

# FRAGILITY AND DISPLACEMENT: A PEOPLE-CENTRED APPROACH TO WORKING ACROSS THE NEXUS

## THE ISSUE

### FRAGILITY: THE COST OF INACTION

“... the EU must support a human rights-based and people-centred approach to fragile contexts to mitigate the impacts of forced displacement and instability.”

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) works in approximately 30 countries across the world, the majority of which are affected by conflict and fragility. DRC responds to emergencies and works towards durable solutions to ensure a dignified life for refugees and displacement-affected people. Through its mission to assist, protect, and empower displacement-affected people towards a better future, DRC implements a “triple nexus approach”—i.e. working with humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities.

In this article, we posit that with forced displacement growing globally and in tandem with (often due to the drivers of) fragility, **the EU must support a human rights-based and people-centred approach to fragile contexts to mitigate the impacts of forced displacement and instability.** This is in contrast to the EU’s current external action focus on seeking to control migration and facilitate foreign investments – neither of which have proven to be effective in fragile contexts. Drawing on DRC’s experience, we propose to focus on what works: bottom-up, conflict-sensitive programming and multi-sectoral, community-focused interventions that link humanitarian response with long-term programming, as these are essential for building self-reliance, social cohesion, and resilient, peaceful communities in fragile, displacement-affected contexts.

## FRAGILITY AND FORCED-DISPLACEMENT

Displacement continues to rise globally, and last year the number of forcibly displaced persons—including refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs)—reached an unprecedented 120 million.<sup>1</sup> In 2025, DRC’s *Global Displacement Forecast*<sup>2</sup> report found that global

displacement is set to surge by 6.7 million people by the end of 2026 due to armed conflict, climate change, the legacy of war and socio-economic instability. The displacement hot spots have doubled from the previous year, with a steep rise in displacements expected in Sudan, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Syria, Yemen, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Venezuela. The report indicates a direct correlation between forced displacement and fragile contexts; fragility essentially fuels forced displacement, and it is therefore critical to address displacement when working in fragile contexts.

## DRC’S APPROACH IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

DRC has extensive experience supporting displaced populations in fragile contexts—mitigating risks and shocks, responding to immediate crises, and addressing long-term needs. Through its “Solutions from the Start” approach, DRC proactively plans the transition from emergency response to durable solutions as soon as conditions allow, strengthening self-reliance, community resilience, and social cohesion from the earliest stages – i.e. the actions DRC takes to contribute to the achievement of durable solutions.<sup>3</sup>

DRC provides assistance across its emergency and solutions programming in four core sectors: protection; economic recovery; humanitarian disarmament & peacebuilding; and WASH/shelter, and infrastructure. Climate and environment considerations are integrated across the four sectors, recognising the impacts of climate change as a cross-sectoral challenge.

A key tool that DRC employs to mitigate displacement and its impacts is Anticipatory Action. DRC links displacement forecasts to scalable, community-driven interventions that reduce the vulnerability of individuals, communities and national systems, enhance their capacity to anticipate and absorb multi-dimensional shocks and prevent the need for costly emergency responses. Anticipatory Actions are strategically deployed across the nexus to mitigate initial displacement, reduce secondary displacement, and enable durable solutions.

1. UNHCR Global Trends Report 2024.

2. [250120\\_global\\_displacement\\_forecast\\_report\\_2025\\_final.pdf](#) - based on the Foresight machine learning model, which accurately predicts displacement trends by analysing 148 indicators based on economic, security, political, environmental, and societal factors, across 27 countries.

3. Durable Solutions are the sustained resolution of displacement for refugees and IDPs, ensuring they no longer face displacement-specific vulnerabilities and can fully enjoy their human rights without discrimination.



Syria: An ECHO funded, DRC community programme to rehabilitate a solar-powered borehole, bringing water to 6000 community members © DRC, 2025

## IN PRACTICE: HOLISTIC, TRIPLE NEXUS PROGRAMMING IN SYRIA AND UKRAINE

In both Syria and Ukraine (as well as in many other contexts globally) DRC and partners are meeting needs by responding holistically to displacement and protection needs at community-level, combining agile emergency assistance with early recovery and resilience-building efforts. This approach has proven to be effective in addressing the complexity of needs in fragile contexts.

In Syria, DRC works to help displaced people and communities recover from over 14 years of conflict and destruction and reintegrate multiple waves of returnees from complex displacement situations. DRC supports communities to transition from emergency response to resilience building, in collaboration with partners and local authorities, offering a comprehensive package of protection and cash services (often to female-headed households), alongside infrastructure rehabilitation (e.g. sewerage, solar powered bore holes, shelter), and subsequently providing livelihoods support including training and small business grants. Concurrently, DRC implements social cohesion programming to mitigate community tensions, and conducts humanitarian mine action (HMA) in collaboration with national authorities, whose staff DRC is training and planning to equip.

This integrated, multi-sectoral approach is responding directly to what people express that they need, while building individual and community self-reliance and durable solutions for the displaced. In Syria, a bottom-up, triple nexus approach helps foster stability and future prospects for communities still highly vulnerable to socio-economic shocks, renewed violence, and further displacement.

In Ukraine, DRC and partners are responding in a similarly integrated way in conflict and displacement-affected communities at the frontline; DRC's integrated, multisectoral programming bridges emergency response with long-term solutions to displacement, while addressing both the social and economic dimensions of vulnerability. For example, in one programme, following mine and explosive ordnance clearance activities in Mykolaiv oblast, Cash for Agriculture was provided to support small-scale farmers in returning to production following the clearance of land. In the same community, DRC provided Housing, Land and Property (HLP) support to assist with access to land, and vocational training and enterprise support to enable livelihood diversification. Similar to Syria, at the core of DRC's and partners' response in Ukraine is a robust integrated approach that addresses the diverse and evolving emergency needs of conflict-affected communities as well as longer-term solutions to their situation.

“Integrated and community-based programming across the triple nexus, driven by civil society in collaboration with local actors, and taking into account the needs of displacement-affected people, must be included in the EU’s approach to fragility.”

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EU’S APPROACH TO FRAGILE CONTEXTS

Based on DRC’s experience, we have some recommendations for the European Union and Member States, to most effectively respond to needs in fragile contexts:

- The EU and Member States must ensure **increased dedicated funding for fragile settings**, complementing the approach of the Global Gateway and humanitarian aid operations and addressing the growing gap between them. In contexts such as Syria, Ukraine, and many others, actors working in the triple nexus struggle to fund the type of community-based, resilience programming that is most effective, leaving communities and people at risk when humanitarian funding ends, and large-scale development funding has not yet reached them. The traditional divide between humanitarian and developing funding streams should thus be reconsidered through a more nuanced lens, with humanitarian and development donors alike extend beyond their strict mandates and coordinating to close gaps in resilience programming.
- **The EU should refocus its approach in fragile contexts on strengthening the rights and resilience of crisis-affected populations.** A people-centred, human rights-based, multi-sectoral, community-based approach works and should be supported and scaled up. This must also include support for Anticipatory Action and HMA – both of which contribute to building resilient communities.
- **EU funding earmarked for “migration” must focus on addressing the needs and rights of the forcibly displaced in these settings** – and not on migration control efforts. As fragility fuels displacement, and displacement is growing exponentially, such a focus can support context-appropriate, sustainable solutions.

- **The EU should recognise and support the important role of civil society operating in these contexts**, partnering with INGOs and local actors, who are well-placed to support communities affected by conflict, climate change, and displacement. NGOs have immense experience of operating effectively in fragile contexts, including where there are de-facto authorities – and are increasingly under-supported despite their expertise.

DRC’s experience demonstrates that the needs in fragile contexts are best addressed when communities are empowered to respond to become self-reliant, ending the cycle of aid-dependence and allowing them to access their full rights. Integrated and community-based programming across the triple nexus, driven by civil society in collaboration with local actors, and taking into account the needs of displacement-affected people, must be included in the EU’s approach to fragility.

**Céline Mias**, EU Director and  
**Fie Lauritzen**, Head of Sectors and Thematic Areas  
Danish Refugee Council