

HUMANITY ON THE MOVE: THE GLOBAL REFUGEE CRISIS

A REPORT FROM PEACE DIRECT'S LOCAL PEACEBUILDING EXPERTS, AUGUST 2016

A record number of people are fleeing violence and conflict. Taking dangerous journeys through dangerous places, their struggle to survive has often just begun. Peace Direct's Local Experts report on the problems refugees face around the world – and the solutions they, and local organisations, have found.



Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The UN estimates that 11 million people have fled the conflict in Syria, with a million now based in Lebanon alone and many more in neighbouring Jordan and Turkey. Image credit: [World Bank](#).

There is a global refugee crisis. According to the UN, some 65 million people have been forced from their homes by violence and persecution – 1 in every 113 people around the world. On every continent, people are fleeing armed conflict and the devastation it wreaks. But the consequences for those who leave can be almost as dire as for those who stay. Even trying to register as a victim of conflict is fraught with difficulties, with refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) often finding themselves in legal limbo, and unable to work or contribute to their host communities.

In this report, Peace Direct's Local Peacebuilding Experts comment on the situation where they are. They describe some the conditions in which people are forced to survive, in Colombia, Lebanon, Tunisia, Ukraine, and the Western Balkans. But they also report on the remarkable work of local organisations, dedicated to ensuring that those who flee conflict do not have to leave their future in the past – and the role of refugees themselves, whose courage has led many to play an active role in shaping their own prospects. Read on to find out more.

CONFLICTS CAUSING CRISES: GLOBAL MIGRATION HOTSPOTS

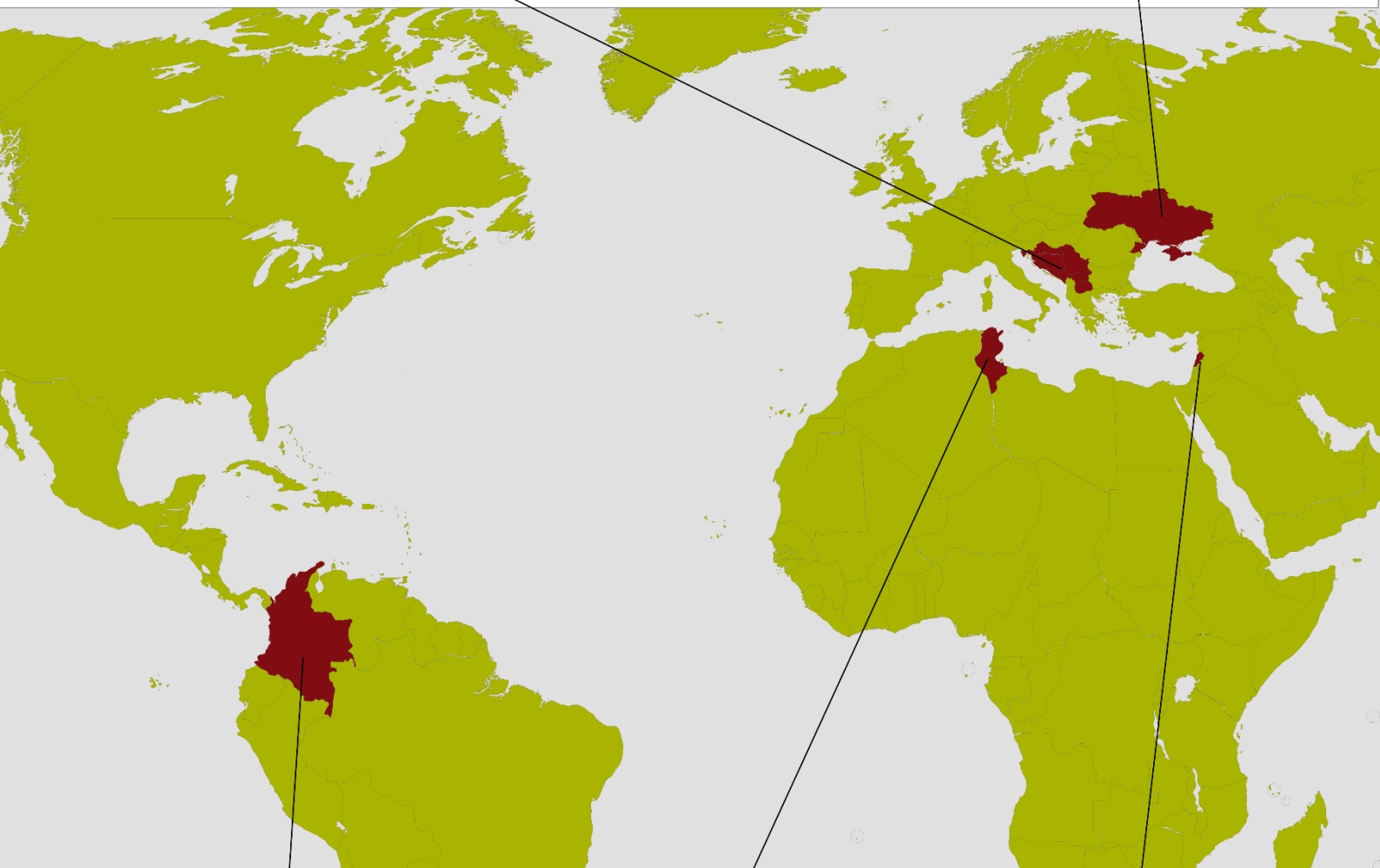
Five areas where violence has forced people to leave their lives behind

Western Balkans

The breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s saw a series of wars across the region. As the area continues to recover from a decade of violence, today is it also a key transit route for those heading to Europe from conflict in the Middle East and elsewhere. Mirjana Kosić speaks to local organisations responding to those in need. **See page 3.**

Ukraine

Serious armed conflict has seen millions displaced in Ukraine since 2013. With sustained fighting in the Luhansk and Donetsk areas in particular, ceasefires have been repeatedly broken. But Ukrainian NGOs across the country have transformed their work to support those fleeing the conflict in the east. Kevin McCann interviews Olga Dolinina for the view from Kiev. **See page 6.**



Colombia

The fifty-year conflict in Colombia has led to one of the world's largest population of IDPs. More than six million people have been forced from their homes amid fighting between the government and multiple armed groups. A ceasefire announced in June 2016 with the largest of these groups, FARC, has raised hopes that the violence may finally end. Lina María Jaramillo discusses the future for those affected. **See page 8.**

Tunisia

Tunisia is a staging post for clandestine migration to Europe, with refugees and migrants from across Africa and the Middle East using it as a departure point for the trip across the Mediterranean. Nissaf Slama considers the causes and consequences of migration in the Maghreb. **See page 5.**

Lebanon

Lebanon has borne the brunt of conflicts elsewhere in the Middle East, with fully a quarter of its current population made up of Palestinian, Syrian and other refugees. The legacy of Lebanon's own civil war has also contributed to pressure on the country's infrastructure and services. Sawssan Abou-Zahr reports on daily life for those who have sought shelter in Beirut and elsewhere. **See page 10.**

The Balkans on the brink? The situation in south-eastern Europe

*Serbia is a key staging post for migrants and refugees trying to reach the European Union. **Mirjana Kosić** spoke to staff at the Asylum Protection Centre in Belgrade about the crisis in the capital.*



The Serbian capital Belgrade has seen thousands of people pass through its streets as part of the 'Balkans route' to the European Union. Image credit: [Matej Duzel](#).

The first weekend of July 2016 was a difficult one for refugees in Belgrade. The Miksalište food and shelter point had to close temporarily, unable to deal with enormous demand. So hundreds of refugees were moved to the [Info Park](#), another information and aid centre which has itself struggled to cope with the number of people who continue to arrive on a daily basis. The park brings together a number of organisations working to provide respite to those on the move. Radoš Đurović is Director of the [Asylum Protection Center](#) (APC), which since 2007 has worked with refugees throughout Serbia. He says it is a difficult time: "[Many will ask what to do next. The question remains how this problem will be regulated in the future.](#)"

Trading places: East to West

For the past couple of years, the Western Balkans have been faced with an overwhelming number of refugees, fleeing the cruelty of wars or protracted economic trouble plaguing their countries. For most of them, Serbia and the region are just part of the route on their way towards wealthier European countries. The response by these countries, however, has revealed big disagreements within the EU about how to deal with the crisis.

This has allowed individual states to frame their own responses, sometimes with scant regard for international humanitarian considerations. For example, the Hungarian Parliament has adopted a [law](#) that allows police to return asylum seekers who have entered Hungary illegally to Serbia. Serbian minister Aleksandar Vulin said that the Hungarian authorities were trying "[Not only to send the migrants to the transit zone, but to return them to Serbian territory, which has no legal grounds in international law.](#)"

"We could find ourselves completely alone in solving the migrant crisis... Europe is acting like the migrant crisis is over," he added.

The situation in Serbia

On 7th July, some 500 refugees from Afghanistan, Syria and Pakistan passing through Belgrade went on a hunger strike, protesting against the situation at the Hungarian border. Many have been forced back to Serbia, beaten by Hungarian border control or bitten by police dogs.

The Serbian authorities insist that Serbia is only a transit country

Usually, women and children are let through – though they often have to wait for two or three weeks – while men are stopped. Jovana Vinčić, from the APC, says that "Migrant movement has definitely slowed down since March, but it has not been completely stifled. Before, there were more families on the move, and now we see more people – many of whom are minors – travelling on their own, unaccompanied."

In the first five months of 2016, 3,345 people expressed the intention to seek asylum in Serbia. The APC emphasises, however, that more than 80% of refugees enter Serbia illegally and are not registered, as they plan to continue their journey.

APC is lobbying for temporary protection to be granted to refugees from war-afflicted areas, which would regulate their stay in Serbia. But the Serbian authorities insist that Serbia is only a transit country, thus absconding themselves from responsibility to provide systematic solutions. The state's support thus far has been scarce, and the majority of refugee-related work has been performed by local NGOs and international organisations, with donor help and the generous support of citizens.

Unlike Hungarian and Bulgarian police, who have used violence, the prevailing sentiment in Serbia is still far more

A refugee's story

"I arrived at the Centre for Asylum in Krnjaca last night, with a group of seven more people who are also from Syria. Five of us are from Aleppo, while the rest are from Homs. I have been on the road for three months. In Syria I finished studies in English literature, but as I didn't want to enter the army, I fled. Over there, there are not many options – either you take up arms and fight against people who were your brothers and neighbours until yesterday, or you reject doing that. Death is in every case the unavoidable result.

I'm tired, more psychologically than physically. We came to Serbia from Macedonia. Near a place near the border, whose name I don't remember, still near Macedonia, we met a group of thieves. They asked for our money and telephones, everything they could use. They had firearms and wooden bats with them. They asked for my Syrian documents. When I asked them what they needed them for, they started to hit me with the bats. I fell to the floor, and one of them hit me over the ankle with the bat, so strongly that I was left speechless with pain. My friend tried to help me. He ended up even worse. They broke his elbow. They took everything and then left us alone. I felt poor. I had fled from war and violence only to be robbed, beaten, and harassed like an animal.

I don't know how long I will stay in Serbia. I know that there were wars in this area, so I believe that people here too have gone through a lot of misery. My first impression from my short time here is that people are warm and ready to help. Now I just need to get a bit better, beginning with some sleep."

This story was shared with the Asylum Protection Centre, who agreed for it to be republished here.

humane. With time, however, the state will have to take concrete steps and provide necessary infrastructure, because some refugees will be forced to stay.

“Refugees should be provided with language classes, and at least basic education for the children”

Commenting on the state response, Jovana says that “There is no general awareness about the scale of the problem, and no one is really working on sensitization with the local population.”

“Refugees should be provided with language classes, and at least basic education for the children of those who decide to stay.” Serbia has to start thinking about a long-term perspective, she says, because the region could easily become a buffer zone for EU states.

A stop-gap measure?

With the current political crisis in the EU, compounded by Brexit, the change of the legal landscape in Hungary, and its forthcoming referendum on opposing burden-sharing by EU members, it is likely that Serbia will face even greater pressure.

Indeed, despite the self-congratulatory announcements of EU officials that “[the Western Balkans route is now closed](#),” the number of refugees still arriving demonstrates that regardless of attempts to block them, people will continue to move towards the more prosperous parts of Europe. It looks unlikely that the situation will improve in the foreseeable future.

Mirjana Kosić is Peace Direct's Local Peacebuilding Expert in the Western Balkans. She is executive director of TransConflict, an organisation undertaking conflict transformation projects and research throughout the Western Balkans. Mirjana is also an academic assistant at the SIT Study Abroad programme, “Serbia, Bosnia and Kosovo: Peace and Conflict Studies in the Balkans”, where she delivers lectures focusing on conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dayton Peace Agreement, and the role of international community in post-war reconstruction and state-building.

Tough times in post-revolution Tunisia

Thousands of Tunisians have continued to emigrate since the 2011 revolution. Nissaf Slama asks why.



Tunisians at a protest in 2013. Push and pull factors mean Tunisians have continued to emigrate since the 2011 revolution. Image credit: [Amine Ghrabi](#).

In July 2016, Tunisia's Assembly of People's Representatives (ARP) debated the future of Tunisian Prime Minister, Habib Essid. In doing so, the future of thousands of young Tunisians was put on hold.

Dissatisfaction has been mounting for weeks over the performance of Essid's government, now 18 months old. It has been criticised for increasing unemployment, terrorism, and the country's deteriorating economy, although Essid says that his government has a [five year plan](#) to combat these and other priorities.

Political analyst and consultant [Youssef Cherif](#) commented the day after the vote of confidence that the event was 'great for Tunisia's democracy but bad for the country's economy and it will not solve the major problems we have'. In an interview with [TRT World](#), Cherif explained that "since he came to power, Habib Essid found the country in a lot of trouble. There was huge and deep economic crisis, bad security as well as political as social problems."

Amidst this ongoing political turmoil, illegal migration to Europe presents itself as a solution to the many problems faced by young people in Tunisia. If young people cannot make it to Europe in a legitimate way, they try to get themselves smuggled on one of the vessels carrying illegal migrants.

In fact, since its independence from colonial power France, Tunisia has become a key country of emigration,

dominated by the movement of labour to Western Europe, in particular France. Throughout the 1980s, Italy was also a prime destination for many low-skilled Tunisians due to its geographical proximity and the lack of restrictive immigration laws.

Tunisians abroad for a peaceful transition

I sat down with Romdhan Ben Amor, communications officer at the Forum for Social and Economic Rights (FTDES), an independent organisation that works to defend the economic and social rights of Tunisians at the national and international level.

"At the FTDES, we believe that all human beings have the right to free circulation and the right to movement. That being said, I can say that clandestine migration remains illegal, even if it represents a legitimate quest for work, hope and dignity."

For Ben Amor, the failure of the old development model adopted by Tunisia's ousted president Zine Al Abidine Ben Ali translates into a strong desire for Tunisians to leave the country and seek better opportunities somewhere else, mostly in Europe.

After the revolution, aspirations of radical change were thwarted

Ben Amor explains that "the increase in the migratory flows straight after the revolution shows that the old regime's approach to the question of migration was based on security tactics and did not seek to initiate solid economic and social reforms in the country, so as to better young people's lives and enhance their opportunities in their home countries."

Change in government, change in circumstances?

Societal discontent and the daily struggles that Tunisians endured led to massive protests which spread throughout the country, eventually leading to the overthrow of President Ben Ali's government in January 2011, following 23 years of dictatorship and corruption.

However, unemployment continued to rise after the overthrow, affecting both the uneducated and university graduates alike. Aspirations of radical change were thwarted as poverty continued to spread, and political tumult grew, once again fueling the emigration aspirations of many Tunisians.

Indeed, official reports by governments and organisations concerned with the flow of illegal migrants indicate that more than 30,000 Tunisians have arrived in the Italian city of Lampedusa since the January 2011 revolution. A number that the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights says is correct.

Mounir Hassine, head of the FTDES in Monastir city, says that since the revolution, the gap between young people and the government has widened. Hassine adds that there is now a bigger break between the authorities and young Tunisians, especially those coming from remote or underprivileged areas like Douar Hicher and Hay Ettadhamon.

“For me, it is the same whether a young person travels illegally to Europe or joins jihad in places like Iraq and Syria. This only means that the situation in their home

countries is very bad, that they need to escape and go anywhere.”

As someone who shares many of the dreams and aspirations of my fellow young Tunisians, I find myself agreeing with Hassine. Every day, I see young people torn between two fires, either to die in the merciless waves of the Mediterranean or to join the ranks of a false Jihad. Those who dare not do either are left to unemployment and misery.

Cherif has also spoken of the risk of politics sinking into “stagnation and administrative lethargy.” Familiar with how slow the political process can be, I cannot help but express my worries for the current situation. As national politics grows in complexity, young Tunisians still want to enjoy the basic rights of employment, dignity and as much freedom as they can get.

Nissaf Slama is Peace Direct's Local Peacebuilding Expert in Tunisia. A social activist and former reporter and fixer with Tunisia Live, she has collaborated with the New York Times, Vice Magazine, The Financial Times, CBS News and Human Rights Watch.

From responding to conflict to rebuilding lives: the future for IDPs in Ukraine

*The conflict in Ukraine has led to the one of the worst internal displacement crises in Europe since the Second World War. Peace Direct's Kevin McCann spoke to **Olga Dolinina** about developments in 2016.*



Protestors in Kiev in December 2013. Fighting in Eastern Ukraine continues today. Image credit: [Ivan Bandura](#).

Peace Direct: What is the current situation in Ukraine?

There are a lot of challenges, and in terms of IDPs, it's not getting any better. A lot of people are trying to return from the Government Controlled Area (GCA) to the Non Government Controlled Area (NGCA). It's too expensive to stay, to find a job and pay rent in the GCA, and to get access to schools and kindergarten. But IDPs are trying to adapt – a lot of them do not want to go back once the conflict ends.

There are reports of civilians being killed, and a lot of damage to housing due to continuous shelling. According to the latest OHCHR reports, about 10,000 people have been killed and more than 22,000 injured since the beginning of the conflict. People who live across the Line

of Contact are at big risk because most of it takes place in this area. And they struggle with basic services such as access to food.

An important political development is the establishment of a government ministry for IDPs and occupied territory. Its main purpose is to receive funds from international donors and redistribute it to IDPs. But the problem is that there is no clear understanding of the minister and what he's going to do. How long will it last? Who will control how the money is spent? There is a lot of scepticism, and an assumption that the ministry will be corrupted.

What is the impact of the boundary between the GCA/NGCA?

Freedom of movement is vital, to earn money and access basic services and food. But there are only five checkpoints across two oblasts, and it is near impossible to move across the Line of Contact because of the queues and restrictions.

We need to provide opportunities for IDPs to build new lives and support themselves.

More generally, the militarisation of society makes things difficult. Some cities are closed, and there are mines and explosive remnants of war everywhere. This is a massive problem, and people are being killed because of it.

What problems do IDPS face?

A huge issue is the suspension of social payments. The government has tried to make it illegal to make welfare payments to people in the NGCA. But you can't just travel from Donetsk to Kiev to collect your pension and then go back.

Another issue is hampered access – discrimination I would say – in terms of employment, renting apartments, and access to school and kindergartens. If IDPs apply for work, employers favour locals – not those from, for example Donetsk. They think they will damage the apartments and leave. There is a lot of pressure on schools because of the newcomers.

But a very positive sign is that many people thought that this was a sign of more general stigma towards IDPs and people from the east. In fact, UNHCR carried out a survey and found that that actually most host communities are

very tolerant and supportive towards IDPs. Although it is still an issue, the tension is not as big as people think.

What obstacles are there to IDPs returning home – when do you think this will be possible?

The problem is that our government says that all IDPs will ultimately have to return to the NGCA. They're not even considering the idea that people will stay. So all their programmes are geared towards people going back. But many have already been in the GCA for two years, and have made their lives here; about 40% think they will stay. So it's as much about dealing with the problems they face in the GCA.

There have been discussions around the idea of banks providing loans to those looking to start businesses, but so far not much has happened. This would be helpful, as it would help us move from emergency response to early recovery work, which is tied in with the need to move people away from dependency on humanitarian assistance. We need to provide opportunities for IDPs to build new lives and support themselves.

Have local organisations been able to respond?

Local groups are always the first to react, because the government has not had these types of problems in the past, and didn't know how to react. The government mainly provided an emergency response – for example, providing food and clothes. But now the conflict is two years old, and there need to be more opportunities for people to support themselves.

Some local organisations say that the best thing the government could do is to stay away!

Local NGOs are doing a lot as partners for bigger organisations, and some have had small grants, such as a thousand dollars, to buy sewing or cooking equipment. This means people can earn money and support their families. But local NGOs don't generally know how to apply for grants, and can't speak English. So only a few big ones, who already know how the system works can apply.

How can the Ukrainian government and the international community support those who have been forced to flee, or the organisations helping them?

Some local organisations say that the best thing the government could do is to stay away! International groups could help by providing funding and capacity

building for the government and departments that work directly with IDPs. Also, we still don't have a joint database for all IDPs. This has been discussed for two years but not yet been implemented, although one is supposed to be in place by September. This would be a good example of cooperation, and if it allowed for a 'needs by region' analysis it would be much easier to provide assistance.

Olga Dolinina is Insight on Conflict's Local Peacebuilding Expert in Ukraine. A trained journalist, in 2014 she began working for Save the Children in Dnipropetrovsk. Using her experience of professional sports marketing and management, she also founded and runs Break The Ice, a hockey-based NGO supporting children displaced by the conflict in Ukraine. Olga is currently a Protection Associate with the UNHCR in Kiev.

Colombian refugees: from victims to peacemakers

Decades of violence in Colombia have led to one of the largest internally displaced and refugee populations in the world. Lina María Jaramillo discusses the challenges they face as the final chapter in the long-running conflict appears to be drawing to a close.



The government of President Juan Manuel Santos, pictured, and Colombia's largest paramilitary group, FARC, announced a comprehensive ceasefire deal in June 2016. Image credit: [Ministerio TIC Colombia](#).

Colombia is now very close to settling a peace agreement with the FARC, one of the illegal armed groups which have been responsible for human rights violations during more than a century of armed conflict in Colombia. The violence has led to one of the world's biggest humanitarian tragedies. Almost seven million people have been forced to leave their homes and are now internally displaced, while more than 500,000 more have crossed its borders as refugees. Most of these are in neighbouring Venezuela and Ecuador.

The situation for Colombian refugees is difficult. Many do not have asylum status or have not been registered as

victims of the conflict. But without this status, host countries often do not recognise the human rights of refugees. An appalling example of the situation Colombians abroad face took place in 2015, when more than 1,000 people were deported by the Venezuelan government without any regard for their status as refugees from the violence.

In light of this, it is encouraging that victims have been placed at the centre of the peace talks in Havana. This is important, as in order to build sustainable peace the agreements must focus on reparations and the restitution of the dignity of the victims. But refugees do not want to be left behind.

Although the sheer scale of the internally forced displaced population has overshadowed the refugee drama, in many countries refugees have organised themselves, shaping collaborative networks to support and give technical and legal advice to other refugees. As the situation develops, organised groups and civil society are taking the opportunity to change the status of refugees from victims to peacemakers, developing political agendas around the issues they face.

Civil society: leading the way on refugee protection

Colombia has remarkable experience with civil society organisations working with displaced and refugee populations. These groups are recognised for their activism and insistence upon fully understanding the

humanitarian disaster in Colombia, in order to ensure concrete actions from the international community to address the needs of those affected. They include the Comité Permanente, the Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento, the Foro Internacional de Víctimas, Fundación Esperanza, the Jesuit Refugee Service, Pastoral Social, and Rodeemos el Diálogo.

The Foro Internacional de Víctimas is a remarkable example of civil society involvement in refugee protection

A remarkable example of this work has been the Foro Internacional de Víctimas, or FIV. Created in 2014, the FIV is a civil society initiative driven by Colombian citizens as well as refugees and victims of the armed conflict living abroad. It aims to ensure a space for dialogue and the active participation of migrants in peacebuilding. And it has had some success.

“We have met with the UN Refugee Agency in Colombia in order to improve our work providing technical support on legal issues to victims of exile, refuge and forced migration,” says Diana Arias from the FIV.

“We have also achieved some level of political influence by promoting peace dialogues with the ELN, the second most recognised rebel group active in Colombia. And we have actively contributed to the National Centre for Historical Memory, giving advice and providing documents, life experiences and information regarding the role of refugees in reconciliation and the reconstruction of historical memory.”

As part of the debate over how best to mobilise the role of refugees in post-agreement Colombia, FIV and the other organisations are concerned about how the rapidly-changing situation could affect the legal status of refugees themselves in recipient countries. Their work aims in consequence to ensure the defence of their human rights.

But the central question in their opinion will be how to ensure the effective participation of refugees – a huge Colombian community in exile – in the implementation of the agreements. As a response to this, a commission on forced migration, exile and reconciliation has been developed, with the support of international relief agencies.

The international conference on peace and refuge

The next step in consolidating the role of refugees as peacemakers will be the International Conference on Forced Migration, Peace and Reconciliation, the outcome of civil society pressure since 2014. Through this international event, refugee activists are aiming to reach a real political commitment from all nations to guarantee the implementation of sustainable and long-lasting solutions for victims of the Colombian conflict, based on local reintegration processes, return and reparation.

This is also crucial, as the signing of a peace agreement is not the end of armed conflict. So it should not mean the interruption of international protection for Colombian refugees. The conference should establish political arrangements to facilitate either the safe return of refugees to Colombia or the integration of those whose desire is stay in their host countries.

It is inspiring to see how Colombian refugees look at themselves as peacebuilders

But the conference itself is a positive sign. Around the world, humanitarian disasters are unfolding, with millions of refugees created as result of civil wars, poverty and fundamentalist hatred. So it is inspiring to see how Colombian refugees are now looking at themselves as key peacebuilders, and how quickly they are organising themselves to have a say in the future of post-conflict Colombia.

To leave behind all the painful experiences they have suffered, while using their status as victims of the armed conflict to influence the agenda on their future – and demonstrate what refugees face – shows an enormous sense of responsibility. Colombians are an admirable example of resilience and the will to build peace.

Lina María Jaramillo is Peace Direct's Local Peacebuilding Expert in Colombia. She is a political scientist with Master's degrees in International Studies and International Development. She has over eight years' experience in peace, security and development projects and is currently with Oxfam as Knowledge Management Officer.

Lebanon: a worried land, full of refugees

Beirut-based Sawssan Abou-Zahr reports on the situation in Lebanon, where millions of people have sought refuge from conflicts across the region. Daily life is difficult for all involved – and getting more so.



Syrians make up some of the 25% of the Lebanese population. The country is facing huge pressure as it tries to provide for them. Image credit: [World Bank](#).

It was a rainy day. I was in a café in Hamra, the most vibrant street in Beirut. A Syrian boy came up to me, selling roses. The waiter yelled at him but I told him to stay. In light summer clothes, he was quivering with fear and the cold. He refused to take my money and keep his roses. So I chose a pink one. I still have it.

Days later, security guards beat a Syrian girl and kicked her out of a fancy store in downtown Beirut. She grabbed a bag of chips worth fifty cents. They refused my offer to pay for it so the skinny girl could eat.

One in four people in Lebanon is a Syrian refugee

Lebanon is a small territory in which one in four people is a Syrian refugee. For its size, it hosts the largest community of refugees in the world. It has 450,000 registered Palestinian refugees, in addition to thousands of other Palestinians from Syria, 40,000 Iraqis and a thousand refugees from Sudan. All this is stirring racism towards 'foreigners', mainly Syrians, especially after recent terrorist attacks on a Lebanese border village; in a country of many religious confessions and ongoing internal rifts, refugees have historically been considered a destabilising factor. Their presence revives bitter memories from the civil war, in which Palestinian militias and the Syrian army took part.

Lebanese life for refugees

Lebanon, a de facto land of refugees, is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, and has refused to set up formal camps for those who have arrived fleeing war. So Syrians are treated as emigrants. In the political debate they are inaccurately referred to as being internally displaced, to deny them asylum and internationally recognised rights.

Sexual exploitation is a growing danger

In 2014, Lebanon imposed a sponsorship system to limit new arrivals, along with strict rules on residency. Unless sponsored by an employer under rigid conditions, Syrians have to sign a pledge not to work and provide a rental agreement with a landlord, which puts them at risk of physical and financial exploitation.

Sometimes people claim to hire their Syrian friends and relatives to grant them residency. A journalist said to security officers that a well-known colleague was her driver so he could stay in the country. Both felt embarrassed and ashamed.

Syrians look for work in the informal sector as regulations deny them access to the mainstream job market. They struggle to get pay, which at best is low and unstable.

The little ones often beg among the traffic, with many not fortunate enough to attend publically-funded Lebanese schools. Adults work at construction sites for long hours. Others carry customer goods at supermarkets, relying only on penny tips. Poverty and misery are common, and refugees often have literally nothing, without identity cards, and cannot register their new-borns. To make things worse, many municipalities have imposed night-time curfews on them.

Women are the most vulnerable. Girls have been victims of early marriages, and sexual exploitation is a growing danger. In March 2016 a large trafficking ring was uncovered in Mount Lebanon. Syrian women were

tempted and recruited, then imprisoned, tortured and flogged. They were forced to take part in prostitution, even during their menstrual periods, and many have undergone risky abortions. Unfortunately Syrian accomplices helped the traffickers.

Meanwhile, wealthy Syrians are not subject to legal restrictions. Many have established their own businesses in the culinary and real estate sectors.

A home from home? The challenge for civil society

Despite the harshness, Syrian refugees do have friends among the Lebanese people. They donate food, clothes and shelter, volunteer to teach children, and collect money to offer medical assistance.

Corruption and bureaucracy hinder the proper spending of the small money the international community dedicates to refugees in Lebanon. Civil society activists and organisations are working with scarce resources to fill the gap. Many are sincere, although a few make it their business to establish fraudulent associations to get funds which don't go to refugees at all, one activist told me.

However, most work with compassion. They develop long term projects to empower refugees and host communities. Simplified conflict resolution and peace building techniques are taught. Vocational training and language courses are offered, and legal and psychological assistance provided. Summer camps for young Lebanese and Syrians establish common grounds to defy stereotypes.

Nawal Mddally works for SAWA, a peacebuilding and development organisation based in the Bekaa valley east of Beirut. She believes relief is inseparable from capacity building, especially for women and younger refugees. However, reaching out to them is hindered by the fact that more and more women are becoming the sole money providers. She explains that men without legal

residence fear arrest and deportation, so, in Bekaa, women and girls work in the fields, in unfair conditions, which in turn complicates the implementation of aid. The longer the Syrian crisis lasts, the more refugees are at physical risk within some unfriendly host communities, she warns.

The international community should support community infrastructure

Another activist fears that the deteriorating economy and security situation in Lebanon could trigger more governmental pressure on refugees, potentially creating ghettos. He calls on the international community to allocate money to develop host infrastructure in order to ease sources of conflict.

However, not all refugee stories emerging from Lebanon are grim. Recently a Syrian student came second in the nationwide ninth-grade exams, while working daily to help his father after school. He had to study harder than anyone to adapt to the Lebanese curricula. And a Palestinian, living in equally hard conditions, came third. There is room for hope after all.

Sawssan Abou-Zahr is Peace Direct's Local Peacebuilding Expert in Lebanon. A senior journalist at An-Nahar, she covers issues related to the Arab Spring, women, Syrian and Palestinian refugees, radical Islamist movements, and Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. She has written features on human rights issues and peace building efforts based on field research in Afghanistan and Libya, and has also worked on assignments in Switzerland, Bahrain, Oman, Poland, Algeria, Brazil, Germany, Morocco, Kuwait and Turkey, covering high profile events and interviewing prominent political figures. She has contributed to the IREX report on media freedom in Lebanon.

About the authors: Peace Direct has a unique network of more than 35 Local Peacebuilding Experts. They conduct research and have profiled more than 1,300 local peacebuilding organisations for www.insightonconflict.org, the leading online resource on local peacebuilding.

Peace Direct is an international NGO that works with local people to stop violent conflict and build sustainable peace. We support local organisations in ten countries around the world and advocate for locally led approaches to preventing conflict and building peace.

For more information on this report, contact Kevin McCann at kevin.mccann@peacedirect.org.