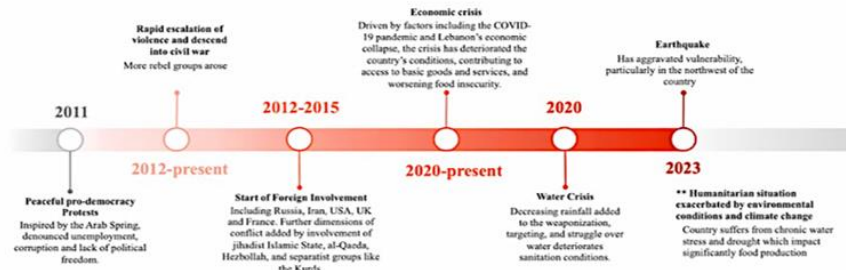
Afghanistan



South Sudan



Syria



Ukraine



Venezuela

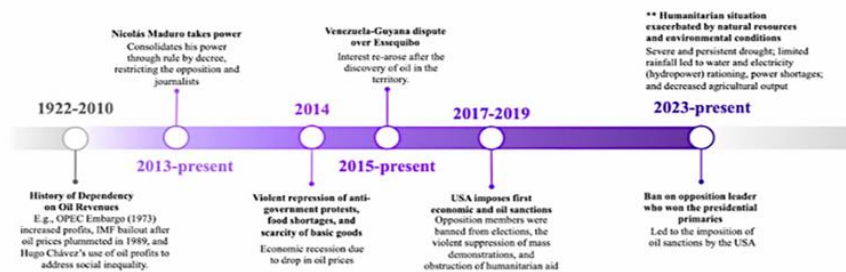


Figure 7: Causal Factor Comparative Timeline: Main Refugee Emergencies. Source: Information compiled from several sources, respectively: Concern Worldwide US. (2024, January 16). The crisis in Afghanistan, explained: Five things to know in 2024. Concern Worldwide US. <https://concernusa.org/news/afghanistan-crisis-explained/>. Concern Worldwide US. (2024, February 6). The South Sudan crisis, explained. Concern Worldwide US. <https://concernusa.org/news/south-sudan-crisis-explained/>. BBC News. (2023, May 2). Why has the Syrian war lasted 12 years? BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>. Reuters. (2022, March 1). Timeline: The events leading up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/events-leading-up-russias-invasion-ukraine-2022-02-28/>. Kiger, P. (2023, August 24). How Venezuela Fell from the Richest Country in South America into Crisis. History. <https://www.history.com/news/venezuela-chavez-maduro-crisis>.

Political violence, in any form, is a relevant push factor in displacement, being present in all main outflow countries, which support several studies (Fearon & Shaver, 2021; Lischer, 2007, 2014, 2017; Weiner, 1996). Civil conflicts, specifically, only apply to four of the main refugee outflow countries but still support studies that defend that internal conflicts are the most common cause of refugee situations today (Adhikari, 2013; Lischer, 2007, 2014; Loescher, 2021). Furthermore, environmental factors and climate change negatively impact and exacerbate displacement in almost all main refugee outflow countries. According to the Institute for Economics & Peace (2023), Afghanistan, South Sudan, Syria, and Venezuela face at least one severe ecological threat and have low levels of resilience. This coheres with several studies that stress the effects of climate change on displacement (Armiero & Bettini, 2023; Betts et al., 2017; Zetter & Morrissey, 2014), and reiterates the need for holistic approaches to solving refugee emergencies (Lischer, 2014; UNHCR, 2024a). Furthermore, the results in Figure 7 and Table 1 exemplify Loescher's (2021) 'complex emergencies', where current forms of mass displacement are caused by a combination of factors, including internal conflict, economic collapse, political instability, medical and food shortages, etc. Even though overarching causes of displacement tend to be similar,

how these causes and their effects manifest is conditional on local economic, political, cultural, and sociological characteristics (Choudhary, 2020), explaining the varying trends from country to country.

Table 1: Causal Factors in the Main Refugee Emergencies

		Afghanistan	South Sudan	Syria	Ukraine	Venezuela
Political Violence	Political repression	x	x	x	x	x
	Genocide, politicide			x		
	Civil conflict	x	x	x	x	
	Ethnic conflict		x	x		
	Inter-state conflict ²³	x		x	x	
Other forms of Violence	religious, cultural, ethnic intolerance	x	x	x		
	Gender-based violence	x				
	Tension over resources ²⁴		x		x	
Political Instability, State Fragility		x	x	x	x	x
Environmental stress ²⁵		x	x	x		x
Socio-economic stress or inequality		x	x	x	x	x
Food, Nutrition, Health ²⁶		x	x	x	x	x

Note. Summarizes the contributing factors in Figure 7. Source: Authors.

²³ Including proxy wars, anti-colonial wars and foreign intervention.

²⁴ Including the illicit mining and trading of resources and minerals used to finance conflict (also referred to as “conflict minerals”)

²⁵ Including climate change and the higher frequency of natural disasters.

²⁶ Including conflict-induced famine (and the disruption of food systems), food insecurity and malnutrition, mass starvation, and medical shortages.

3.4. DISPLACEMENT AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Examining the UNDP's complete HDI time series on the five main outflow countries and investigating the correlation between the HDI and refugee outflows, we seek to answer RQ (2). Figure 8 depicts the evolution of the main refugee outflow countries' HDI values from 2000 to 2022, along with the world and main refugee-origin countries average. Afghanistan exhibits a slight positive trend until 2019 (reaching a high point of 0,492), followed by a decrease to 0,462 in 2022, somewhat corresponding to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the later withdrawal of American troops and the Taliban takeover. South Sudan's HDI trend demonstrates a decrease which somewhat corresponds to the start of the civil conflict in 2013 and remains constant throughout the remainder of the period. In contrast, Syria's HDI trend shows a sharp and continuous decrease after 2011 (reaching a high point of 0,687) until 2022, corresponding to the start of the civil conflict. Ukraine's HDI trend was mostly positive until 2019, decreasing slightly after that. Like Syria, Venezuela's HDI trend demonstrates a sharper decline after 2013 (reaching a high point of 0,771), which corresponds to the economic collapse triggered by the fall in oil prices and the political repression used by Maduro to consolidate his power. As of 2022, all five countries have HDI scores lower than the world average (0,739), where Ukraine scores the highest (0,734). Furthermore, the difference between the main refugee outflow countries' average and the world average has been around 0,2 points.

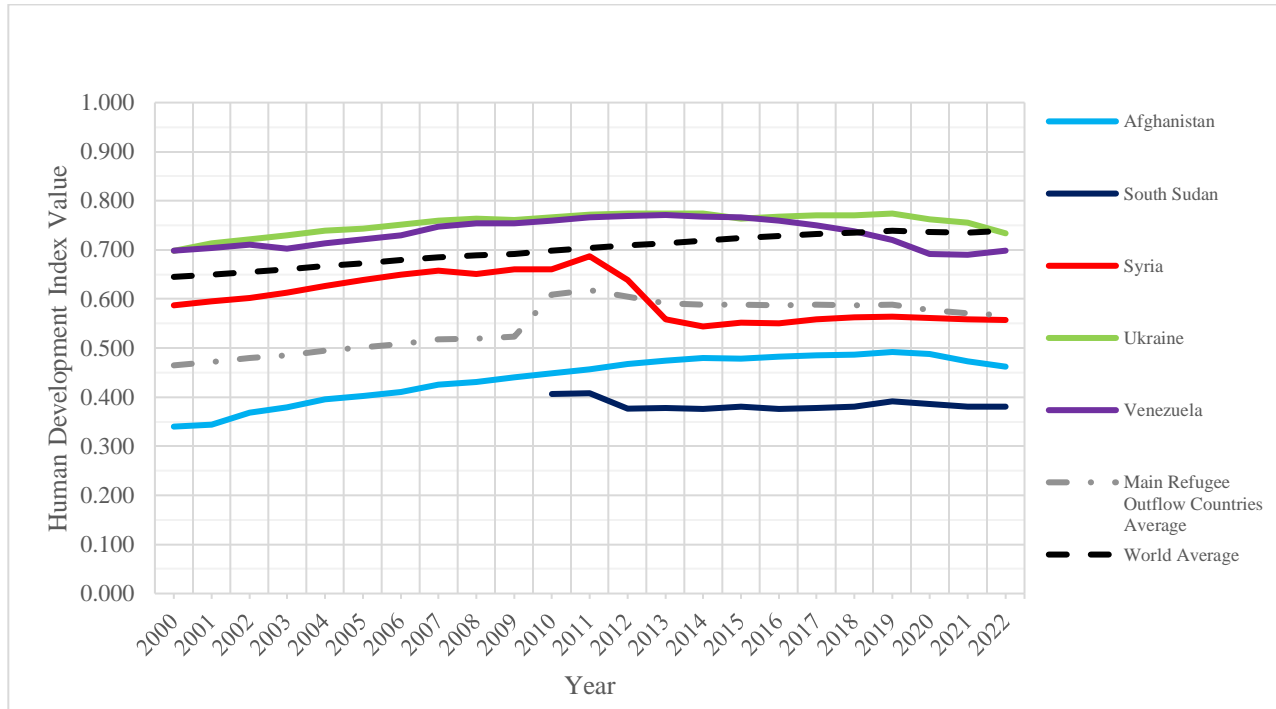


Figure 8: Human Development Index: Main Refugee Outflow Countries. Source: UNDP (2024).

Seen as developing countries are the main source of refugee-like populations, due to a higher propensity for conflict, political instability, human rights violations, economic hardship, vulnerability to climate change, and poor governance, it stands to reason that there may be a clear correlation between forced displacement and human development. Since all the common characteristics that engender displacement can negatively impact development, and all main refugee outflow countries have HDI scores lower than the world average, it can be hypothesized that there is a strong negative correlation between displacement and the human development index of the country's origin. Except for South Sudan, all countries had HDI values since 1990. Regarding displacement and refugee outflow, Afghanistan and Syria had values since 1990, Ukraine and Venezuela since 1992, and South Sudan since 2011. Hence, correlations were calculated for the available corresponding data for both variables. However, that is not the case (vide Table 2), the only country to display a moderate negative correlation ($-0,7 < r < -0,5$) for both overall forced displacement and refugee outflow was Syria. Regarding the

displacement-HDI correlation, Afghanistan and Ukraine display a positive but almost insignificant correlation ($r < 0,3$). Meanwhile, South Sudan and Venezuela have a negative but almost insignificant correlation ($-0,3 < r < 0$). Regarding the refugee-HDI correlation, Afghanistan has a weak negative correlation ($-0,5 < r < -0,3$), Ukraine has a positive but insignificant correlation, and South Sudan and Venezuela have a negative but almost insignificant correlation. The analysis reveals no specific trend regarding forced displacement and human development that can be generalized to multiple countries. Only for Syria was a clearer relationship apparent. The general weak correlation between displacement and human development can reflect the complexity of these phenomena, where multiple other factors are at play and have a greater impact.

Table 2: Correlation Coefficients: Forced Displacement and Human Development

	AFG	SSD	SYR	UKR	VEN
Displacement & HDI	0,272	-0,217	-0,564	0,178	-0,234
Refugee outflow & HDI	-0,402	-0,166	-0,586	0,011	-0,229

Source: UNDP (2024). UNHCR (2024c).

3.5. REGIONAL DYNAMICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Considering the main outflow countries here analyzed, the relevant regions are Southern Asia, East Africa, the Middle East (West Asia), Eastern Europe, and South America. Observing the totality of displacement trends in Figure 9, the regions that stand out are Central and East Africa, West, and Southern Asia especially due to the combination of mass displaced populations, conflict zones, and climate hazard risk (UNHCR, 2024a). Apart from originating from the developing world, refugee populations tend to remain near their homeland (Betts et al., 2017; Bhattacharya, 2020; Choudhary, 2020). 75% of refugee populations worldwide are hosted in low- and middle-income countries, and 69% are hosted in neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2024a). Countries suffering from refugee emergencies also frequently host neighboring displaced persons, such as Sudan, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Bhattacharya, 2020; UNHCR, 2024a). Weiner (1996) highlights the existence of geographic clusters or regions responsible for considerable refugee

outflows due to conflict and violence, which coincides with the data and analysis presented in this paper. Furthermore, roughly 66% of displaced persons (estimated 24.9 million refugees and others needing international protection) in 2023 were in protracted refugee situations (UNHCR, 2024a). Increasing refugee outflows may also be due to ‘neighborhood effects’, in which conflict spillover may frequently occur where ethnic groups are divided by international borders (Weiner, 1996).

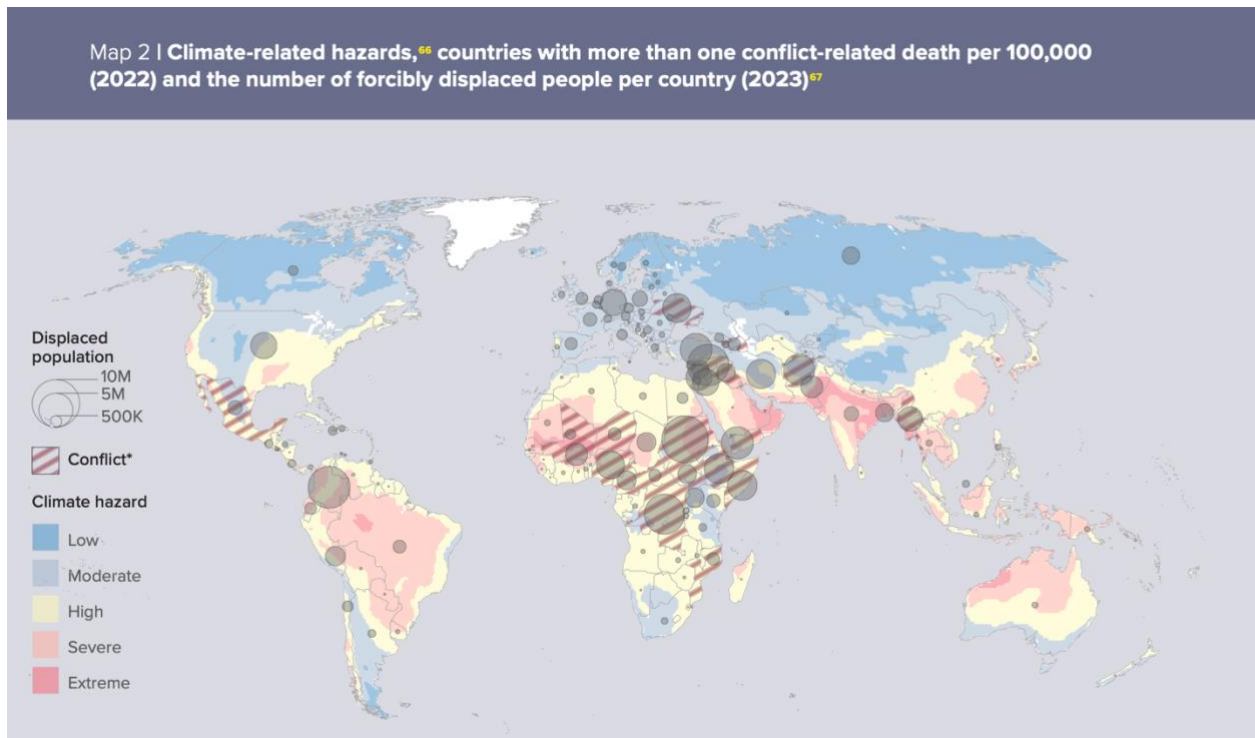


Figure 9: Global Distribution of Climate Hazards, Conflict and Displacement. Source: UNHCR (2024a).

Like other forms of migration, forced displacement has negative consequences for countries of origin including the loss of skills, labor, and capital (Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002). Even though migration enables remittances for those refugees who find employment, the benefits vary according to the circumstances. Remittances can benefit families and communities during crises and support post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation. However, these usually have limited reach, and can, even if unintentionally, perpetuate crises by providing funds for armed conflicts (Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002). Refugee outflow countries are often characterized by severe

conflicts, natural or human-induced disasters and crises, acute shortages, and lack of resources (Choudhary, 2020), which negatively impacts the countries' security and stability, health, employment opportunities, livelihoods, leads to the destruction of infrastructures (such as hospitals, homes, and schools), environmental degradation and lower agricultural production, food insecurity, and malnutrition. Consequently, these countries struggle to provide an adequate and conducive environment for growth and development, where these communities cannot thrive because they must instead take care of issues that severely degrade their living conditions. Thus, these traits pose considerable barriers to human development and often hamper long-term goals of productivity and innovation.

Host countries frequently convey worry regarding the “destabilizing effects of sizeable refugee populations” (Lischer, 2017). Not only are political leaders concerned about negative public opinion associated with large refugee inflows, but also how refugee emergencies can aggravate existing tensions within the host country. Furthermore, the host states bearing the heaviest burden of refugee populations often lack assistance from wealthier states and struggle to address the needs of their citizens and displaced people (Lischer, 2017). The unequal distribution of hosting refugees is further attested in recent UNHCR reports. Firstly, the countries hosting the largest refugee and refugee-like populations are Iran (3,8 million), followed by Türkiye (3,3 million), Colombia (2,9 million), Germany (2,6 million), and Pakistan (2 million) (UNHCR, 2024a). Nearly all those hosted in Iran and Pakistan are Afghans, while almost all refugees in Türkiye are Syrians. During the last decade, refugees have mostly increased in number in these main host countries. Secondly, the UNHCR adjusted the Gini Coefficient to assess responsibility- and burden-sharing among refugee-hosting countries. UNHCR (2024a) found a significant imbalance in the distribution of refugees, where a handful of poor countries bear much of the responsibility of hosting refugees. In fact, 80% of the world's refugees were hosted by countries that jointly produce less than 20% of the world's income (UNHCR, 2024a). Even though mass arrivals of displaced persons can have short-term detrimental effects on asylum countries, such as straining public services, creating labor

market pressures, and infrastructure overload, it can have positive long-term effects, associated with human, social, and economic capital (Betts et al., 2017; Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002).

Current global approaches to refugee policies rely, mostly, on the 2016 New York Declaration, the CRRF, and the GCR, in which the main goals are to alleviate pressures on host countries, improve refugee self-reliance, broaden access to third-country solutions, and improve origin countries' condition to provide a safe and dignified return (Denaro & Giuffre, 2022; United Nations, 2018). In parallel, several of the SDGs and their respective targets, despite not addressing directly forced migration, are still relevant and conceptually aligned with the GCR. The inclusion of indicator 10.7.4 supposedly ensures refugees are not excluded in accomplishing the 2030 Agenda (Denaro & Giuffre, 2022). Despite the lack of comparability between SDG and GCR indicators and data, they reiterate the importance of international cooperation and collaboration to address forced displacement. Refugee situations call for, at least initially, a humanitarian response to provide basic subsistence and security (Lischer, 2017). However, it can lead to long-term dependency and can legitimize many policies that socially exclude refugees (Betts et al., 2017). Loescher (2021) argues that the current refugee regime is not equipped to respond to all the drivers of displacement. Since it often does not have the authority to intervene in matters of governance, peace, security, development, and justice, it relies on other actors to affect change - like regional organizations, the United Nations Security Council, and development actors. That is why both academics and international actors defend holistic responses to solve protracted refugee situations, by providing the necessary humanitarian aid while addressing the root causes of displacement and not simply restricting refugee flows (Betts et al., 2017; Lischer, 2017; Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002; UNHCR, 2024a; Zetter, 2021).

As seen, refugee emergencies occur more frequently in high-conflict and unstable regions, engendering further violence and displacement (Lischer, 2017; Weiner, 1996). And, like how each emergency occurs due to a specific combination of factors, it is argued that there is no single solution to solve all types of forced displacement. Still, analyzing common traits among emergencies can be beneficial to comprehend which factors of displacement

are more frequent and must be underscored. Due to the prominence of climate change in current emergencies, to achieve durable solutions, approaches will need to integrate the strengthening of ecological adaptive capacities and provide “climate resilient” access to basic goods and services with general stability and peace responses (UNHCR, 2024a). Hence, to efficiently resolve crises, responses must be tailored and must address: the traditional and new causes of displacement, the regional security environment, and the circumstances of exile (Lischer, 2014, 2017; Loescher, 2021). Betts et al. (2017), Nyberg-Sørensen et al. (2002), and (Zetter, 2021) highlight that approaches to refugees should focus on their empowerment and self-reliance, acknowledging that they have capacities – skills, talents, and aspirations – that can simultaneously benefit refugees, donor countries and contribute economically and socio-culturally to host communities. Even though fostering self-reliance through development assistance can be a way to overcome protracted displacement and lead to win-win situations, most host governments refrain from such resource reallocations and perceive self-reliance to be equivalent to permanent local integration (Betts et al., 2017).

Hence, several authors defend the integration of relief and development in the efficiency of durable solutions (Betts et al., 2017; Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002), especially considering how the current development agenda regards development as multidimensional (Morgan & Bach, 2018; Thorbecke, 2019). However, development aid is often performance-based, where it goes to relatively well-performing countries²⁷ that need it the least (Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002). Whereas trouble spots²⁸ receive mostly humanitarian aid, being too unstable to receive development assistance, and countries in strained situations²⁹ receive reduced development assistance. Performance-based aid allocation hinders the prevention of such emergencies because humanitarian assistance – which by default is delivered after a crisis starts – cannot prevent or stop a conflict.

²⁷ Poor developing nations with stable economies and institutions.

²⁸ Developing countries in political, economic, and social emergencies, including failed states and conflict-affected countries.

²⁹ Developing countries that face political turmoil and economic setbacks but are not yet in crisis.

Conclusions

This paper provided an overview of the historical progression of refugee outflows since the establishment of the UNHCR to lay the groundwork for the case study of the countries that have contributed most to displacement today. The case study also investigated the factors that most contribute to these refugee emergencies, highlighting not only the combination of several factors (Loescher, 2021) but also the importance of political violence, especially civil conflicts (Adhikari, 2013; Fearon & Shaver, 2020; Lischer, 2017), and climate change (Armiero & Bettini, 2023; Betts et al., 2017; Zetter & Morrissey, 2014) in current crises. Accordingly, it was argued that displacement and its root causes hamper human development, especially in origin countries. This is observable in these countries' common traits, which range from negative health outcomes to limited employment opportunities and economic hardship to environmental degradation. The impact on host communities is subject to debate since there are negative short-term economic effects, including labor market pressures, straining public services, and creating or aggravating tensions within the host community (Lischer, 2017). While at the individual level, many argue that refugees and displaced persons must be recognized for more than their vulnerabilities since they can provide economic, social, and human capital to host countries (Betts et al., 2017; Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002). Still, it was also accentuated that the unequal distribution of hosting refugees among the international community leads neighboring lower-income countries to bear the heaviest burden.

Despite no confirmation of an overarching trend concerning the correlation between forced displacement and human development, except for Syria, the findings suggest the need for a more comprehensive approach to analyzing this relationship and understanding the uniqueness of each emergency. Causes of displacement cannot be investigated in isolation, since a better understanding of the interaction between root causes, regional environment, and displacement can inspire new holistic solutions and end the cycle of displacement (Lischer, 2017; Loescher, 2021; UNHCR, 2024a). To efficiently address forced migration and its causes, different

types of international aid – humanitarian and development – must be used in unison, considering they serve distinct purposes. Additionally, the difficulties related to performance-based aid allocation must be recognized when implementing holistic responses. These findings support current goals in refugee policies – clear in the 2016 New York Declaration, the CRRF, and the GCR (Denaro & Giuffre, 2022; United Nations, 2018) – as well as overarching development goals like the UN's SDGs (Thorbecke, 2019; United Nations, 2023). It is imperative to cooperate and collaborate to improve burden – and responsibility – sharing among the international community and truly leave no one behind.

Building on this study, future research should delve deeper into mapping the factors that most directly influence crisis countries' HDI, pinpointing key target areas to improve these communities' capacities, resilience, and development. Future studies can address the singularities – cultural, contextual, or otherwise – of a given refugee-origin country to guide the development of holistic interventions.

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