



## Peace and Migration: Realising the links

**We are an international community increasingly on the move:** [244 million](#) people crossed borders to become international migrants in 2015. Many people who moved in 2015 did so voluntarily. However, around 65.3 million were forcibly displaced as a result of **factors including conflict, food insecurity and climate change**. Among them, [21.3 million](#) were refugees, forced to cross borders due to violence and fear of persecution. Many of those who fled came from escalating conflicts in Syria and Iraq or long-running conflicts in Somalia and Afghanistan. Half of those fleeing were under the age of 18.

**This week, member states of the United Nations will hold a [Summit on Refugees and Migrants](#) – the first of its kind.** Given the global nature of the issue at hand, this is undoubtedly the right forum and the right time. However, and despite reiterating their commitment to established laws and norms surrounding the movement of people, member states have fallen well short of any new ambitious changes. For example, there has been no success in agreeing on firm commitments to share the responsibility of hosting refugees, nor is there political will to discuss legal migration and open up safe and regular channels.

**Business as usual will not be enough.** It is clear that the global [refugee protection](#) and wider [humanitarian](#) system is under severe financial stress. Furthermore, the ten countries hosting the largest number of refugees were in developing regions, while the six biggest economies in the world [host less](#) than 9% of the world's refugees. The UN Secretary-General has rightly argued that this is not only a crisis of numbers but also a crisis of solidarity. Unless the international community shows greater solidarity, and collectively designs and implements appropriate responses, there is a risk that these will not be effective or respond to the needs of the world's poorest and most vulnerable.

**An improved humanitarian response will only do so much.** As member states recognise in this week's Summit declaration, armed conflict is one of the root causes of the current refugee crisis. The [total number of armed conflicts](#) jumped from 31 in 2010 to 50 in 2015. Conflicts killed more people in 2014 than in any other year in the last two decades. The second most deadly year was 2015. The protracted conflict in Syria accounts for many of these deaths, but of the ten conflicts with the most fatalities in 2013, eight became [more violent](#) in 2014.

**Immediate and longer-term action must be taken to address the root cause of today's crisis.** UN Security Council members are falling shamefully short in their collective responsibility for ending armed conflicts over which they wield direct influence. Urgent leadership is needed to overcome these diplomatic failures. However, as was agreed in the [Stockholm Declaration](#) earlier this year, "if we are to reverse the trend of increasing numbers of protracted humanitarian crises caused by violent conflict, we, now more than ever, need to have a long-term view that focuses more on prevention, by addressing the root causes and the drivers of fragility and conflict." Member states have plenty to work with: in 2015 they committed through the [2030 Agenda](#) to make the promotion of more peaceful, just and inclusive societies a global development priority over the next 15 years. In

2016, the UN General Assembly and the Security Council also [passed resolutions](#) that establish an expansive mandate for the whole of the UN to sustain peace before, during and after conflict. This renewed consensus for peace provides a foundation for action on the root causes of conflict and instability driving displacement.

**We, as a peacebuilding community, are deeply concerned with the nature of today's response to the growing flow of migrants and refugees into developed countries.** Under pressure from xenophobic populists stoking panic, governments are making poor domestic and foreign policy choices: short-term and securitised approaches, legitimised through an ever-narrowing definition of the national interest, are being prioritised in the panic to 'do something'. Aid, security cooperation and international legitimacy [are being offered](#) to regimes in return for quick action to reduce migration from or through their territories. In some cases, these are the very same regimes that have previously been ostracised for persecuting their people, sparking conflict, or both. In addition, while much of the focus is on migration management and cooperation on return and readmission, these partnerships are shifting scarce resources away from the protection of refugees and tackling the root causes of displacement. Moreover, while [aid may be withdrawn](#) in case of failure to cooperate, it will essentially be taken away from the people who need it the most.

**The political nature of lasting peace is being ignored.** We know that because people are politically excluded, because they cannot freely redress injustices, and because they cannot enjoy their most basic rights, including to freely organise as civil society, repressive regimes tend to be [more prone to conflict](#) than other countries. Unsurprisingly, the evidence is also clear that when conflict strikes, the number of refugees from countries with repressive regimes are significantly higher. Recent experience tells us that partnerships with governing elites in such contexts will prove to be dead ends for migration management that may only make matters much worse. Similarly, while livelihoods and resilience programmes are being prioritised to address the root causes of migration, these over-simplify and de-politicise the causes of displacement and fail to address crucial issues, including poor governance, injustice and inequalities and corruption.

**Turning renewed global commitments on preventing conflict and sustaining peace into reality will demand leadership on the global stage. But it will also require political courage at home,** where the case for a patient, long-term, preventive approach must be made to electorates along with an appeal for societies to reject shrill calls to build walls and close themselves off from the world. As has been demonstrated on countless occasions, most people will be willing to take on their fair share of responsibility for global problems in the knowledge that other countries will do the same. And it is here that the UN comes in: as well as being established to uphold world peace, the organisation serves as a forum for countries to overcome collective action problems. While this week's Summit appears to have missed the opportunity for concrete measures, the political declaration to be adopted can still be a useful step toward immediate bilateral and multilateral follow-up actions.

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