

A person in a light-colored shirt and pants is walking through a dense forest, carrying a large, dark wooden boat on their back. The boat is held upright and supported by the person's hands. The background is filled with green foliage and trees. In the lower right corner, a group of people, including a child, is visible sitting on the ground.

Migration and conflict: some
insights of 20 years of
research

Ana María Ibáñez – Interamerican
Development Bank

HiCN Working papers

33% about forced displacement



HiCN Households in Conflict Network
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Towards Sustainable Return Policies for the Displaced
Population: Why Are Some Displaced Households More
Willing to Return than Others?

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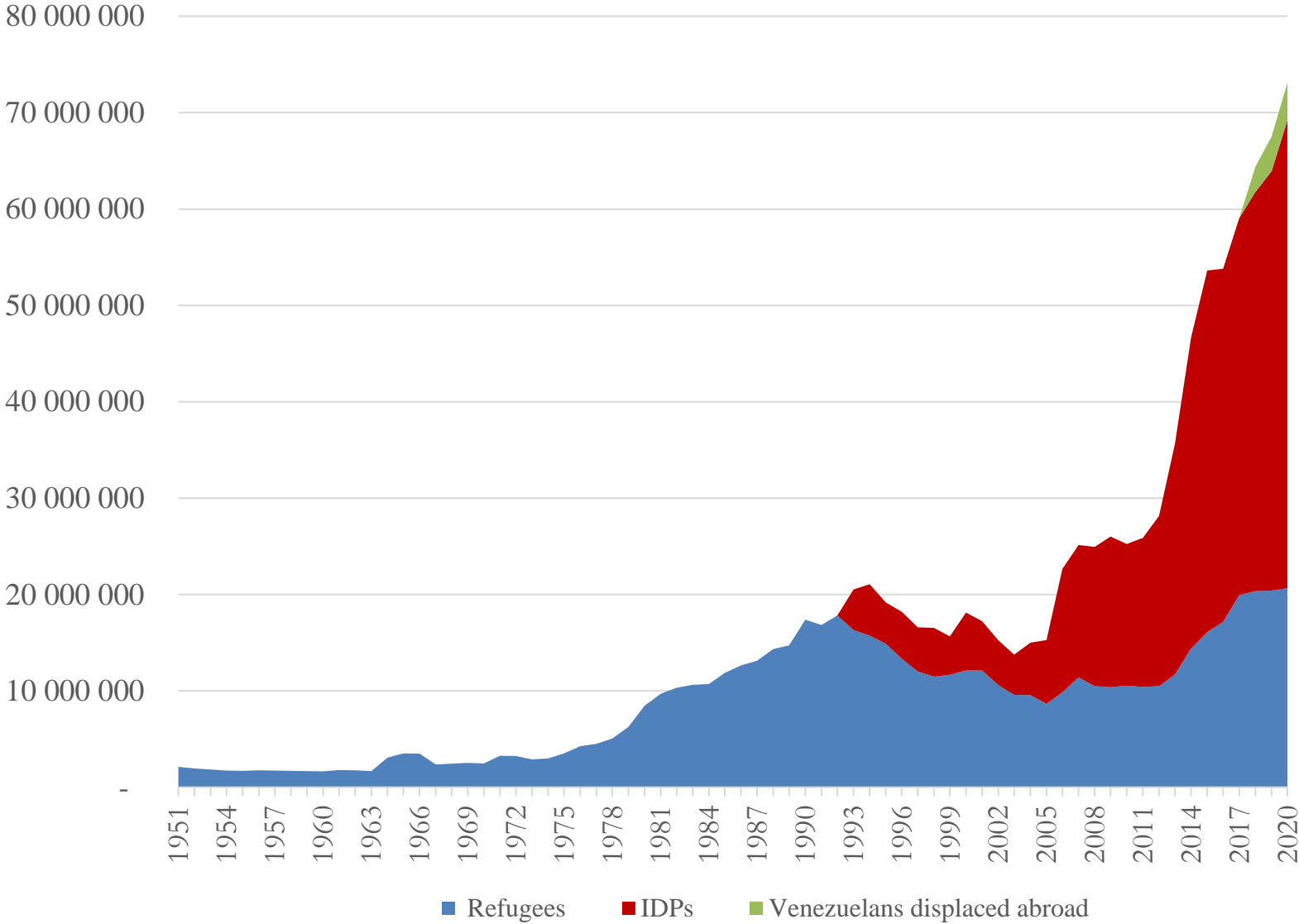
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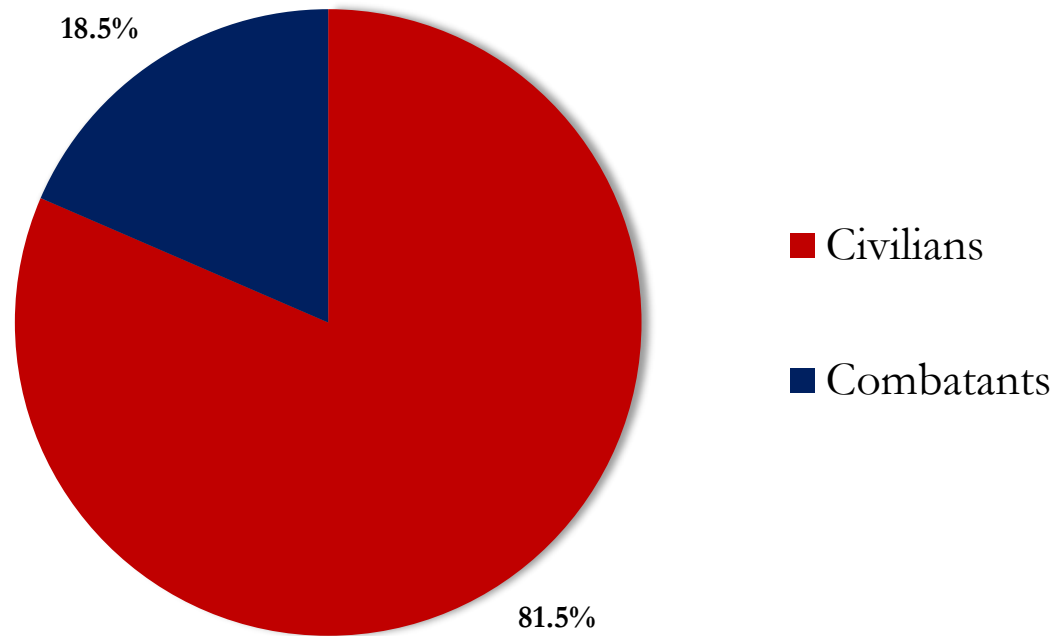
Forced migration: trends 1951-2020



Source: UNHCR (2021)

High victimization of the civilian population

In Colombia: around 8 out of every 10 people killed because of armed conflict have been civilians



Total conflict related deaths since 1985: 200,000

Forced migration in the economic literature

- Economists perceived forced migration as a political problem: refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) were passive victims of war with little room for voluntary decisions
- But people and households **DO** have agency and adopt several strategies to survive amid violence and conflict
- Migration is one of the strategies people adopt to minimize the impact of war and increase the chances of survival



The talk today

- Who migrates and who stays during violent conflict
- Some economic consequences of forced migration

Who stays and who leaves: the dynamics and the impact of violence

- Violence is the strongest correlate of the decision to migrate: Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Nepal, and Spain
- Violence is not random: strategic interaction between armed groups and the population
- Deliberate targeting of armed groups:
 - Colombia: landowners, people with stronger community ties and those affiliated with left-wing parties
 - Maoist in Nepal
 - Left-wing parties in Spain

Who stays and who leaves: economic factors also play an important role

- Traditional migration incentives
 - Push factors: deterioration of economic conditions in hometown
 - Pull factors: opportunities in destination areas
 - Migration constraints
- But violence may reverse the role of traditional migration incentives
 - Deliberate attacks of better-off individuals: landownership and social network

Who stays and who leaves: redistribution of the population along the territory

- Redistribution of the population in conflict times is not random and depends on conflict dynamics
 - Nepal: stayers were landowners or wage workers
 - Colombia: migrants were landowners or people with strong social networks
 - Bosnia – Herzegovina: positive self-selection into migration
- Opportunities for development in conflict regions once war is over hinges on the characteristics of the staying population

Economic consequences of forced migration: asset losses

- Large risk of asset losses: abandonment or illegal seizure
 - Forced migration is often hasty: households leave behind assets
 - Absence of rule of law and unprotected property rights
- In Colombia:
 - IDP lost 7.4 million hectares of land: 1.5 times agricultural land
 - Only 25% of IDP were able to recover from asset losses
 - Consumption and income levels fell by 53% and 28% respectively
- But restitution policies are an opportunity to redress these impacts
 - In Rwanda returnees have a higher access to land and higher levels of well-being

Economic consequences of forced migration: labor markets

- Severe constraints to join labor markets for forced migrants:
 - Skills are not transferable to new destinations (e.g. agricultural skills or language barriers)
 - Loss of network access and employment disruption
 - Deterioration of labor markets in conflict regions
 - But higher incentives to invest in labor skills: less likelihood to return
- In Bosnia-Herzegovina, returned IDP have an increase in unemployment rates between 19% to 22%
- Refugees in the USA, initially fare worse than economic migrants (earn less and work less) but eventually surpass economic migrants

Economic consequences of forced migration: labor markets

- Impact of IDP in Colombia's labor markets:
 - Overall reduction of hourly wage: stronger effect for female, low-skilled and informal workers
 - Wages for self-employed workers with a high school diploma or less declined by 2.1% with a 10% in the share of IDP
 - Average minimum wage increase: 2.21% yearly
- Impact of Syrian refugees on Turkish labor markets
 - Decline in employment of 1.8 pp
 - Unemployment increased by 0.8 pp
 - Fall in labor force participation: 1.03 pp

Three broad conclusions

- Migration during conflict time is not “truly forced or truly voluntary”
 - Violence is a dominant factor
 - But people react to economic incentives
 - And migration can be an effective strategy to avoid victimization and survive
- Yet migration implies a large trade-off between income drops and improvements in security
 - These impacts might be long lasting and in some cases may generate poverty traps
- Changes in prices and wages in destination locations may transmit partially the negative impacts to local populations, particularly to low-income households