Migration: Important Terms

Asylum seekers: individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs): Persons who have been forced to leave their homes, 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 man-made disasters, and who have not crossed an international border. Although they are still in their home country, they still face the consequences of forced displacement: loss of home, livelihood, and community.

Migrant - IOM defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is. IOM concerns itself with migrants and migration-related issues and, in agreement with relevant States, with migrants who are in need of international migration services.

Migration system: Set of places linked by flows and counter-flows of people, goods, money, services, and information. Feedback mechanisms transmit information about migrants’ reception and progress at the destination back to the place of origin.

Push-pull factors - Migration is often analyzed in terms of the "push-pull model," which looks at the push factors that drive people to leave their home (war, poverty, oppression, lack of economic or educational opportunity, discrimination, etc.) and the pull factors attracting them to the country of destination (more jobs, better education, security, social services). It is important to realize that not everyone is able to or wishes to respond to these push-pull factors in the same way—a person’s gender, educational background and profession, social class, family circumstances, etc. will all factor into whether or how they attempt to migrate and their destination.

Refugee: Someone who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

A distinction is often sharply drawn between refugees and migrants, even when they are traveling along the same routes. International law sees refugees as having a right to protection, since they are fleeing in order to save their lives or preserve their freedom. Economic migrants, on the other hand, are often seen as having voluntarily chosen to leave their countries in order to improve economic opportunities for themselves or their families.
However, in our increasingly complex world, the lines between refugees and migrants are becoming increasingly blurred. The rise in food and energy insecurity, water scarcity, climate change, urbanization and population growth, and severe economic deprivation can all exacerbate the effects of conflict and may combine in a variety of ways to displace people as it becomes more and more difficult for them to survive in their homelands. Some argue that international law should change in order to recognize some of these migrants as refugees.