



SECOND RESEARCH CONFERENCE ON FORCED DISPLACEMENT

January 20-22, 2022

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Executive Summary

The **Second Research Conference on Forced Displacement** featured academic presentations, keynote speeches and policy discussions. The format favored a dialogue between participants, with the aim of facilitating their interaction and the intellectual cross-fertilization of their respective areas of work.

The academic presentations focused on a number of salient themes, and priority was given to some topics which are often not at the center of the academic and policy debates. This is the case of **Internally Displaced People (IDPs)**, who represent the majority of those forcibly displaced, but whose socioeconomic status and living conditions are still to be investigated and understood fully. Similarly, the Conference gave space to presentations on intentions to return, and the attitudes towards those forcibly displaced in different geographical and social contexts. The academic program also provided insights into the effects of cash transfers; the impact of forced displacement on both host and origin countries; and innovations in data collection methods, a topic which has gained relevance vis-a-vis the impact of COVID-19 on traditional survey methods.

Moreover, some academic contributions focused on the impact of policies implemented in different countries and affecting the livelihoods of forcibly displaced populations. These presentations offered an immediate link between the academic program and the policy conversations developed throughout the Conference. During the event, several participants spoke on **the relationship between research and policy measures**. In particular, much attention was devoted to the way in which research has informed (or can inform) policies and interventions to benefit those forcibly displaced. A policy panel was dedicated to this topic, and the keynote speakers were also able to offer their reflections on this issue throughout their speeches.

The Conference also offered an opportunity to reflect on those thematic and geographical areas which, despite a recent explosion of socioeconomic studies, are still neglected by research actors. Four themes emerged as particularly urgent:

- **Stateless people**;
- **Sub-Saharan Africa**, particularly the Sahel, Sudan, South Sudan and DRC, recognizing both the scale and complexity of the forced displacement situation;
- **Displaced children**, whether early childhood or adolescents; and
- **“Service delivery”**, including the question of integrating displaced populations into national systems rather than creating parallel mechanisms.

There was also a general sense that researchers, practitioners and policymakers should (jointly) do more to create protocols and give guidance on the **ethical considerations** associated with research on forced displacement.

Overall, a number of lessons learnt emerged, that we hope can inform both the future editions of the Research Conference, and, importantly, new and innovative research programs. The Joint Data Center will continue working with partners to ensure uptake by decision-makers and practitioners. We will be disseminating research findings and take-aways by supporting specific policy and programming dialogues with host countries, and we will ensure the data

and analysis are made “digestible” for policymakers, including by organizing seminars, publishing blogs and disseminating the material using JDC’s existing knowledge products.

Introduction

The [Second Research Conference on Forced Displacement](#), held virtually from January 20-22, 2022, brought together some 500 academics and development practitioners from all over the world to discuss the latest socioeconomic research on forced displacement, and to draw attention to important findings that have direct relevance for policymakers, World Bank and UNHCR operations, and beyond.

The conference was organized by the [World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement](#) (JDC)¹ in partnership with the [School of Economics at Universidad de Los Andes](#), and the World Bank's [Development Research Group](#).

The conference featured a rich academic program of 24 papers, selected from over 150 submissions. Priority was given to those papers that tackled interesting and original research questions, while adopting robust, and often innovative, analytical methods. The presentations at the conference covered diverse topics such as the impact of forced displacement on the displaced and host communities, attitudes toward the forcibly displaced, and innovations in data collection.

Given the relative dearth of dedicated research on internally displaced people (IDPs), the conference focused particular attention on emerging research on internal displacement, with a view to stimulating further data collection and research on this relatively understudied population. Emphasis was also given to the linkages between research and policy, with a lively panel discussion on the role that research plays in informing and shaping policy interventions on forced displacement. Keynote speakers at the conference included Edward Miguel and Ana María Ibáñez, who reflected on major research questions in forced displacement and lessons learned from their own research.

Recording of all the sessions are available on [the event page](#).

¹ The JDC is a collaboration between the World Bank and UNHCR established in 2019 to stimulate the collection, analysis, dissemination, and use of data about the forcibly displaced and their host communities.

Themes

Internal displacement

Internal displacement still receives less attention by the research community than what the scale and magnitude of the challenge warrants, and consequently IDPs were a particular focus for the conference.

The conference featured a keynote presentation by Ana María Ibáñez on the lessons learned from Colombia's response to its large, highly dispersed IDP population. Around 9.2 million people are officially recognized as victims of internal conflict, of which 80 percent (around 8 million people) are IDPs. This has led to a rich, 30-year experience of crafting policies aimed at protecting the IDP population.

Ibáñez et al (2022) reviews the response of the Colombian government, policymakers, and researchers to protect IDPs, and to highlight lessons learned that can inform policy responses in other countries. The authors highlight some of the remarkable achievements that have been made, including: (a) legal recognition of IDPs as victims; (b) a legal obligation of government to compensate IDPs through land restitutions and indemnities, which have had a large and potentially persistent effect on socioeconomic outcomes for IDPs and their children; (c) a government registry for IDPs, which has enabled the identification of IDPs and assessment of their needs; (d) special programs for IDPs rather than solely preferential access to existing government programs, which have improved the lives of IDPs; and (e) the design of institutional architecture enabled by legislation. The Colombian government's response has evolved over many years through trial and error, and lessons can also be learned from some of the missteps along the way, including: (i) overly ambitious early legislation, which raised expectations and increased frustrations among IDPs; (ii) the long time taken to define the criteria to cease the special protection of IDPs, and the introduction of overly complex criteria; (iii) inadequate efforts to address the drivers of displacement, which has continued to occur; and (iv) the role of politics in decision making.

Other presentations covered a range of topics and contexts, including identity and altruism in Syria, social cohesion between IDPs and residents in Afghanistan, early marriage among displaced women in Indonesia, and human capital in Mozambique.

[Hartman et al \(2022\)](#) explore **whether a shared experience of violence during the Syrian civil war increases empathetic concern**, which can transcend ethnic and religious identity, and increases altruistic behavior towards both ingroup and outgroup others. Consistent with earlier work in Liberia, they find that individuals who experience high levels of violence and displacement are more willing to host IDPs, and are willing to extend their generosity across intergroup boundaries. However, in the case of Syria, altruism born of suffering is unlikely to extend to all outgroups, especially those associated with rival parties in the conflict.

A paper by Zhou and Lyall (2020), presented by Yang-Yang Zhou, explores **whether prolonged social contact can reduce local resident's negative attitudes towards IDPs in Afghanistan**. IDPs in Afghanistan face various forms of discrimination, harassment, social exclusion, and difficulties accessing public services. The authors study the effects of extended contact between IDPs and residents during a vocational training program implemented by Mercy Corps in Kandahar. They did not find any effect on local resident's attitudes towards IDPs, which suggests that it may be difficult to change attitudes through intergroup contact in

settings with active conflict.

A paper by Blanco (2020) finds that **displacement accelerates the timing of marriage for young, displaced women in Indonesia**, especially for women who adhere to traditional marriage customs. The payment of a bride price (a payment from the groom's family to the bride's family) or matrilineal traditions (the expectation that a husband joins his wife's family's community) create financial incentives for early marriage, by enabling households to smooth their consumption or acquire a new income earner. Early marriage may also provide a quick way to integrate into the local population, thereby increasing a household's socioeconomic network. Preliminary results also show that unconditional cash transfers may mitigate the effect of displacement on marriage timing, especially for women whose parents receive a bride price when they marry. This is an important finding, because early marriage has been shown to negatively and persistently affect the educational attainment, fertility, and empowerment of women, as well as the socioeconomic and health outcomes of women and their children.

Finally, a paper by Chiovelli et al (2021), presented by Sandra Sequeira, investigates **whether displacement paths affect investments in human capital and long-term welfare of IDPs**. They draw on data collected five years after the Mozambican civil war (1977-1992) to reconstruct displacement trajectories for 12 million people, identifying "non-movers", IDPs who moved to rural and urban areas, and refugees. To address problems of endogeneity and selection, they compare the different displacement trajectories of siblings separated during the war. They find large, systematic variation in schooling and employment across siblings with different displacement trajectories, with children moving from rural to urban areas experiencing the biggest increase in human capital investment. However, IDPs exhibit significantly lower social/civic capital and have poorer mental health, even three decades after the war ended.

Several policy implications emerged from these presentations and subsequent discussions:

- **Policies in response to internal displacement need to move beyond humanitarian aid to development solutions.** Governments need to develop comprehensive policy, legal and institutional frameworks to ensure the protection of IDPs. There isn't a one-size-fit approach to the integration of IDPs within host communities, and context matters.
- **Governments need to implement evidence-based policies and programs to promote the recovery of economic, social, and psychological capacities of IDPs.** Policies and programs need to account for the multi-dimensional asset loss of IDPs and incorporate complementarities between programs, for example labor training coupled with psychosocial support.
- **Being overly ambitious may set implausible targets, hamper the credibility of government, and frustrate victims.**
- **Addressing the needs of IDPs can be a politically contentious issue.**
- **More investments should be made in conflict prevention and mitigation measures.**

Returnees

Four papers presented at the conference shed light on the factors affecting refugees' decisions about if and when to return to their home countries, and the impact of return refugee flows on countries of origin.

A paper by Alrababa'h et al (2021), presented by Daniel Masterson, investigates the **factors that affect refugees' intentions and preparations to return home, looking at the specific case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon**. One striking insight from the data is that, while two thirds of Syrian refugees in Lebanon intend to return to Syria at some point, a third never intend to return home. The authors show that conditions in a refugee's home country are the primary drivers of return intentions. Refugees' decisions are influenced primarily by conditions in Syria: safety and security; economic prospects; availability of public services; and networks of family and friends. Confidence in information is also important, as several drivers of return only impact intentions among people who have high confidence in their information. In contrast, the conditions in refugee-hosting countries—so-called “push” factors—play a minimal role in shaping return intentions. The authors conclude that even in the face of hostility and poor living conditions in host countries, refugees are unlikely to return unless the security situation at home improves significantly.

A keynote presentation by Edward Miguel, outlined some **early evidence from the Syrian Refugee Life Study (S-RLS), which aims to collect and analyze novel longitudinal panel data, covering a representative sample of the Syrian refugee population in Jordan, to expand understanding of how policies and “shocks” impact their life outcomes**. Early evidence from the study reveals: (a) Syrian refugees in Jordan suffer from very high rates of depression (61 percent), and children of depressed parents appear to have worse socio-emotional outcomes than children on average; (b) there is social integration of Syrian refugee children—the majority have Jordanian playmates and share recreational spaces with Jordanian children—but there is still a sizable share that don't integrate, suggesting the possibility of social exclusion; (c) the vast majority of refugees (87 percent) do not intend to return to Syria before the conflict is resolved, and only half of respondents (54 percent) intend to return to Syria even after the Syrian conflict ends—with major implications for regional public policy and political economy.

What happens when refugees return home?

A paper by Bahar et al (2020) highlights the **importance of returning refugees for post-war reconstruction in countries of origin**. The authors find that refugees returning from Germany to the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s increased export performance. The results are consistent with industry-level productivity shifts responding to returning refugees bringing expertise they gained while working in asylum countries. The results are driven by those returning refugees who are more likely to transfer knowledge, technologies, and best practices, that is, skilled professionals, people performing analytical and cognitive tasks, people in supervisory roles, people who are working for high-paying firms, and people who experienced fast wage growth in Germany.

Repatriation of refugees involves the reencounter of groups that were separated for many years and often decades. This process can lead to the reestablishment of old societal divisions or the creation of new ones. A paper by Ruiz and Vargas-Silva (2022), presented by Isabel Ruiz, examines the **impact of refugees forced to return from Tanzania on social cohesion in their communities of return in Burundi**. The authors find that, in this context, returning refugees led to lower measures of social cohesion in their communities of return. There were stronger negative effects on social cohesion in communities that were less ethnically diverse, had less land availability, and where negative attitudes towards refugees were more common.

These papers suggest several policy implications:

- **Policies that make life difficult for refugees in host countries will not make refugees more likely to return home** but will increase immiseration. Similarly, supporting refugees in host countries will not make them less likely to return, but can improve their wellbeing.
- **Supporting improvements in conditions in refugees' place of origin is essential for increasing return movements.** Credible information about conditions in countries of origin may also increase return movements.
- **Returning refugees can play a huge role in the post-conflict reconstruction of their home countries by driving productivity gains from technology and knowledge diffusion.** This highlights the importance of supporting the integration of refugees in host labor markets, where they can gain expertise that can subsequently drive growth in their home country economies.
- **The process of out-migration and return could lead to new divisions in society depending on where individuals were located during the conflict,** which could supersede and get mixed with previous societal divisions.
- **A sizeable share of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan do not intend to return to Syria, even when the conflict is resolved,** which has implications for both host and origin countries in terms of demographics, domestic public policy, domestic political economy, and foreign policy.

Impacts of refugee flows on host, transit, and origin countries

Academia has generated a growing body of evidence on the short-, medium-, and long-term impacts of hosting refugees, as summarized in several issues of [JDC's Quarterly Digests](#).

Two papers presented at the conference demonstrate that refugee flows can generate substantial economic benefits for both host and origin countries.

A paper by Lombardo and Panalozza-Pacheco (2022), presented by Carlo Lombardo, investigates the **effect of Venezuelan migration on the export performance of Colombian manufacturing firms**. The authors find that Venezuelan migrants, who tend to be more skilled than Colombian nationals, improved Colombian manufacturing firms' export performance, provided these firms already had exporting experience. The effect was stronger for exports to high-income countries of the OECD (mainly North America) and for smaller firms (that exported less before the inflow of Venezuelans). The authors attribute these effects to a decrease in wages, particularly for skilled blue-collar workers, which allowed firms to upgrade the skills of their workforce by hiring workers more compatible with export markets.

A paper by [Mayda et al \(2022\)](#), presented by Anna-Maria Mayda, examines **the causal effect of refugees resettled in the United State (US) on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows** from the US to refugees' countries of origin, and study the particular case of Vietnamese 'boat people' who arrived in the US in 1975. The authors find that refugee inflows significantly increase FDI to refugees' countries of origin 15 years later, across all measures of FDI (flows, projects, and jobs), and that these increases exceed corresponding estimates in the related literature on the impact of economic migrants on outward FDI flows. There is substantial heterogeneity, however, across countries of origin, with the largest impact on FDI for former Soviet Union countries, the former Yugoslavia, and Vietnam. Additionally, the positive impact of refugees and FDI flows are greater in countries of origin with greater political stability and are smaller in countries of origin which are politically unstable. The Vietnamese case study

provides causal evidence that Vietnamese refugees fostered FDI to their home region, while national domestic reforms in Vietnam amplified the positive FDI-creating effects of the overseas Vietnamese diaspora.

However, economic benefits arising in host and origin countries do not necessarily accrue in transit countries, where large, poorly managed flows of transiting migrants can have negative effects on trust in government institutions and attitudes towards migrants, with detrimental effects on entrepreneurial activity. These issues are explored in a paper by Ajzenman et al (2020), presented by Sergei Guriev, which examines the effect of mass refugee flows on the native population in 18 transit countries in Central and Eastern Europe during the 2015/16 European migration crisis. The authors find that exposure of the native population to transit migration reduced entrepreneurial activity, likely due to decreased trust in government, increased perception of political instability, decreased confidence in law and order, and decreased willingness to take risks. The authors rule out other mechanisms including changes in economic activity, changes in labor market outcomes (employment, unemployment), and demographic changes due to selective outmigration.

Finally, a paper by Knight and Tribin (2020), presented by Ana Maria Tribin, found that, following the mass inflows of Venezuelan migrants, **violent crime increased in Colombian municipalities close to the border, driven by crimes against Venezuelan migrants rather than crimes against Colombians**. The authors suggest a number of possible mechanisms driving these results including: (a) the routes from Venezuela to Colombia pass through dangerous areas, increasing the chances that migrants come into contact with violent actors; (b) undocumented migrants disproportionately work in high-risk jobs, increasing their exposure to violence, and putting them at greater risk of exploitation, extortion, trafficking, sexual abuse, and violence; (c) competition among migrants for jobs in the informal sector can exacerbate economically motivated violence; and (d) negative perceptions of migrants potentially leading to an increase in violence by natives against migrants.

Several policy implications are suggested by these findings:

- **Refugees have the potential to improve export performance in their host countries.** Depending on their skill profile relative to the host population's labor force, refugees may reduce the cost of skilled labor and thereby allow exporting firms to upgrade the skills of their workforce and scale up production for exports.
- **Refugees can substantially increase FDI to their countries of origin in the long-term,** especially to origin countries with greater political stability, and these benefits can be amplified by domestic reforms in origin countries.
- **Poorly managed refugee flows in transit countries can increase dissatisfaction in political and legal institutions among the native population,** which can lead to other adverse effects, including decreases in entrepreneurial activity.
- **When analyzing or discussing the effect of migration on crime, it is important to account for the nationality of the victim.** Evidence from Colombia is consistent with migrants being victimized and inconsistent with xenophobic perceptions of migrants committing crimes against natives.

Impact of policies and programs on wellbeing of forcibly displaced

Cash Transfer Programs

A growing body of quantitative research examines the effects of providing cash transfers to forcibly displaced people. Cash transfer programs can ease the liquidity and credit constraints faced by forcibly displaced households, helping them to satisfy basic needs, accumulate savings, and reduce their reliance on expensive credit. While cash transfers are frequently used in humanitarian settings to deliver short-term relief, in protracted refugee situations they offer the potential to support longer-term development outcomes for displaced populations. However, the long-term outcomes of cash transfers vary greatly and depend on numerous factors including: the design features of the program; how funds are used by beneficiaries; and the characteristics of beneficiaries, including their initial capital endowments, access to markets, and property rights over income, savings, and investments.

Three papers presented at the conference examine the welfare effects of cash transfers provided to Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Turkey, including some of the first evidence of the effect of large-scale cash transfer programs on keeping refugee children in school and reducing child labor.

In Lebanon, a paper by Altındağ and O’Connell (2021), presented by Onur Altındağ, examines the **effect of two large-scale cash transfer programs on the welfare of Syrian refugee households in Lebanon**. Consistent with the existing literature on cash transfers, they find that the programs were effective in providing temporary relief and improving economic wellbeing in the short term, generating higher household consumption, improved child welfare, increased food security, and reducing harmful food and livelihood coping strategies. However, despite the generous size of the cash transfers, these benefits dissipate soon after the program ends. Even though beneficiaries were better able to save and purchase durable goods during the program, they tend to spend these savings and liquidate assets soon after the program ends. The authors argue that the program features (value of the transfer, duration of the program, transfer modalities) are unlikely to explain the lack of persistent effects. Rather, this is likely to reflect the economic and legal impediments faced by refugees that constrain their ability to save and claim the returns on investments.

[Özler et al \(2021\)](#) examine the **effects of the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) program**, which supports around 1.7 million refugees **in Turkey**. For the average Syrian household in Turkey with six members, the monthly payment of around \$105 is quite substantial—equivalent to 55 percent of the average monthly labor earnings of Syrian men in Turkey. The authors demonstrate that, within six months of the ESSN program starting, it led to improvements in household consumption and food security, but surprisingly, both beneficiary and non-beneficiary households increase their consumption. Delving into the reason for this counterintuitive finding, the authors find that there was a movement of school-age children from larger ineligible households to smaller eligible ones, probably motivated by a desire to increase children’s access to support and school. This caused a substantial decline in poverty and inequality for the entire refugee population. Consistent with the findings of the Altındağ and O’Connell paper, the authors find that welfare improvements dissipate over time, which they attribute to non-beneficiary households gaining eligibility for the program, or the possibility that the program crowds out labor market earnings.

A paper by Aygün et al (2021), presented by Murat Kirdar, finds that the ESSN program in Turkey produced large, positive effects on schooling and child labor outcomes, especially for

children in poor households. The authors also find that beneficiary households are more likely to send children to school because the cash transfer addresses both the opportunity cost and direct cost of schooling, although the former is more important.

With the continued upward trend in refugee numbers, humanitarian organizations are often confronted with funding shortages. In response, some organizations resort to reducing food assistance for refugees considered more self-reliant, using time passed since their displacement as a proxy for self-reliance. A paper by Vintar et al (2022), presented by Mirko Vintar, examines **whether refugees living for many years in Uganda's Nakivale refugee settlement are indeed more self-reliant, how they fare when rations are reduced, and how they cope**. The study demonstrates that refugees subject to ration cuts experience significant declines in caloric intake and food expenditure, and they also become more food insecure. Coping strategies differ for refugees from different countries: Somalis substitute preferred food items with cheaper items from their ration which are richer in calories and rely on their remittance network; whereas Congolese refugees become more involved in non-agricultural jobs.

These papers have several policy implications:

- **Large-scale cash transfer programs can provide relief and improve economic wellbeing of displaced households in the short-term. However, cash transfer programs do not necessarily achieve longer-term poverty alleviation objectives**, and whether a program generates sustained results might depend on the specific context and the extent to which economic shocks erode benefits when the program ends.
- There **may be unintended consequences of cash transfer programs**, for example the relocation of household members across households, **with potential positive spillover effects for non-beneficiary households**.
- The research provides **compelling evidence for the positive and substantial benefits of modest cash transfers on keeping children in school and reducing rates of child labor**, in host countries that have complementary policies in place to integrate refugee children into national education systems.

Other policies and programs

While there is a rapidly expanding body of literature on the impact of refugees on host populations, there is relatively little evidence on the effectiveness of policies to promote self-reliance for forcibly displaced people.

A presentation by Sarah Stillman and Emma Smith, previewed **preliminary evidence emerging from a randomized control trial to evaluate the impact of a Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) urban shelter program on Syrian refugees' life outcomes in Jordan**. The program provides around US\$2,000 towards rent and repairs. In the short run (6-12 months) the program improved housing quality, financial stability (lowered credit usage and debt accumulation), and school attendance among treatment households relative to control households. Unexpectedly, households that received the housing assistance showed an increase in household size due to an influx of children, presumably due to the movement of children from relatives or neighbors into these households now that they had better living conditions. There were also unexpected increases in certain measures of food insecurity, possibly due to the increase in the number of children in the household. In the medium run

(12-18 months), preliminary results show that there was a persistent increase in school attendance and decrease in housing expenditures even after rent subsidies ended, possibly because NRC negotiated a two-year lease with landlords, locking in a rental rate for an additional year. However, the positive effects on housing quality, household composition, financial stability (credit usage), and adverse food insecurity patterns, largely dissipated over time.

Guarin et al (2021) investigate the **effects of reparations paid to victims of human rights abuses (mainly IDPs) in Colombia**. The Colombian reparations consist of large, one-off, lump-sum payments of up to US\$10,000 per individual, equivalent to around six times recipients' annual household income. The authors find that beneficiaries are more likely work in better jobs, have higher formal earnings, and own a business. Reparations also led to decreases in health care utilization, consistent with improved health due to better working and living conditions. Reparations also increased high school test scores and college attendance rates for beneficiaries' children.

A paper by Ibanez et al (2021), presented by Sandra Roza, evaluates the **impact of a large regularization program, the *Permiso Especial de Permanencia* (PEP), on the lives of Venezuelans displaced abroad in Colombia**. PEP offered irregular Venezuelan migrants legal status for two years, a work permit, access to social safety nets (healthcare, childcare, and education), and access to financial services. An initial qualitative survey revealed: high mistrust and fear among Venezuelan migrants of being deported, which affected willingness to apply for the program (fear of detection); individuals with prior networks in Colombia had a lower propensity to apply for the program, possibly because they felt they already had the social connections to succeed in the country; and PEP and non-PEP holders had very different characteristics. The analysis found that PEP improves migrant wellbeing in a few ways, specifically the program: (a) increased labor formalization by more than 10 percent; (b) improved access to safety nets and financial services; (c) increased consumption and income per capita by more than 60 percent; (d) improved health outcomes; (e) improved labor conditions; (f) reduced food insecurity; (g) increased feelings of integration; and (h) improved resilience to COVID. These findings have relevance for developing host countries, which have a large informal sector, in which refugees might already be working.

Several policy implications emerge from these studies:

- **Rental subsidies provided to refugees can improve housing quality, financial stability, and school attendance in the short-term.** While some of these benefits dissipate over time, rental subsidies appear to persistently decrease housing expenditures and improve school attendance in the medium term.
- **The benefits of reparations paid to victims of violence and displacement are likely to outweigh the costs, with strong evidence that reparations improve the long-term wellbeing of beneficiaries, reduce utilization of the health system, and increase investments in human capital.** And, contrary to the notion that cash transfers discourage employment, reparations in the Colombian context only led to a small drop in wage employment.
- **Regularizations of migrants/refugees can substantially increase labor formalization and increase the wellbeing of migrants/refugees, without harmful impacts on host workers' labor market outcomes.** Amnesty programs such as the PEP in Colombia can increase migrant/refugee wellbeing more than cash transfer programs have done in similar

settings.

Attitudes

The conference featured several presentations on attitudes to migrants and their importance for integration.

Aksoy et al (2021) examine **how initial conditions at the time of arrival—including initial local unemployment and attitudes to immigrants—affect the integration of refugees in Germany**. The authors find that refugees assigned to counties with higher employment rates or more unwelcoming attitudes towards immigrants: (a) are less likely to be in employment or education; (b) are less likely to be in full or part-time employment; (c) have lower net monthly earnings; and (d) are less integrated across various multi-dimensional measures of socio-economic integration.

Hong et al (2020) conducted research in South Korea to explore **whether past experiences of war and displacement can affect people's openness towards hosting refugees**. South Koreans are frequently against the settlement of refugees in their country, and people with family experiences of war and displacement are even more opposed to hosting refugees. However, the type of war experience matters, and people whose families had experiences of displacement were more open to accepting refugees, and more susceptible to sympathetic messages that link their experiences with contemporary experience of refugees.

There is **little evidence on the potential for aid to facilitate positive relations and mitigate tension between refugees and host communities**. Research by Baseler et al (2021), presented by Olivia Woldemikael and Thomas Ginn, explores the effects of aid on attitudes toward refugees in Uganda, and whether these effects are amplified or diminished when the link to refugees is made explicit to host beneficiaries. The authors conducted a Randomized Controlled Trial to investigate whether a program for Ugandan (host) microentrepreneurs, delivered by a refugee-led NGO, increased support for more inclusive refugee policies. The program provided cash grants and/or information about Uganda's aid sharing policy (30 percent of refugee aid is to be shared with host communities). The results show that all forms of assistance (grant alone, information alone, grant and information combined) increased hosts' support for inclusive refugee policies, including refugees' right to work and hosting additional refugees. However, the largest effect was found when hosts received both the cash grant and the information.

These results suggest the following policy implications:

- **Initial conditions in settlement locations are important determinants of refugee integration.** Attitudes towards immigrants are as important as local economic conditions when it comes to refugee integration.
- **Substantial public finance benefits can accrue to a host country from allocating working-age refugees to counties with lower unemployment rates and more welcoming attitudes towards immigrants,** while also supporting the socio-economic integration of refugees.
- With the right messaging, **aid to host communities is a promising avenue to increase support for refugees' inclusion in host labor markets.** Messaging is a low-cost addition to ongoing programs.

Linkages between research and policy

One of the objectives of the JDC is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, with a view to: (a) ensuring research topics are relevant to the priorities of policymakers and practitioners; and (b) to facilitating the ‘translation’ of technical research into practical guidance that can effectively inform policy and operational responses to forced displacement. To encourage this dialogue, the conference featured a panel discussion on the linkages between research, policy, and programming.²

Importance of data and research on forced displacement

The speakers agreed on the crucial importance of data and research for the work of government policymakers, humanitarian and development organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—helping them to make timely, and evidence-based decisions that can prevent and respond to forced displacement and improve the lives of affected people. Without relevant data and research, it is impossible to characterize and understand the problems precipitated by forced displacement, build support for a global agenda, advocate successfully for policy change at the country level, develop and implement effective operations in forced displacement settings, improve accountability, or ensure approaches reflect the experiences of people of all ages, genders, and diversities.

Participants highlighted specific examples that showed how research can have a direct effect on policy outcomes and improve the effectiveness of humanitarian and development operations in forced displacement settings. For example:

- **In the Central African Republic, statistical research is providing important insights for making the collection of data on those forcibly displaced more effective.** This is particularly relevant for data collection on those hosted within families, outside camps, who are typically difficult to reach with traditional surveys methods.
- A seminal **World Bank study** on the impact of the Syrian war on the Lebanese economy **helped to mobilize development funding for Lebanon, brought into sharper relief both the costs and potential benefits of hosting refugees**, and set in train research that underpinned the World Bank’s introduction of dedicated financing envelopes for refugees and host communities.
- **In Colombia, research, and data**—collected by civil society organizations, government, and research institutions—**have helped to illustrate the extent of the internal displacement problem and the needs of IDPs.** Academic research has been used by the Colombian government, senate, and constitutional court, and informed the development of policy and legislative responses. More effective use of data for policymaking helped to strengthen government ownership, agree on common objectives with national and international partners, and promote transparency and accountability as key elements to mitigate the lack of legitimacy and trust in government institutions due to decades of

² The panel was moderated by Domenico Tabasso (JDC) and featured Blaise Bienvenue Ali (Director General, Institute of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies of the Central African Republic), Ninette Kelley (author of “People Forced to Flee: History, Change and Challenge” and former UNHCR Representative, Lebanon) and Carolina Sánchez-Páramo (Global Director of the Poverty and Equity Global Practice, World Bank), with additional contributions from Xavier Devictor (Co-director of the World Bank’s 2021 World Development Report on Cross-Border Mobility), Sarah Sakha (Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy Officer, International Rescue Committee), and Sajjad Malik (Director for the Division of Resilience and Solutions at UNHCR).

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- **Also in Colombia, recent analytical work on the impact of the Colombian President's amnesty program in 2018 reassured policymakers that the program had not had negative effects on host communities and paved the way for a second amnesty in 2021**, granting temporary protection status for ten years to all Venezuelans in the country. Research demonstrates that these permits have had large benefits for recipient households. The Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank are now systematically sharing this experience with governments across the region (and beyond), extending the benefit of the research even further.
- **In Kenya, poverty data and analysis has informed discussions about transforming refugee camps into villages that can be integrated into national systems.**

It was acknowledged that government policymakers may not always wish to act on research findings, and the potential benefits of integrating political economy considerations into the research agenda. In addition, even though international organizations are actively engaging with the research community at their headquarters, there is not necessarily the motivation or capacity in field offices to act on research findings. It was noted that donors are increasingly including a requirement for impact evaluations in their granting of funds, and it will be interesting to see to what extent this is improving implementation.

Innovations in data collection

Forcibly displaced people are often missing or under-represented in official statistics and traditional data sources, rendering them “invisible” to policymakers and making them difficult to study. This reflects a number of challenges encountered in the collection of data, including: collecting data on a large and growing population that is often mobile, and which may not have trust in authority.

There is very little good quality data on IDPs, who account for nearly 50 million of the 82 million forcibly displaced people, partly due to the inherent difficulties of collecting data in conflict-affected areas, and capacity constraints in fragile and conflict affected countries. Against this backdrop of general data scarcity, three papers presented during the conference demonstrated how untapped data sources and innovative data collection methods can address this gap and provide new insights.

Dutra and Brum (2021) **combine survey microdata with gridded meteorological ('big') data to examine migration from the northeast to the southeast of Brazil, commonly associated with drought.** A methodological challenge was how to reconcile differences in the time resolution between the two data sources, since survey microdata is collected less frequently than big data. Combining the two data sources required simplification (for the big data) and some degree of extrapolation (for the microdata), losing the advantages of big data, and introducing a high degree of uncertainty into the microdata estimates. Nevertheless, the potential for the use of big data and open data is evident, providing more granular data, possibilities for exploring new research questions, and reducing costs of data collection.

A paper by Tai et al (2021) develops a **new method for using anonymized high-frequency mobile phone data to measure, with new granularity, the causal effect of violence on internal displacement in Afghanistan.** The research shows that high-casualty events and violence involving the Islamic State (as opposed to the Taliban) cause the most displacement. They also highlight the important role of provincial capitals in the ongoing conflict, since these

capitals are resilient to local violence, and attract people fleeing violence in outlying areas. This type of analysis can provide important insights for policymakers; an understanding of what types of violent events cause the greatest displacement and where displaced people tend to cluster could assist in the targeting of aid, understanding the likely locations of future instability, and designing policies for prevention and mitigation.

A paper by Fei et al (2020), presented by Beza Tesfaye and Jessica Sadye Wolff, develops **a method to conduct automated surveys using the WhatsApp messaging service, which they apply to refugees and migrants in Colombia, as well as resettled refugees in the U.S.** While the method is not without limitations, the case studies suggest that automated surveys using WhatsApp provide a potentially viable alternative to in-person or phone surveys. Automated surveys on WhatsApp are less costly than in-person or phone surveys, are easily replicable and scalable, allow researchers to stay in touch with mobile populations (since users can maintain the same WhatsApp profile even if they change their phone or SIM card), enable remote engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, and leverage commercial technology to send and receive messages.

Roles in research on forced displacement

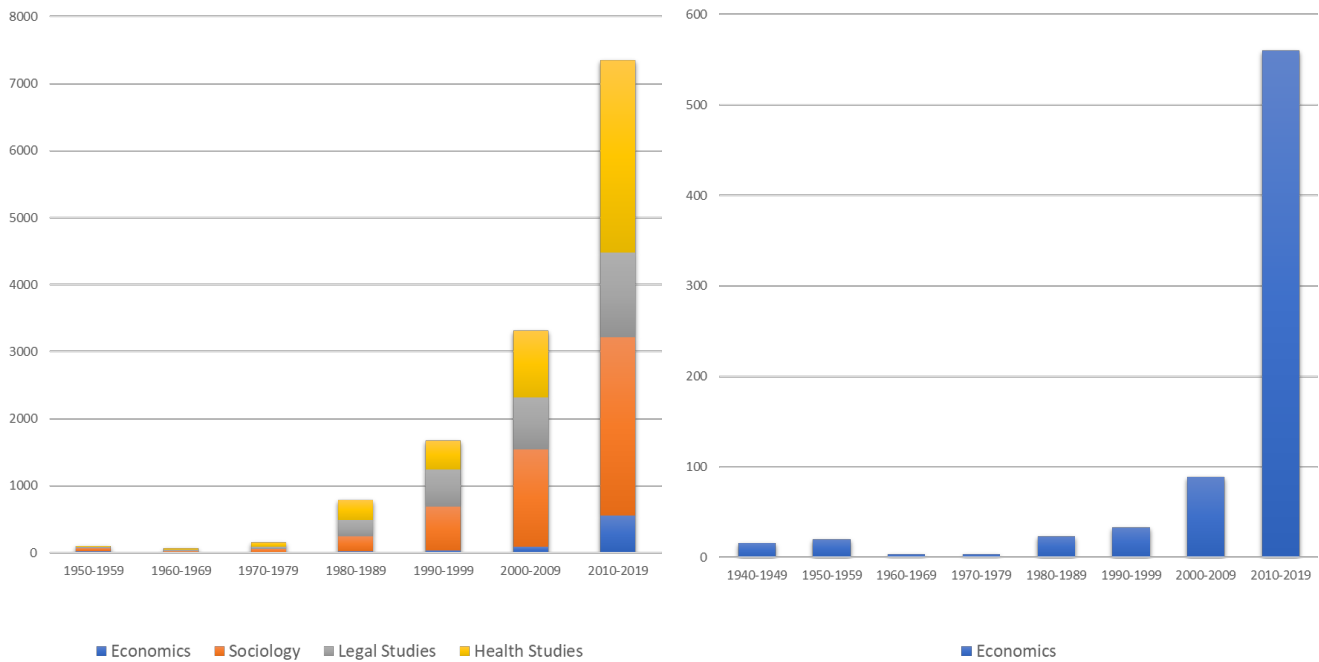
A simple typology emerged from the discussion, identifying three broad roles in research on forced displacement: (1) data and research producers; (2) consumers of research; and (3) translators and connectors of research.

Producers

In recent years there has been an exponential increase in socioeconomic research on forced displacement,³ driven by a concerted effort to expand the collection of data on displaced populations.

³ See the [recent paper](#) by Filippo Dionigi (University of Bristol) and Domenico Tabasso (JDC).

FIGURE 1: GROWTH IN PUBLISHED PAPERS



Source: Dionigi and Tabasso (2021)

Several organizations have been active data and research producers, filling data and knowledge gaps at the country, regional and global level. These organizations are also innovating in the way data are collected, including through the novel use of satellite imagery, mobile phone data and citizen-generated inputs to produce more granular and timely information. For example, when the COVID-19 pandemic prevented national statistical offices from carrying out important surveys, the World Bank and UNHCR initiated a global effort to use phone surveys to collect household data, and refugees and IDPs were included in several countries, in some cases with support from the Joint Data Center. The data enabled a deeper understanding of how the pandemic was affecting vulnerable households and informed the support to governments as they developed responses to deal with the crisis. Another example is the support provided by the World Bank to the national statistical office in the Central African Republic to help them collect data on IDPs living in camps and among the general population who were previously not included systematically in the national household survey. This will inform government policies and donor assistance and help to identify data collection gaps in fragile situations.

The discussion emphasized the importance of maintaining investments in data collection to continue to fill data gaps, and significantly upgrade the quality, comparability, and usability of data.

The discussion emphasized the **importance of working with and supporting capacity of government institutions, including national statistical offices, to ensure that data collection and research aren't one-off activities driven by the agenda of a particular institution but become part and parcel of the way that countries think about the**

evidence that they need for policy making. It was acknowledged that, while there are some good experiences in this regard (e.g., Colombia), there's more that could be done.

Participants highlighted the **advantages of research undertaken by refugee/IDP scholars, who have first-hand experiences of displacement, and the understanding to tackle and explain phenomena in forced displacement settings.** Displaced scholars face many obstacles to author or publish academic papers, and more support is needed to ensure scholars are settled in safe countries, have access to the academic institutions, libraries and funding they need to pursue their research, have documentation that allows them to travel, as well as opportunities to improve their language skills and academic writing skills.

In a subsequent discussion at the conference, a question was raised about **the ethics of collecting data from refugees and IDPs, which go beyond the usual ethical dilemmas faced in low-income settings when surveying vulnerable respondents. For example, in undemocratic, politically repressive contexts of displacement and return, the safety of respondents is paramount, but at the same time there could be ways to collect data safely, e.g., using encryption tools.** There was a consensus that researchers, practitioners, and policymakers should (jointly) do more to create protocols and give guidance on the ethical considerations associated with research on forced displacement. Mention was also made of the potential political ramifications of research findings, and the risk of blowback for refugees and IDPs.

Translators and connectors

The panelists discussed **how to make operationally- or policy-relevant research more readily available in a way that government actors and operational agencies can understand.** Several organizations, including the World Bank and the Joint Data Center, aim to 'translate' or bridge the gap between frontier academic research and what policymakers need for designing a policy or a program. For example, interpreting a theoretical idea that has been developed in an academic context and translating it into practical policy advice, or drawing on findings for a particular country and exploring the possibility of replicating that analysis in other contexts. However, it was generally agreed that more could be done to ensure that research is translated into practical advice for government policymakers and others.

Efforts are also made by several organizations, including JDC, to draw out questions that counterparts and partners may have and bring these questions to the attention of academics who may be able to illuminate answers to these questions. However, it was acknowledged that more could be done to draw the attention of researchers to priority policy problems.

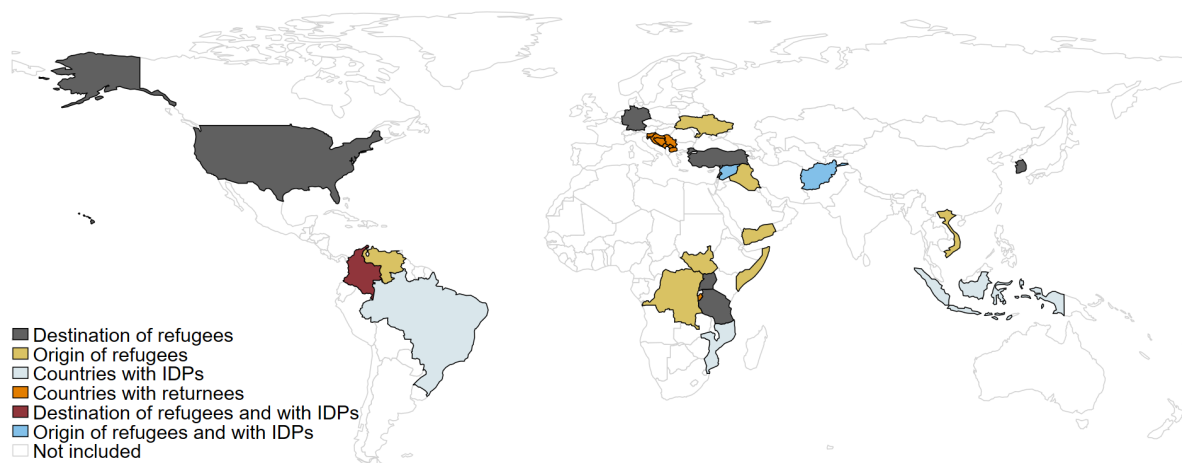
Conference papers and attendees

Conference papers

Figure 2 provides an overview of the countries covered in the conference presentations, including host and origin/return countries. To some extent the geographical focus of the conference papers reflects the locations of several large refugee crises with considerable regional implications, including the Syrian refugee crisis encompassing Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, and the Venezuelan displacement crisis and its effects on Colombia. Largely, the papers focus on displaced people in middle-income countries, with less attention given to low-income countries. In particular, Sub-Saharan Africa receives little attention, and several large displacement crises are not covered, including displacement in Sahelian countries and internal displacement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To a large degree this reflects the impediments to collecting good quality data in these challenging settings, and investments are required to fill data gaps and to foster rigorous, policy-relevant research in understudied countries with large and vulnerable displaced populations.

In terms of thematic coverage, this year's conference has deliberately focused on internal displacement, an understudied population group, and covered a range of topics including social cohesion, returnees, innovative research methodologies, and emerging research on the impact of programs to assist IDPs and refugees (cash transfers, housing vouchers, reparations). As the discussions during the conference highlighted, there remains numerous gaps in the research on forced displacement, which are outlined in detail in the concluding section, below.

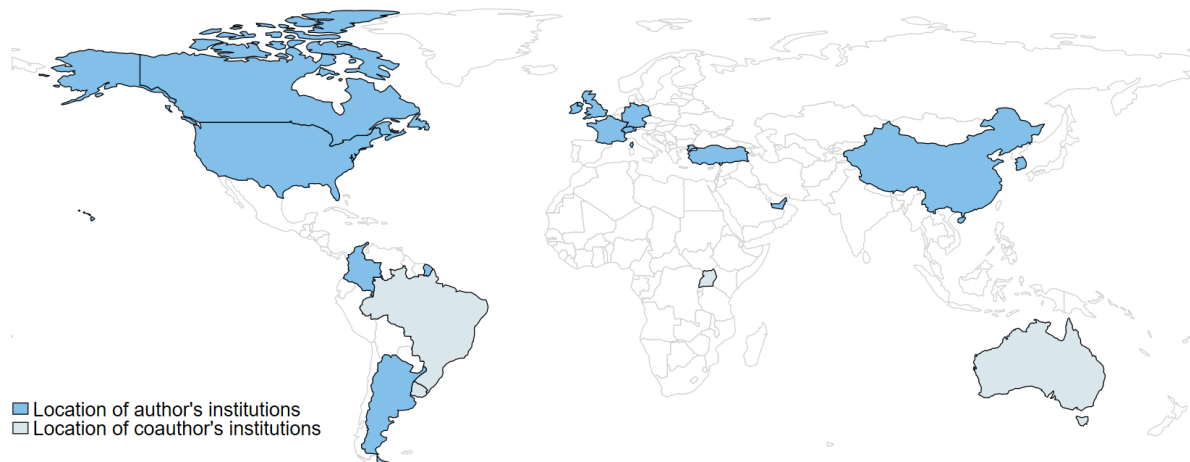
FIGURE 2: COUNTRIES STUDIED IN CONFERENCE PAPERS



Over 40 percent of the lead authors for the shortlisted papers were from the global South. However, few of them are based in institutions in the global South. Several participants highlighted this phenomenon during the conference, calling for research institutions and academics to be much more inclusive of local researchers. Involving local researchers in research projects can deepen a research team's understanding of local dynamics and constraints. At the same time, by being part of international research teams, local researchers

gain exposure to new methodologies and connect to academic networks and policy circles abroad.

FIGURE 3: LOCATIONS OF AUTHORS

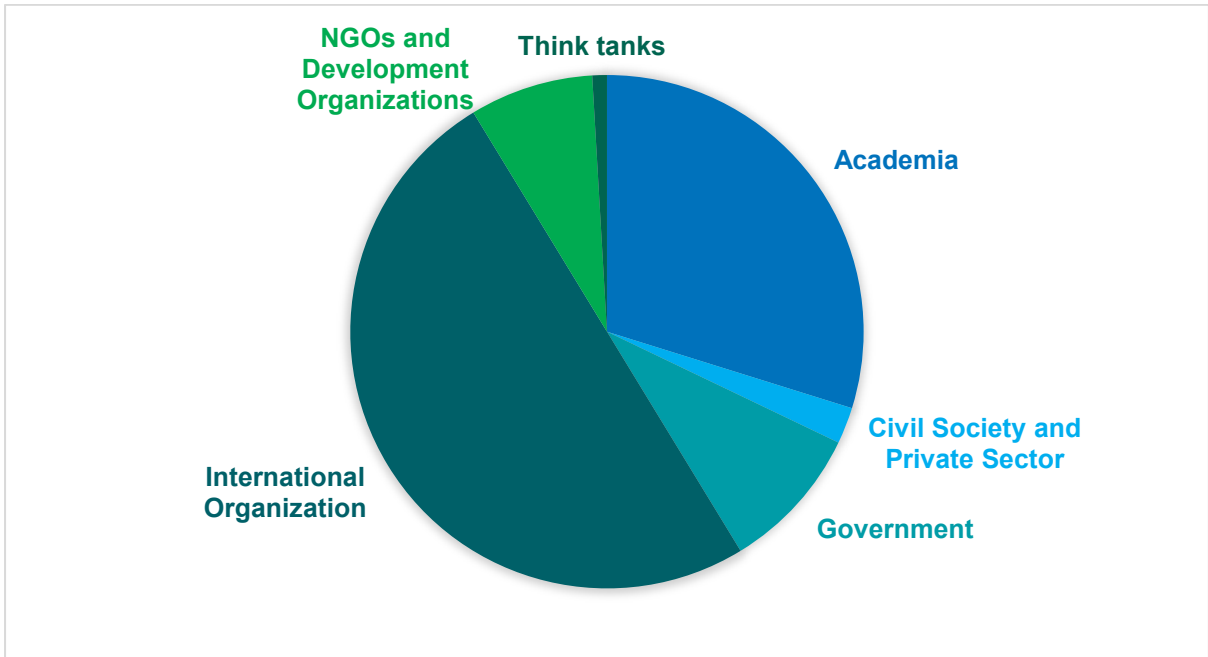


Conference participants

Among the conference participants, about half were from international organizations, 30 percent from academia, with smaller numbers from NGOs, governments, research institutes/think tanks and development partners (see Figure 4).

Conference attendees were invited to complete a questionnaire with a view to better understanding the profile of the participants, including their ability to influence policy responses to forced displacement. More than 60 percent of respondents identified themselves as researchers, and within this group, almost everyone's research has a policy focus. A third of respondents' work is policy oriented.

FIGURE 4: AFFILIATION OF CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS



Looking forward

Addressing gaps in the evidence on forced displacement

The discussions during the conference surfaced several challenges and questions from policymakers and practitioners that require further study, as well as gaps in the evidence base on forced displacement. These included the following:

- Expanded **collection and analysis of longitudinal panel data** on forcibly displaced populations, building on ongoing data collection efforts in Jordan, Kenya, and Bangladesh. Longitudinal data and analysis can expand evidence on the life trajectories of refugees and IDPs and the factors that shape their decision making, the long-term effects of displacement on wellbeing, the socio-economic impacts of policy and operational responses over time, and the interventions that can disrupt the mechanisms that transmit poverty and inequality across time and across generations.
- Research on the **relative efficacy of interventions in forced displacement settings**, and how assistance can be delivered more effectively. There is enormous heterogeneity in the way that different countries have approached the socio-economic integration of displaced populations, and the regulations, policies, and programs that they've put in place. More work needs to be done to understand the effects of these approaches, what is or isn't working, and how they can be improved. Additionally, there is little research to date on the **complementarities between different types of programs** (for example, psychosocial support and labor training), which tend to be evaluated in silos.
- Further research on the **factors that affect refugees' and IDPs' decisions to return** to their countries or communities of origin, the profiling of those wishing to return or stay, and how we can foster a sustainable return process. There is still a misconception held by some that if refugees' lives were made more miserable, they would be more likely to return to their home countries. Studies on factors affecting return intentions could advance advocacy on the importance of security and stability as determinative factors in return decisions.
- Better **data and analysis for assessing whether the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)**, among other policy mechanisms, has made tangible differences in refugee policies and practices and in the lives and experiences of communities in force displacement settings. There is insufficient data to assess whether the GCR has led to more predictable funding for host countries and refugees. There are critical gaps in data on funding flows, including how funding passes from donors through first and second level recipients, and a lack of a shared methodologies and standards for reporting this data. This data is essential for organizations to advocate for more predictable, timely, flexible, multi-year funding to frontline responders. However, a prerequisite for better funding is greater financial transparency, better data, and better research.
- Research on the **intersection between conflict, displacement and climate**, and their combined effects on poverty. How will climate change migration flows, including forced displacement? Will these trends spur an enlarged sense of collective responsibility sharing? Some of these linkages will be explored in the World Bank's World Development Report (WDR) for 2023.
- More **dedicated, bespoke research on internal displacement**, that considers its distinct

characteristics. Analysis of internal displacement is frequently situated within broader research on forced displacement. While this serves to highlight the protection and humanitarian challenges facing IDPs, it obscures some of the distinct issues that emerge in internal displacement situations: IDPs are citizens in distress and there is a fundamental failure of accountability to them from different sources; and political economy considerations play a more important role.

- The analysis of the socioeconomic cost to host countries of an ongoing or increasing **stateless population** could better inform policy discussions with host government on solutions for stateless people.
- Detailed **economic studies on the likely impacts on various sectors of a host country economy of regularizing the stay of refugees and granting work permits**. Such analysis would help host governments quantify the costs and benefits of integrating refugees into the formal labor market.
- Specific research on **education of displaced children**, in particular older children and young adolescents who have experienced traumatic events and who consequently have high dropout rates, and intergenerational effects of displacement on educational outcomes.
- More analysis on the **gender dimensions** of various research topics, and the challenges encountered by women and girls, including gender norms, SGBV, and female household heads and primary income earners.
- More data collection and research in **Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the Sahel, Sudan, South Sudan and DRC**, recognizing the scale and complexity of displacement in these settings.

During the concluding session of the conference, Björn Gillsäter, Head of the JDC, offered the following advice to scholars. First, to keep displaced people in mind as they pursue their research agenda. The global displacement crisis is not a crisis of numbers, it is one of profound human suffering. Second, to think through the implications of research findings for policy, to formulate policy advice, and to push to get policy advice into the hands of policymakers and practitioners. Third, to push for responsible open data. Researchers were encouraged to collect data and innovate on data collection methodologies in countries and settings where there currently isn't a lot of data, rather than focusing on countries where the data is better. And finally, to stay connected with JDC and the community of practice.

Role of the Joint Data Center

The conference confirmed that the Joint Data Center is an appreciated contributor to significantly increasing data and analysis on forced displacement. The participants repeatedly referred to the JDC's Newsletters, Literature Review database, and Quarterly Digests. We also heard positive feedback on our role as a connector with relevant World Bank and UNHCR networks, and appreciation for our efforts in creating platforms for interaction, such as the conference itself.

The Center will continue to work with partners to ensure research findings inform the work of policymakers and practitioners. We will disseminate the findings and take-aways by supporting specific policy and programming dialogues with host countries, and we will make the data and analysis "digestible" for policymakers, including by organizing seminars,

publishing blogs, and disseminating the material using JDC's existing knowledge products.