Responding to Refugee Crises in Developing Countries: What Can We Learn From Evaluations?

SIX KEY TAKEAWAYS
Displacement is at a historic high, with over 65 million individuals currently displaced. The world is facing a refugee crisis that is unprecedented in scale. While many of the situations and contexts that people are fleeing are not new, the impacts of recent movements have been strongly felt around the world.

A large number of evaluations look at different aspects of international response to refugee crises in developing countries. This paper draws from evaluations of past efforts by OECD member countries to highlight key lessons and recommendations for positive change going forward.
Why Do We Need to Learn from Evaluations?

Unresolved protracted conflict and human rights abuses in major refugee countries of origin such as Afghanistan, South Sudan and Somalia have lasted decades and have resulted in an ever increasing number of refugees. The 2011 outbreak of violence in Syria and increasing levels of violence and conflict in Iraq, and other countries have only added to total global figures of people forcibly displaced. Available evidence today suggests that displacement is often protracted, meaning that the international community must plan for longer-term approaches and solutions. Findings from evaluations, based on evidence and lessons from past experience, can help improve future responses to refugee crises. Encouragingly, there is evidence that OECD member countries intend to work towards long-term solutions that enhance linkages among humanitarian, diplomatic and development actors. There are positive examples and initiatives to build on. Better responses to assist refugees are needed and evaluations can help light the way.

What Did We Find?

The existing evaluation evidence on responding to refugee crises in developing countries suggests that many practical barriers to better programming remain. While international consensus at the policy level is increasing, it is not a simple task to turn policy goals into better on-the-ground results. There are no silver-bullet solutions or one-size-fits-all approaches to deal with the complexity of situations related to forced displacement. Evaluations shed light on the obstacles, while pointing to areas of success and to promising new initiatives.
SIX KEY TAKEAWAYS

I. Evaluations suggest that humanitarian needs in refugee countries of origin often remain high for years or even decades. This has been the case in countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan. As humanitarian aid will likely be needed for years or even decades in many contexts, the international community needs to start with realistic assumptions about the likelihood of protracted crisis. The international community should not expect quick improvements to refugee crises, as the crises that provoke large-scale forced displacement are often protracted. Evaluations suggest that in Syria some countries failed to anticipate the likelihood that the crisis would lead to large-scale, protracted displacement.
II. Evaluations point to a number of challenges for humanitarian, development, diplomatic and military actors to effectively align divergent interests and there are lessons to be learnt from past whole-of-government approaches. Evaluations from whole-of-government approaches used by OECD countries in fragile contexts reveal both potential risks and emerging good practice. Evaluations looking at the whole-of-government approach used in contexts as varied as Afghanistan where the model was first tested to South Sudan and Syria, where some donor are considering pursuing similar approaches, show that there are many different understandings of whole-of-government and different models have been tried. Challenges related to the use of whole-of-government approaches include: institutional differences; conflicts over funding and resources; competing priorities; and different approaches towards work with local institutions, authorities and government actors. A number of evaluations suggest that an overemphasis on visible, short-term results can undermine the likelihood of longer-term positive change. Evaluations also make clear that stabilisation efforts are resource-intensive and donors have tended to underestimate the timescales necessary to see results. Evaluations suggest that creating safeguards for development and humanitarian work within integrated approaches may help.
III. **Funding shortfalls limit the coherence and overall effectiveness of donor efforts to address refugee contexts in a holistic manner.** Funding for development and humanitarian responses to forced displacement has not kept pace with needs, leading to competition between immediate humanitarian response and longer-term programming. Evaluations suggest that the main challenge facing the international community is how to work to meet the immediate needs of people who have been forcibly displaced while simultaneously working for longer-term solutions. In refugee countries of origin such as South Sudan, the needs of people who are now fleeing South Sudan as refugees compete with: the needs of people displaced within South Sudan; the needs of South Sudanese communities who are impacted by ongoing fighting and malnutrition; and the needs of refugees from South Sudan who fled in previous refugee waves and have settled in surrounding countries. Limited funding forces donors to choose among responses, and often leaves them unable to address all aspects of the crisis. In response to the Syrian crisis, for example, large funding shortfalls have led to programme disruptions.
IV. Evaluations demonstrate that the lack of experienced staff with field experience and regional expertise hampered the ability of some countries to organise timely assistance for refugees fleeing Syria. Evaluations suggest that it may be possible to improve future responses by improving efforts to predict and more quickly respond to forced displacement. Donors faced new challenges to organise assistance for refugees fleeing Syria where many did not have an existing field presence and on-going programmes. The urbanisation of the refugee population in the Syria region also required closer co-operation with local actors and authorities. New modalities of financing to support middle income countries (in countries such as Lebanon and Jordan) had to be put in place, with existing modalities not appropriate for the context. Specifically, evaluations suggest that having experienced humanitarian staff in the country and in the region, improving the forecasting and anticipation of population movements, and adapting administrative structures and processes to enable nimble, flexible responses may help. Evaluations also found that multi-year, flexible funding is important.
V. Evaluations show the importance of livelihoods and jobs for the forcibly displaced and the necessity of education and the consequences of failures to provide education to displaced youth. Evaluations highlight that formal access to the labour market is important and suggest that policy dialogue to improve refugees’ access to jobs and ability to become self-reliant are needed. Host communities also require support, as evaluations highlight the important economic impact on host communities and that refugees often settle in areas where the host community may also be vulnerable. Positively, job creation compacts have been put in place in Jordan, Lebanon and Ethiopia, and look promising. However, it is too early to measure their impact and future assessments of their performance will be needed. Evaluations suggest that cash-based programmes have generally been successful in urban and middle income environments and could be scaled up. On education, evaluations found that the main challenge is to ensure refugee populations access to quality education, while being conscious of not creating divisions between refugees and host communities. Evaluation evidence suggests that including education for refugees in national development planning and viewing education programming as part of a holistic child protection framework may help.
VI. Evaluations demonstrate the significant challenges and obstacles faced in conflict contexts, with efforts at addressing root causes not leading to obvious short term success. Changing the factors leading to conflict and forced displacement in countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan, Iraq and Somalia cannot be achieved in a short time spans. To date, there appears to be a lack of robust evidence to suggest that short-term programming intended to address root causes has been successful in preventing population movements (although most programming has not been undertaken with the goal of preventing population movements as its main objective). More evidence and research on the possible impact of conflict prevention, peacebuilding and state building on population movements is needed.
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Read: oe.cd/evalrefugee

And: Three case studies on Afghanistan, South Sudan and Ethiopia/Uganda

Case Study / Afghanistan / Country of Origin
Susanna Morrison-Métois

Case Study / South Sudan / Country of Origin
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