

MODULE 2.

ARMED CONFLICTS AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

MODULE 2.

ARMED CONFLICTS AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Published and coordinated by

Servei Civil Internacional
de Catalunya

Authors

Pamela Urrutia Arestizábal
(Escola Cultura de Pau)

Translation from Catalan

Sara Gil Ribas

English editing and revision

Christie Collins

Design and layout

Mireia Serrano

Place and date of publication

Barcelona, setembre de 2020

In collaboration with

 escola de
cultura de pau

With the support of



License



Learning goals

What is the situation of armed conflicts in the world and how do they cause forced displacement on people? In this module you will get elements to understand how the civilian population is impacted by armed conflict, how the situations of armed conflicts are linked to the flows of refugees and internal displacements, and what the present scene of the displaced population is at a global level. This material will also help you reflect on the gender dimension of the population's forced displacement, and on some of the main challenges in regards to the reception of refugees.



KNOWLEDGE

- Get to know the present scene of armed conflicts and the reality of forced displacements in the world.
- Acquire a deeper and more complex point of view about this phenomenon with a gender perspective, and take into account the challenges which refugees face in the host societies.



ABILITIES

- Identify the impacts of conflicts on the civilian population, and the link between armed conflicts and forced displacement.
- Recognize gender elements behind forced displacement caused by armed conflicts, and behind the difficulties which those people who achieve to flee from violence situations in their countries have to face.



ATTITUDES

- Increase the motivation to question simplistic and stereotyped discourses about the realities that refugees and displaced people face.
- Promote a more critical and proactive attitude to contribute to actions aimed to improve the reception of refugees, and demand greater political and institutional commitment to respond to this phenomenon.

Armed conflict and forced displacement: What are we talking about?

The number of forcibly displaced people caused by conflicts, violence, persecution and human rights violations has increased steadily during the last years, and the figure is at the worst levels since the Second World War. According to UNHCR figures, at the end of 2018 there were 70.8 million forcibly displaced people, inside or outside their countries' borders, a 50% increase from 2009 (UNHCR, 2019).

A considerable amount of forced displacements are directly linked to armed conflicts and their serious consequences on civilians. Refugees face multiple challenges, both in their attempt to look for a safe place, and once they have reached the host societies. For instance, they confront difficulties caused by the non-fulfillment of international duties of protection by the reception states, securitization policies and border closures, and the stereotyped and prejudiced discourses about refugees. In this unit we will try to delve into this complex phenomenon, and give tools to understand it through four key questions:

- *How is the present scene of armed conflicts, and what are their consequences on civilian populations?*
- *What is the relationship between armed conflicts and forced displacement of a population?*
- *What keys does gender perspective provide for the analysis of the phenomenon of forced displacement?*
- *What challenges can be identified in the reception of refugees?*

SCENE OF ARMED CONFLICTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON CIVILIAN POPULATION

The last decade is characterized by a scene of more intense, lethal and complex armed conflicts, which has resulted in a deterioration of the world's security (Smith, 2018).

By **armed conflict** we understand a confrontation of regular or irregular armed groups with aims perceived as incompatible, in which the continuous and organized use of violence:

- a)** causes a minimum of 100 casualties in a year, and/or a serious impact on the territory (destruction of infrastructures or nature) and on human security (ex. wounded or displaced population, sexual and gender violence, food insecurity, impact on mental health and the social fabric, or disruption of basic services);
- b)** intends to achieve goals different from those of common crime, and usually related to:
 - demands for self-determination and self-government, or identity aspirations;
 - opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state, or to the domestic or international politics of a government, which in both cases motivates the fight for reaching or undermining power;
 - control over resources or territory.

The figures from the School for a Culture of Peace, which has analyzed global armed conflicts in the last twenty years, confirm that although the number of armed conflicts has remained around thirty in the last decade, the percentage of serious cases has increased. These cases present high mortality rates, profound consequences on human security, and severe effects on the territory. In 2008, serious or high-intensity cases – which caused over a thousand casualties per year – represented 26% of the total armed conflicts. However, in 2017 this proportion reached 40% (see Figure 2.1). In the past several years, armed conflicts have taken the lives of thousands upon thousands of people.

To name a few examples:

- It is estimated that in Afghanistan, in 2008 alone, around 43 000 people died because of the armed conflict.
- In Yemen, the total amount of casualties from the beginning of 2016 to the end of 2018 was already over 60 000.
- In the case of Syria, around 20 000 people lost their lives in 2018, and the number of casualties since the beginning of the armed conflict in 2011 was already over half a million people.

Source: School for a Culture of Peace, 2019

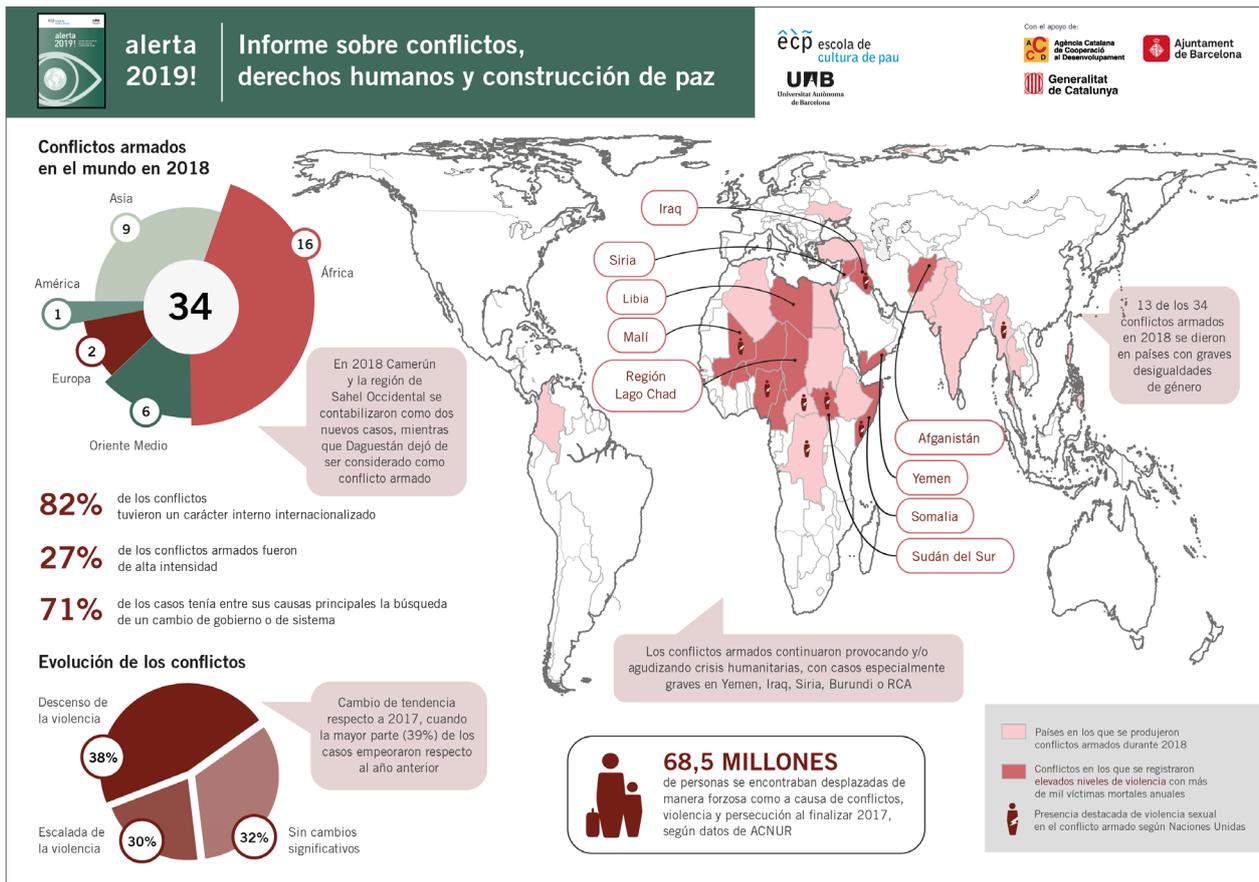


Figure 2.1. Infographics on armed conflicts (2018). Source: School for a Culture of Peace, 2019.

Unfortunately, the use of deliberate or indiscriminate violence against civilians is a war strategy of many – state and non-state – armed actors, who do not hesitate to use violence in order to cause terror, make progress in their strategic aims, drive their opponents into rendition, or force population displacements. Year after year, reports by the UN, various civil society organizations, and the press confirm and denounce the variety of human rights abuses and violations perpetrated against civilians.

In this way, **the civilian population** is directly affected by attacks with different types of weapons, including light weapons, bombs, explosives, and even chemical weapons, as repeatedly denounced in recent cases such as in Syria – according to different investigations, the Syrian regime is the main side responsible. Additionally, in armed conflict contexts, civilians suffer summary executions, torture, arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances, kidnappings, extortion, and/or sexual violence.

Conflicts also have serious **impacts on minors**: In many contexts, they are victims of forced recruitment, and do not have their right to education guaranteed, partly because they live in precarious conditions – which

force them to work inside and outside their homes –, and in other cases due to the destruction of educational infrastructures in conflict scenes.

Moreover, the impacts on the population caused by **civil infrastructures' affectations** must be taken into account, as in the case of markets, community and religious buildings, and above all, health centers. In different active armed conflicts, frequent attacks against hospitals and health personnel are still occurring now, although this constitutes an infringement upon international humanitarian law. Thus, for instance:

Between 2013 and 2016, the Red Cross recorded 2400 attacks of this nature in 11 countries, and Médecins Sans Frontières denounced continuous attacks against hospitals in armed conflicts such as in Afghanistan, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Ukraine, and Yemen.

Lastly, armed conflicts can improve or worsen **humanitarian crisis** situations, and the access to basic services for the population. In 2018, the UN World Food Program pointed out that out of the 815 million people who suffer from chronic hunger in the world, 60% live in conflict contexts and 10 out of the 13 main food crises are related to armed conflicts. In the past several years and up through 2019, the most serious was the crisis in Yemen where the armed conflict not only caused a surge in the number of people who needed assistance, but had also aided in the expansion of diseases.



For a closer look...

About the situations of armed conflicts in the world, you can read the chapter on "[Armed conflicts](#)" in the last edition of the report [Alert 2019! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding](#), which includes general and regional tendencies, and case analysis.

About the impact of conflicts on civilian population, we recommend reading two texts recently published in the 2017 and 2018 editions of the Alert report by the School for a Culture of Peace:

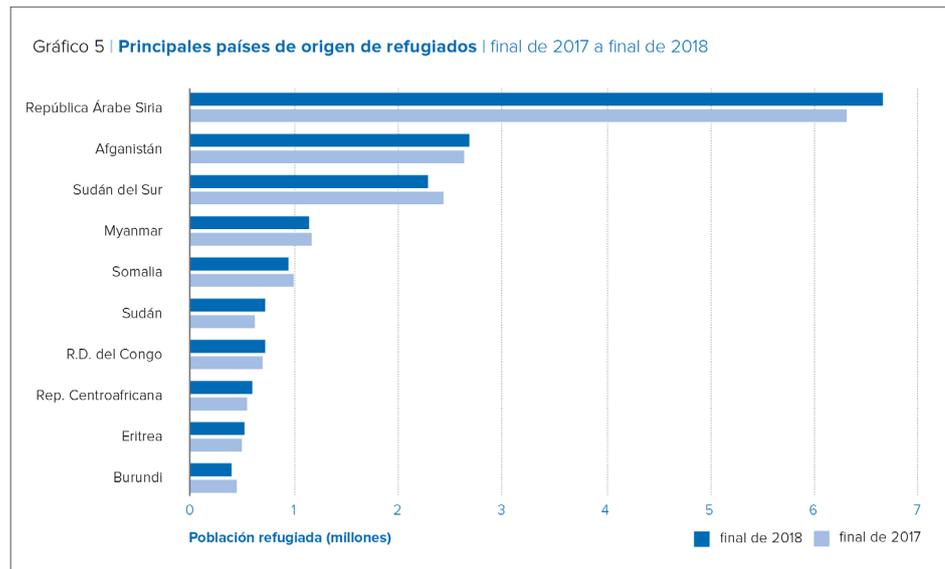
"Siria y el fracaso en la protección de civiles en contextos de conflicto armado", in [Alerta 2017! Informe sobre conflictos, derechos humanos y construcción de paz](#) (in Spanish), p. 264-265.

"The impact of conflicts and violence on children in the MENA region", in [Alert 2018! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding](#), p. 146-147.

CONFLICTS AND POPULATION FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Forced displacement of populations is another consequence of armed conflicts, and as previously stated this phenomenon has significantly intensified over the last years. The correlation between conflicts and displacement is made clear if we analyze the last UNHCR figures. According to this UN agency specialized in the situation of refugees all over the world, at the end of 2018 there were 25.9 million refugees. Out of this total amount, 67% came from five countries – Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, and Somalia –, all of which are in situations of high-intensity conflict except for Myanmar (figure 2.2). In the following graphic we can observe the major source countries of the refugee population in the world, with respect to the UNHCR figures at the end of 2018.

Figure 2.2.
Major source countries
of forcibly displaced
populations (2018).
Source: UNHCR, 2019.



With regard to **internal forced displacement**, that is displacement inside one's own country's borders, there were 41.3 million internally displaced people at the end of 2018, and the ten states with a greater number of internally displaced people in the world suffered armed conflicts of various intensities: Syria, Colombia, DRC, Somalia, Afghanistan, Yemen, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Iraq. As these figures give clear proof, Syria was at the front line among the countries with a considerable population of internally displaced people, and the major source country of refugees. In fact, it is estimated that more than half of its population had to leave their homes as a consequence of the conflict in recent years. This case is considered to be the main cause for the increase of the displaced population in the world in the last few years, although there are other conflicts that have contributed to the growth of global figures.

We must point out that, contrary to what might appear due to certain discourses and narratives about refugees, at this moment most of the people who flee their countries because of conflicts, violence, and persecution live in countries considered developing countries, not in territories such as Europe or the United States. As stated by the UNHCR, at the end of 2018 the countries in “developing regions” hosted 16% of refugees, whilst a third of the refugee population (almost seven million people) lived in some of the “least developed” countries in the world.

The countries with a major number of refugees at the end of 2018 were:

- Turkey, (3.7 million, 98% of them of Syrian origin),
- Pakistan (1.4 million, mostly from Afghanistan), and
- Uganda (1.2 million, coming from different African countries, among which South Sudan stands out).

In Europe, Germany is the most notable country with a refugee population of approximately one million, bringing it to fifth place directly after Sudan (with a similar number of refugees). If we look at the total number of refugees in comparison to the total number of locals in a given state, we can see that Lebanon – with one million refugees at the end of 2018 – is the country which hosts more refugees per local population: in proportion, one in six persons is a refugee. If we account for the number of refugees per 1000 national inhabitants, Lebanon hosted 156 refugees per 1000 national inhabitants, Jordan had 72 per thousand, and Turkey had 45 per thousand. Meanwhile, in the territories considered “high-income countries” – according to the figures of the UNHCR –, the average was 2.7 refugees per thousand inhabitants.

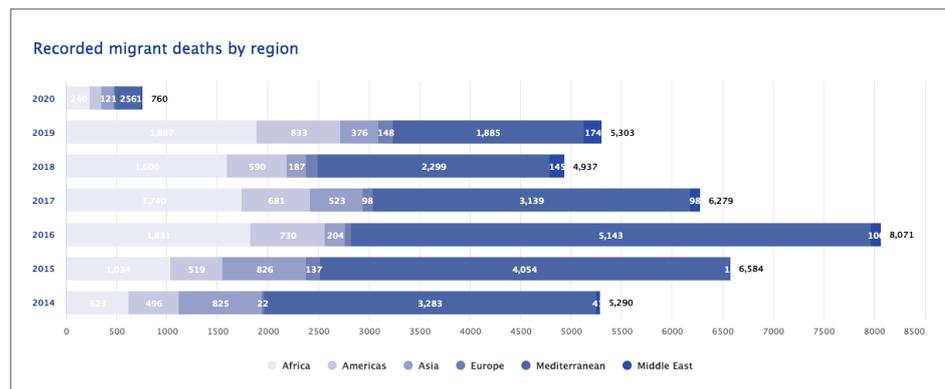
The above mentioned figures show clear proof of the fact that the majority of the forcibly displaced population is still living in other continents, outside of Europe. However, in 2015 and 2016 an increase in the number of refugees and migrants arriving to Europe was registered. This amount was four times the number of people who arrived in 2014. Moreover, in the period 2015-2016 the figure was over a million people in reference to all EU countries, but this is still significantly lower than the number of people arriving to, for instance, the neighboring countries of Syria.

During the period 2015-2016, the most active route used to flee was the eastern Mediterranean shore, and most people who fled came from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, all countries with high-intensity conflicts. Since then, the number of refugees on this route has been decreasing as a result of the different European policies of response and blockade (see the following section on “Challenges for the reception of refugee population”). These policies also caused some changes in displacement patterns, and modified

the main entrance route from the eastern shore to a central route – with departures from the coast of Libya mainly heading for Malta and Italy –, and later on to the western shore – mostly from Morocco to Spain.

In spite of the obstacles, many refugees and migrants have continued to try to cross the Mediterranean through different routes – in many cases becoming more and more dangerous – in order to reach Europe. As a consequence, the Mediterranean Sea has been a scenario of shipwrecks, deaths, and disappearances of people who were trying to arrive in European countries from the southern or eastern shores. Thus, the Mediterranean Sea has become what some have called *Mare Mortum*, meaning ‘Dead Sea’, which also references the Latin expression for the Mediterranean *Mare Nostrum*, ‘our sea’. The figures reported by the project Missing Migrants highlight the seriousness of this situation. As it can be observed in figure 2.3, the bloodiest year was 2016 when it is estimated that over 5000 people died in the Mediterranean. From then on the numbers have reduced, but they are still alarmingly high (over a thousand deaths in 2019).

Figure 2.3. Recorded deaths by region.
Source: Missing Migrants Project, International Organization for Migration (IOM).



EUROPEAN RESPONSE AND CHALLENGES FOR THE RECEPTION OF REFUGEE POPULATION

Forced displacement also involves rights violations related to the response given by the hosting societies. As happens with rights in general, to guarantee the right of asylum is not only a solidarity action towards refugees, but an obligation of states after having ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The policies of securitization and border closures, and the insufficient application of the international protection mechanisms also compromise the exercise of human rights of the displaced population. Among these rights, there is the right of asylum, an internationally recognized human right which includes the protection offered by a state to certain people who have their fundamental rights threatened by actions of persecution or violence. In contrast to the growing demands of information, assessment, and

protection by the displaced population, reception of asylum seekers is still very limited and insufficient.

As an example, over the past few years Spain has received more and more applications for asylum (15 755 in 2016, 31 120 in 2017, 54 065 in 2018), but the decision rate of these applications is very low, and the percentage of denials is high. According to information of 2018, only 24% (2985) of the applications ended up in an approval decision, the lowest proportion if we compare it to that year's figures of other countries such as Belgium (65%), Germany (50%), Greece (49%), Sweden (39%), Italy (36%), and France (27%). Moreover, during 2018 the status of refugee was granted to 575 people, less than in 2017 (595). Even the subsidiary protection offered by Spain – provided to people who are not eligible for asylum, but who cannot return to their countries because of an evident risk of suffering serious harm such as death, torture, or threats – showed a descending tendency (6500 in 2016, 4080 in 2017, and 2320 in 2018). (Source: CEAR – Spanish Commission for Refugees)

It is important to point out that in general terms **the European response to the increase in the refugee population in the last years has been largely insufficient and far from reaching the obligations and commitments to human rights. Many European policies have prioritized security approaches, including externalization of borders,** resulting in agreements to hold back flows of migrant and refugee populations in countries such as Morocco and Turkey, as well as ignoring *non refoulement*¹ or non-devolution practices which then push migrants and refugees into countries considered unsafe like Libya.

¹ *Non refoulement* is a principle of human rights international law, according to which no person can be returned to a country where he/she could suffer torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, punishment, and other irreparable harms.



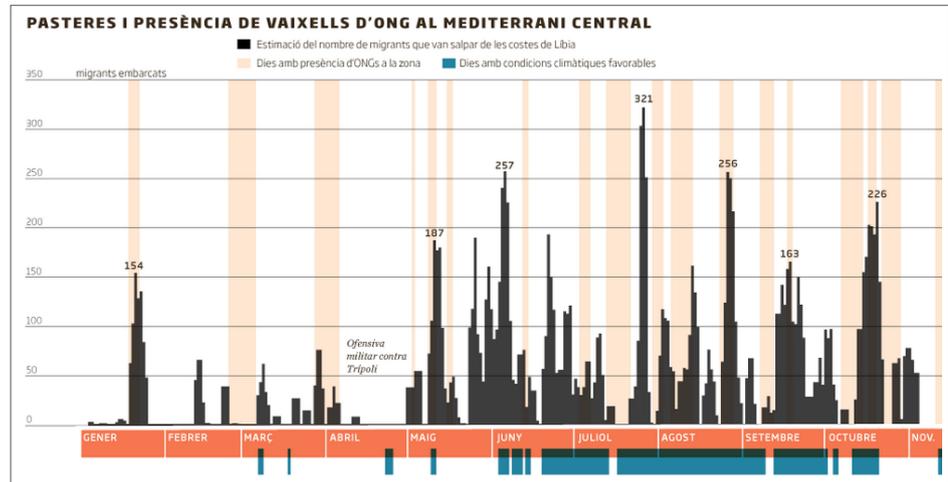
For a closer look...

To learn more about militarization policies at borders, consult the reports by the Study Centre for Peace J.M. Delàs "[Guarding the Fortress: The Role of Frontex in the Militarisation and Securitisation of Migration Flows in the European Union](#)" (2019), "[The Business of Building Walls](#)" (2019), and "[Building walls: Fear and Securitization in the European Union](#)" (2018).

In addition, **groups and collectives in support and solidarity** with refugees and migrants **have been criminalized**, as illustrated in the cases of the activists Helena Maleno, Sarah Mardini, or Salam Aldeen, and by the persecution, problems and obstacles that the NGOs Open Arms or SOS Méditerranée have had to face for their rescue tasks in the Mediterranean. It is also important to emphasize that the accusations

made by the Italian extreme right-wing politician Matteo Salvini and his political sector about NGOs having a “pull factor”, which supposedly influences more illegal migration, have been refuted. The presence of these organizations’ vessels in the Mediterranean Sea does not favor a greater departure of small migrant boats from the southern shore, as confirmed by a recent study (Catalan newspaper Ara, 2019).

Figure 2.4. Relation between the presence of migrant small boats and rescue boats with regard to “pull factor” (2019). Source: “Les dades desmunten el discurs contra les ONG de rescat al mar”, Cristina Mas, ARA, 17/11/2019



To the aforementioned rights violations we must add the problems caused by **stereotyped and prejudiced discourses** about migrants and refugees, and the construction of a racist and xenophobe speech that turns the displaced population into a “threat” or a “problem”. For instance, according to figures by Oxfam, 55% of citizens expressed their conviction or fear that terrorists might infiltrate among refugees (Oxfam, 2018).

Similarly, the conclusions of a survey by the Pew Research Centre show that in eight out of the ten European countries surveyed, half or more than half of the population think that refugees increase the probability of terrorism in their country; while in five of the countries around half the population believe that these people appropriate jobs and social benefits from the autochthonous population. Not to mention, around 30% of the population in the ten surveyed countries believe that refugees commit more crimes than the local populations (Pew Research Centre, 2018).

These discourses and narratives have the effect of stigmatizing displaced populations. In fact, these speeches create favorable scenarios for social and legal vulnerability of this group to become more pronounced – with the respective impact on the exercise of their fundamental rights. On occasion, these discourses lead to racist behavior, in part as a result of the lack of information and analysis about the profound causes of forced displacement, and the lack of education about the sociopolitical context in the source countries of refugees which leads to this displacement in the first place. In this sense, it is confirmed that citizens need to gain

awareness about the right for asylum – be it for conflicts, religious, political, or sexual persecution, or situations of serious needs –, and about the right to flee from one's country of origin to pursue dignified life conditions.

FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Gender and feminist perspective on the analysis of conflicts has made some issues visible, like the links between militarism and patriarchy, the continuum of violence which women suffer during war or peace, or how preexisting gender inequalities and discriminations are exacerbated, among others (for further information about gender perspective on armed conflicts and peace, see Module 3). It is important to also note the specific consequences of armed conflicts and forced displacement on women, men, boys, girls, and LGBTQI people, and how gender influences and shapes their experiences, in intersection with other factors.

Thus, for example, men – who mainly play the role of combatants in armed conflicts – are in general the main direct casualties of armed conflicts. Many of them decide to escape from their countries to avoid forced recruitment policies, and/or because they do not want to participate in hostilities.

In the case of women and girls, the fear of sexual violence in the context of armed conflict is a relevant factor to activate their forced displacement. But during the journey or in the hosting societies they are exposed to this kind of violence too. Some examples of this are the denunciations of the trade, labor and sexual exploitation of displaced women, the increase in phenomena such as child marriage or “temporary marriages” of Syrian refugee teenagers in different countries in the Middle East, or the serious and high rates of sexual violence detected among migrant women and refugees – and sometimes also in men – who are trapped in detention centers in Libya.

It is noteworthy to mention that in the past several years the number of forcibly displaced minors has increased. In 2009 they represented 41% of the displaced, and in 2018 they were already half of the world's refugee population. It is not only important to take into account the specific vulnerabilities and risks which these children face in the situation of forced displacement, but to also consider that, due to traditional gender roles, the care of children falls on women, often in a context of severe precariousness.



SELF-STUDY ACTIVITY

1. Learn about some stories of refugees with these two materials:

- Exhibition "[Am I Wrong to Love?](#)"
- [Video](#) (20 minutes)

Based on these witnesses, identify specific examples of how gender inequalities and roles affect the dynamics of forced displacement caused by conflicts in three moments: before the people abandon their homes, during their journeys, or in the reception societies.

If you find it hard to identify examples, the following materials may be of help to expand information and gain more tools for analysis:

- "[Gender, peace and security](#)", in *Alert 2019! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*
- "[Gender dimensions of displacement](#)"

2. Read the article "[Europe's refugee policy: walking headlong into disaster](#)", by Petra Bendel, a professor of political science at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, and reflect on the role of the states and the European Union in the arrival of refugees in the European territory over recent years:

- Which type of policies do you think European governments could/should implement?
- How do you think the citizens could pressure governments in order to promote a reception more coherent with the international agreements on human rights?
- In your opinion, which should be the role of civil society in this issue?



WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

In order to address the question of forced displacement, there are plenty of actions which you can take, from impeding the causes of forced displacement, up to improving the reception conditions to mitigate the consequences of this process:

Act on the causes of forced displacement

If we take into account that the main causes for forced displacement are armed conflicts and climate change, the most effective way to improve displaced people's lives would be to influence these phenomena for the purpose of decreasing their consequences. Commit to making an impact on these situations in order to reduce the number of people who have to flee from their homes:

- **Act against armed conflicts:** you can find action suggestions in the sections "What can you do about it?" in the Module Introduction to Culture of Peace.

- **Act for mitigating the climate emergency:** you can take some ideas from [here](#) or [here](#).

Counter stereotypes of refugees and of the challenges that they face in the reception societies

Share the information and reflections that you have acquired in this learning unit with your closest people, be they in a family, working, or neighborhood context. Invite other people to think about the situations of violence and conflict from which refugees escape.

Act as an anti-rumor agent with regard to forced displacement caused by conflicts, giving facts in conversations and discussions, and a point of view committed with the respect for human rights. Here you have some useful material:

- Materials of [Anti-Rumours Strategy](#), an initiative in Intercultural Cities Programme by the Council of Europe

- For more information about forced displacement, you can check this year's report of the [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre \(IDMC\)](#).

Show an interest in the experiences of refugees and migrants who live close to you

Take a welcoming attitude towards people who have lived a forced displacement, investigate on your own about the circumstances in

their countries of origin, and keep a respectful attitude towards their experiences to avoid revictimization situations.

Bear in mind both the contexts that have caused forced displacement in the recent years (Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, for instance), and long-term displacement experiences as in the case of Palestine or Western Sahara.

Get in contact with refugee and migrant organizations and/or the NGOs which support them.

Find out what you can contribute, get involved in their activities and demands. Try to learn more about initiatives through organizations such as Open Arms, SOS Méditerranée, Refugees International, or through the work of activists like Helena Maleno.

Join support campaigns for refugees, such as I Welcome.

Get informed about how reception systems work in your region and whether they include a gender perspective.

Make good use of citizen and political participation spaces by demanding the different authorities and administrations give a response to the phenomenon of forced displacement with a viewpoint committed to respect human rights and to accomplish international laws. Demand a more expedited protection for people at risk, and an establishment of safe routes to take this protection.



REFERENCES

De Lucas, Javier (2019). "Refugiados: política, no misericordia", *El País*, 20 de juny de 2019.

Escola de Cultura de Pau (2019). *Alerta 2019! Informe sobre conflictos, derechos humanos y construcción de paz*. Barcelona: Icaria.

Escola de Cultura de Pau (2018) "Gènere, conflictes i desplaçament forçats," guia ràpida, a la web Dones, Pau i Seguretat. Edició en línia: Escola de Cultura de Pau.

Mas, Cristina (2019). "Les dades desmunten el discurs contra les ONG de rescat al mar", *ARA*, 17 de novembre de 2019.

Smith, Dan (2018). "Introducció. Estabilitat Internacional i Seguretat Humana en 2017", *SIPRI Yearbook 2018 Armaments, disarmament and international security*, Resum en català.

ACNUR, (2019). *Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2018*.

Urrutia, Pamela (2019). "De què fugen les persones desplaçades? Conflictes armats com factors d'expulsió" (*manuscript in preparation*).

Villellas, María (2016). "Una mirada feminista a la crisis de refugio en Europa", *Pikara Magazine*, 21 de març de 2016.



OTHER RESOURCES OF INTEREST

International organizations:

[United Nations Refugee Agency](#)

[US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants](#)

[Women's Refugee Commission](#)

[Missing Migrants Project](#)

Other Catalan and Spanish organizations, campaigns and material:

[Stop Mare Mortum](#)

[Catalan Commission for Refugees](#)

[Spanish Commission for Refugees](#)

[#SeTrataDeRefugiadas](#), refugee campaign with a gender perspective by CEAR Euskadi

[Barcelona Antirumors Campaign](#) by Barcelona City Council

[Barcelona, Refuge City](#) by Barcelona City Council

[Website section on ethical consumption by Greenpeace Spain](#)

Video-documentary "[Salir del infierno](#)" by Solidaria TV Argentina

Article "[Gènere, conflictes i desplaçament forçats](#)" by School for a Culture of Peace

Article "[Una mirada feminista sobre la crisis de refugio en Europa](#)" in Pikara Magazine by María Villellas, researcher in the School for a Culture of Peace

Article "[Refugiados: política, no misericordia](#)" in the newspaper El País by the academic Javier de Lucas

ANNEX

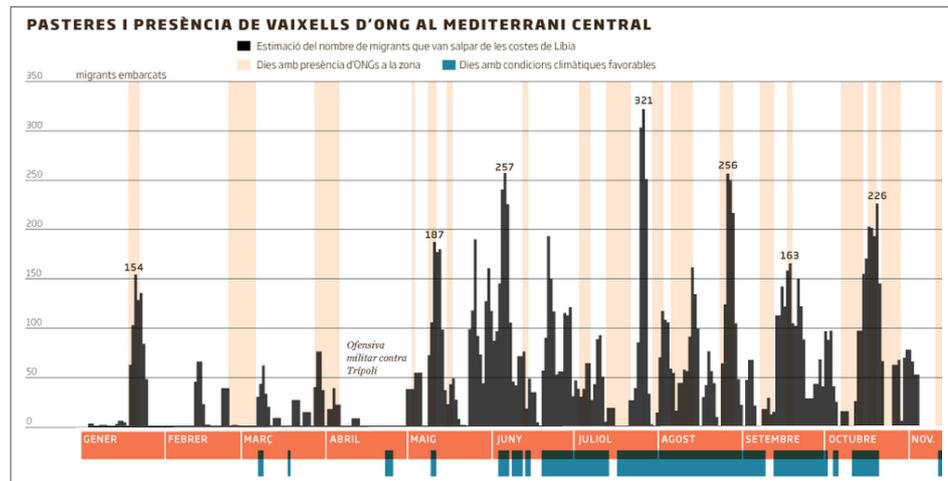


Figure 2.4

[title] Migrant boats and presence of NGO boats off the coast of the Central Mediterranean countries

[black] Estimated number of migrants that set sail from Libyan shores

[pink] Days in which NGOs were present in the area

[blue] Days with favorable weather conditions

[350] embarked migrants

Military offensive against Tripoli

JANUARY / FEBRUARY / MARCH / APRIL / MAY / JUNE / JULY / AUGUST /
 SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER / NOVEMBER

Source: Matteo Villa / Graphics: Esther Utrilla

