A photograph showing a man in a green shirt and blue jeans carrying a long, narrow wooden board or canoe on his shoulder. He is walking away from the camera through a dense, lush green jungle. In the background, a horse-drawn cart is visible, and some children are sitting on the ground to the right.

Migration and conflict: some insights of 20 years of research

Ana María Ibáñez – Interamerican
Development Bank

HiCN Working papers

33% about forced displacement



H i C N Households in Conflict Network
School of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies - University of Sussex - Falmer - Brighton - BN1 9SN
www.hcn.org

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

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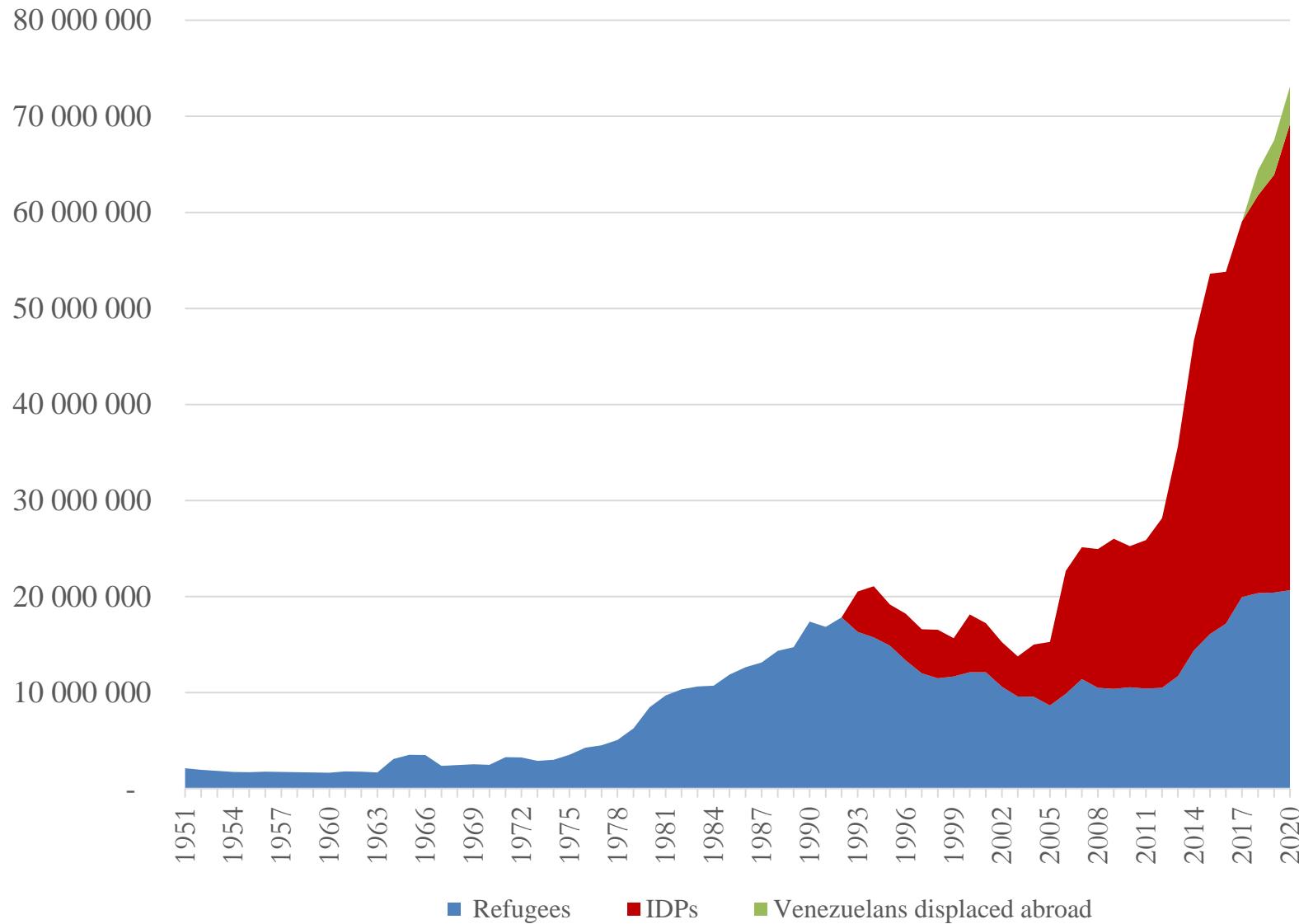
HiCN Working Paper 07
February 2004

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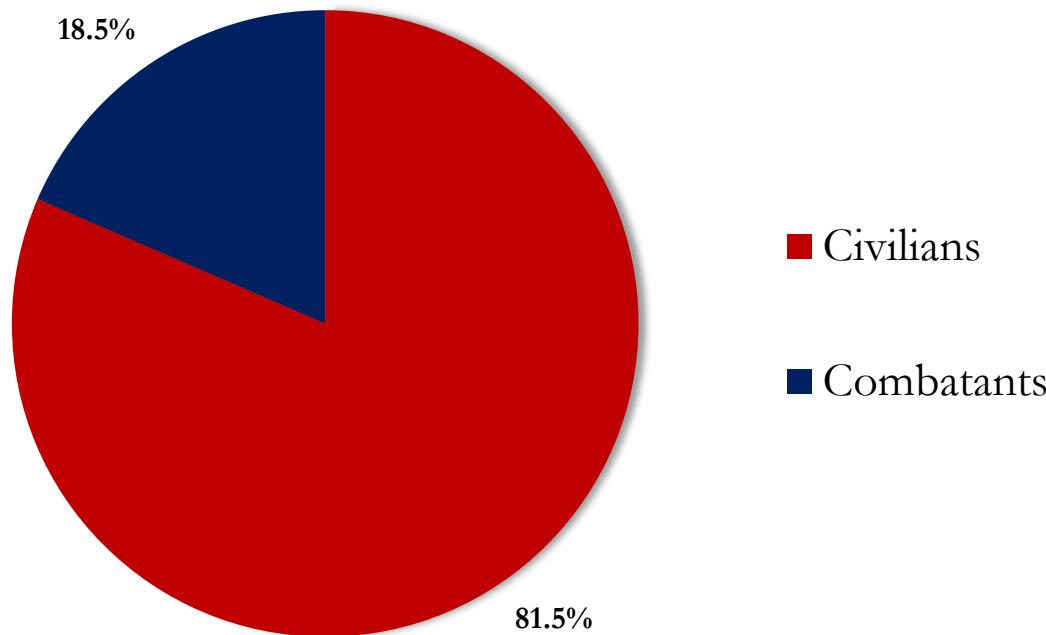
Forced migration: trends 1951-2020



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