



Figure 1 World Bank CEO Kristalina Georgieva and UN High Commissioner Filippo Grandi sign agreement to establish a joint data center on forced displacement in APRIL 20, 2018 /World Bank

NEW GLOBAL DATA CENTER TO IMPROVE RESPONSES TO DISPLACEMENT IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

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In 2019, the world's forcibly displaced population hit the 70.8 million mark, the highest level in human history. Inspired by the mantra: "What gets measured (and clearly defined) does get done", the World Bank and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) launched the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement to enhance the ability of stakeholders to make timely and evidence-driven responses to forced displacement. Scientific information is needed to support projects and knowledge-based interventions to improve the lives of refugees, asylum-seekers, Internally displaced persons, returnees, stateless people and host communities in the Horn of Africa region.

“In God we trust. All others must bring data”, quipped the Statistician, William Edwards Deming. Rightly extolled as the new oil of the digital economy in the 21st century, data underpins a new development-oriented response to displacement. Reliable data is central to the success of the new shift to the development-humanitarian paradigm and the unique and complex partnerships it is spawning. A new Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement by the World Bank and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) exemplifies the emerging unique partnerships between development and humanitarian actors to use data to stem the spiraling global displacement crisis.

In 2019, the number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally-displaced people (IDPs) hit the 70.8 million mark, the highest level since the creation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) after the Second World War. Nearly 90% of the displaced are living in the developing world, many trapped in protracted displacement situations. By June 2019, the Horn of Africa hosted over 4 million refugees and twice the same number of IDPs. A report of a recent stock-taking Forum of the IGAD Council of Ministers lamented that one out of every five refugees worldwide is in the region. And the numbers are projected to climb to nearly 5 million by 2020.

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in September 2016 underscored the need for high-quality, timely data to deliver on the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). Data is needed to underpin the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees adopted in December 2018.

Among the drivers of the development response to displacement is the world Bank Group. Since 2017, the Group has dedicated \$2 billion to fund low-income countries hosting large numbers of refugees as part of its IDA 18 sub window for refugees and host communities, which has since been constantly replenished. Data is needed to

help countries benefiting from the sub window.

The WBG has forged a new partnership with UNHCR on data collection to drive evidence-based response to the forced displaced and communities hosting them. “What gets measured (and clearly defined) does get done”. This mantra popular in the development sphere has inspired this partnership.

In April 2018, the WBG and UNHCR signed of a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a Joint Data Center (the “Center”) on Forced Displacement based in Copenhagen. Denmark contributed 100 million kroner (\$) to support the Center over a four-year period.

The new Data Center is a game-changer in the quest for data to underpin decisions and programs on displacement. It is envisaged a source of information and data to enhance the ability of stakeholders to make timely and evidence-driven decisions that can improve the lives of those affected by forced displacement.

“The scale, complexity and speed of today’s refugee crises mean we can no longer afford to respond through humanitarian action alone. It is more important than ever to mobilize resources and plan for the longer term from the beginning. This is why early access to reliable data for development partners like the World Bank is so important,” noted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi during the launch of the Center.

Data from the Center will help maximize the effective use of shrinking resources for the displaced. “When resources are scarce all efforts should be made to get help to those who need it. Improving data and evidence is critical to ensure that these resources are used efficiently and effectively. We have much to learn from UNHCR’s experience, so that we can do more together working in complementary ways to help both refugees and their hosts,” said former

Interim President for World Bank Group, Kristalina Georgieva.

In the Horn, the Special Envoy of the UNHCR Commissioner, Mohamed Affey, avers that “data is needed to enable governments in the Horn of Africa to plan for and to effectively receive refugees returning home”. The Kenya politician and diplomat was speaking during a recently concluded launch of the Advisory Council of the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (JDC) co-hosted by the World Bank Group and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Copenhagen Denmark on September 30, 2019.

So far, detailed data has enabled the WBG and UNHCR to prepare landmark reports on the welfare of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, which in turn have led to a better targeting of humanitarian assistance as well as the preparation of development projects.

Regionally, the two partners have organized joint analytical work in the Horn of Africa, the Lake Chad Basin and the Middle East. They have worked jointly with government institutions to expand the collection of micro-data on displacement. They have also carried out collaborative missions to inform Bank Group programming of new resources to address refugee situations.

In Kenya, detailed data made possible a detailed assessment of the role of refugees in Kakuma camp in the local economy in Northern Kenya.

Today, data is needed to inform decisions by countries like Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Djibouti, currently implementing the World Bank’s Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project (DRDIP) which targets refugee-hosting communities and regions.

The Center’s data will benefit two of IGAD’s knowledge-based interventions on displacement: its Annual Progress Report on the Nairobi Declaration; and its Refugee Support Platform (RSP), both launched in September 2019.

On the road to the first Global Refugee Forum in Geneva on December 17-18, 2019, the activities of the Center already reveal it as one of the sharpest arrow in World Bank’s quiver in addressing the displacement crisis. Its data will provide the much-needed evidence to inform policy, decision, and programs.

Professor Peter Kagwanja is former Government Adviser and currently Chief Executive of the Africa Policy Institute. This article benefited from his participation in the First Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement Advisory Council Meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, September 30, 2019.

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