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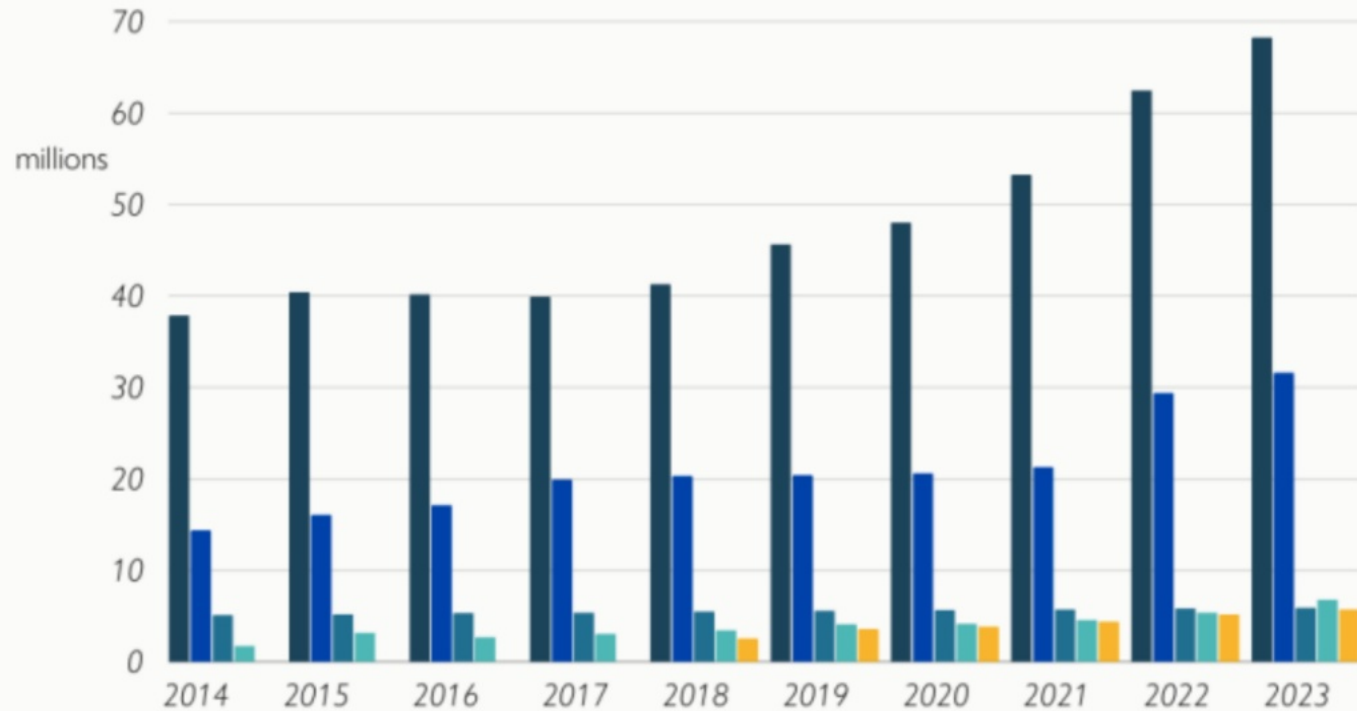
Understanding (In)Voluntary Migration: The Role of Force

Exploring Sociological Perspectives on Migration and Coercion





GLOBAL TRENDS OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT, end of 2014 - end of 2023



Note: The category "Other people in need of international protection" was first introduced in mid-2022 reporting. The new category refers to people who have not been reported under other categories, and includes Venezuelans previously designated as "Venezuelans displaced abroad (VDA)". This change has been made retroactively in UNHCR's statistics since 2018. The term VDA will no longer be used. (UNHCR, 2023: 4)

- Internally displaced people due to conflict and violence
- Refugees under UNHCR's mandate
- Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate
- Asylum-seekers
- Other people in need of international protection

Source: UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023* (Copenhagen, 2024).

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Introduction to the Sociology of Forced Migration

The role of violence in shaping forced migration through a sociological lens, focusing on how different types of violence drive involuntary displacement.

Forced migration, distinct from voluntary migration, is characterized by **coercion, where individuals or groups are compelled to move due to direct violence (e.g., war, persecution) or indirect forms of violence (e.g., poverty, environmental degradation).**

What is (In)voluntary Migration?

Forced Migration Definition:

The movement of people under duress or coercion, typically caused by factors such as war, persecution, or natural disasters.

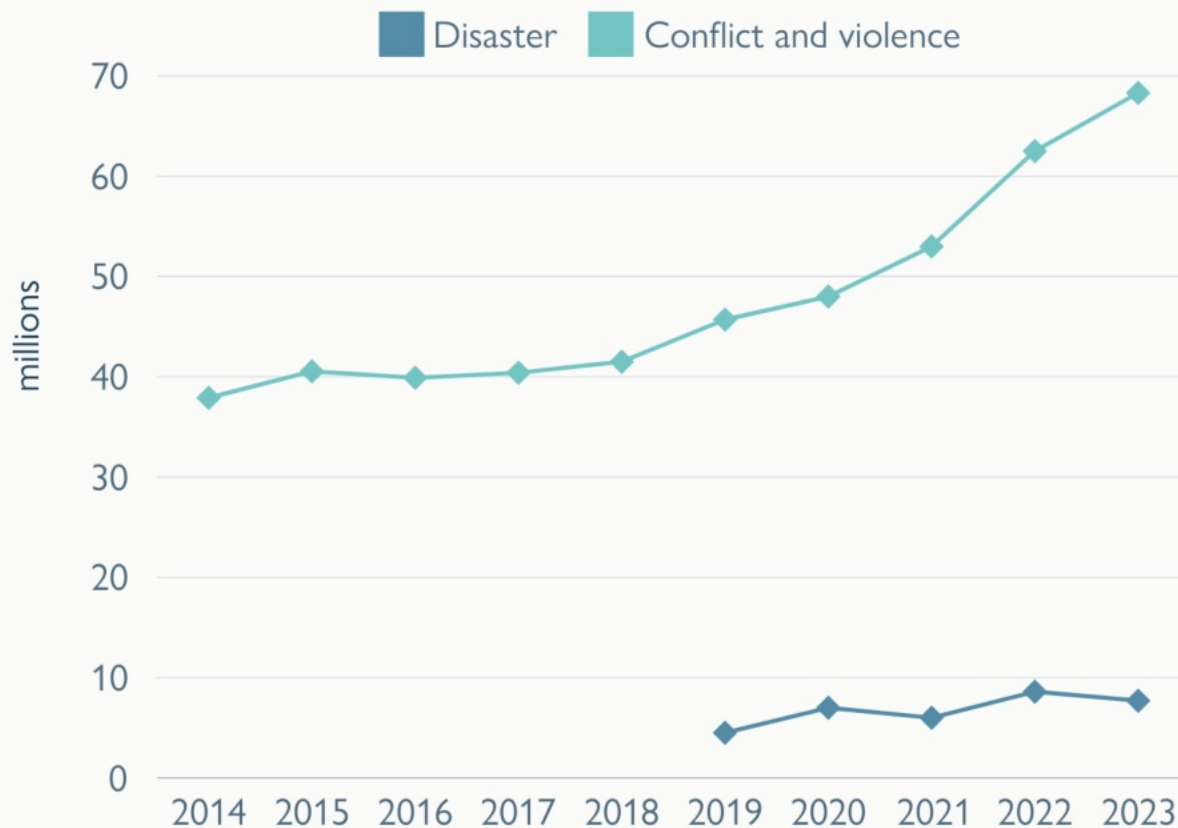
Source: Mandić, D. (2022). "What Is the Force of Forced Migration? Diagnosis and Critique of a Conceptual Relativization." *Theory and Society*, 51: 61–90

Displacement

The movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters.



INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs)
DUE TO DISASTER AND CONFLICT,
END OF 2014 - END OF 2023

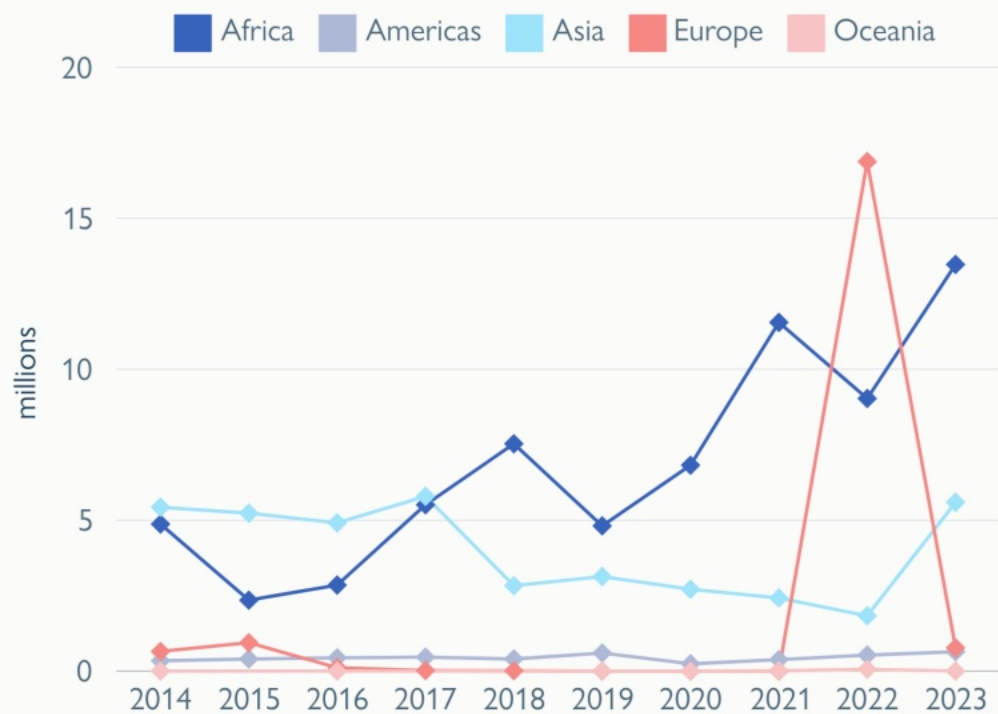


Source: IDMC, 2024.

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NEW INTERNAL DISPLACEMENTS DUE TO CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE, BY REGION, 2014 - 2023



Source: IDMC, 2024.

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What is the Force of Forced Migration?

- The "force" aspect has been conceptually sidelined in migration theory.
- Contemporary theorizing has overemphasized the migratory aspect of refugees and migrants while neglecting the coercion and violence that causes displacement.
- The "force factor" — the coercive, often violent events that precipitate refugee movements — must be reintroduced and prioritized in sociological theory, which is uniquely equipped to address it

Mandić, D. (2022). "What Is the Force of Forced Migration? Diagnosis and Critique of a Conceptual Relativization." *Theory and Society*, 51: 61–90

RELATIVIZATION OF "FORCE FACTOR" IN MIGRATION THEORY

that have blurred the “force” aspect in the theory of forced migration:

1. **Unintentional harshness:** Assumes that the force faced by refugees is either diffuse or unintentional, thus downplaying the activity and intentionality of actors causing displacement, such as state and non-state armed groups.
2. **Procedural blurring:** This approach views forced migration as an ongoing process, shifting attention from the individual violent events that trigger displacement to the overall migration journey and post-displacement experience, thereby de-emphasizing the initial coercion.
3. **Political and economic uncertainty:** This relativization blends the political and economic forces behind displacement, weakening the clarity of violence and coercion as the defining forces behind refugee movements.

Sociologists are interested **in coercion because it shifts focus from migration as a simple act of movement to migration as a response to violence or other forms of structural oppression.**

Reasserting the force factor



a return to the **coercion-centric conceptualization of forced migration, drawing on sociological theories of violence** to better understand displacement as the product of deliberate, identifiable forces, such as war, ethnic cleansing, and state repression.

Reasserting the force factor would sharpen theoretical clarity and prevent conceptual oversimplifications that obscure the violence inherent in forced migration.

Voluntary vs. Involuntary Migration

Voluntary Migration: Define as movement based on individual choice, typically for economic opportunities, family reunification, or lifestyle reasons. Common examples include labor migration, internal migration, or migration for education.

- **Involuntary (Forced) Migration:** Define as migration driven by coercion, such as war, violence, persecution, environmental disasters, or human trafficking. Examples include refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and victims of human trafficking.
- Key Distinctions:

Choice vs. Coercion: the primary distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration is the presence of agency and choice in voluntary migration, while involuntary migration **is driven by external forces beyond the migrant's control.**

"Force Factor": Coercion or violence driving displacement.

"Survival Migrants": Those fleeing life-threatening circumstances.

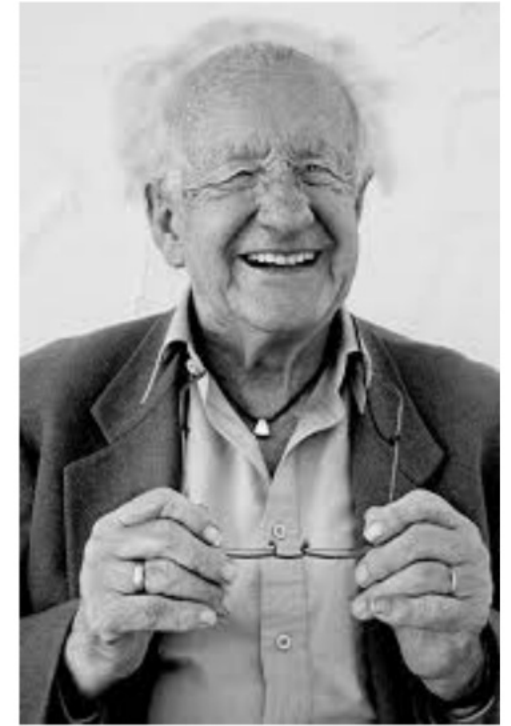
Relational Definition: Forced migrants should be understood in relation to those enduring similar violent conditions but not migrating.

Theories of violence in Sociology

Galtung's Structural Violence: refers to social structures (e.g., poverty, institutionalized inequality) that harm individuals or prevent them from meeting their basic needs.
o Direct vs. Indirect Violence:

Distinguish between direct violence (e.g., war, persecution) and **structural violence** (e.g., economic systems that prevent access to resources), how both can lead to forced migration.

**Galtung, J. (1969): "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research."
Journal of Peace Research**



RICHMOND'S SYSTEMS APPROACH ON MIGRATION

Richmond proposed a systems approach to migration, suggesting that migration is best understood as part of a complex interaction between structural conditions and individual agency. Richmond emphasized that migration decisions are not solely based on personal preferences but are often shaped by larger sociopolitical and economic forces.

Agency vs. Structure: there is the tension between individual agency (the ability of individuals to make choices) and structural constraints (external factors that limit those choices). Forced migration, according to Richmond, occurs when structural constraints—such as violence, political oppression, or economic instability—become so intense that they effectively eliminate personal agency.

Reactive Migration: Richmond introduced the term "**reactive migration**", referring to migration driven by external pressures, where individuals or groups are forced to react to adverse conditions (such as war, famine, or persecution) rather than migrate out of personal choice. **This concept is directly linked to forced migration and highlights how violence and structural inequality operate as push factors.**

Direct Violence: Richmond's analysis acknowledges that direct violence, such as warfare and political persecution, are clear drivers of forced migration. This is especially evident in cases of refugees, where individuals or groups are forced to flee their countries to escape persecution or violence.

Structural Violence: Richmond extends the discussion to structural violence, arguing that socioeconomic conditions such as chronic poverty, lack of access to healthcare, and education can also be considered forms of coercion that push people to migrate. For example, individuals in developing countries facing systemic inequality may be forced to migrate to survive, even in the absence of direct conflict.

Reference: Richmond, A. H. (1993). "Reactive Migration: Sociological Perspectives on Refugee Movements." *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 6(1), 7-24.

Ref: Richmond, A. H. (1994). *Global Apartheid: Refugees, Racism, and the New World Order*. Oxford University Press.

