**Climbing out of the silo: A systems approach to displacement**

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Research on forced migration tends to take place in siloed forms of knowledge production. Characteristics of siloed approaches include 1) the tendency to be ahistorical (most policy studies), 2) the failure to explain—or purposefully neglect—the causes of displacement by taking it as a given and avoiding politically sensitive issues of causation (UNHCR annual *Global Trends* reports), and 3) the use of an exclusively legal definition of refugees to define the scope conditions of study (most legal and policy studies). The first three trends are linked to a dual imperative in which knowledge producers, in addition to publishing impactful reports and datasets, are responsible for providing lifesaving services to forcibly displaced persons and thus operate with “categories of practice” as opposed to “categories of analysis.” Other characteristics of a siloed approach include 4) the assumption that the phenomenon is always a subset of migration (migration studies), 5) a focus on so-called “durable solutions” of return, local settlement, and resettlement (humanitarian publications), and the study of a single isolated stage of displacement that is divorced from other stages such as asylum-seeking or resettlement (most social science studies). Academic studies often adopt the same scope conditions of analysis and ultimately employ categories of legal and humanitarian practice even though they are *not* providing services to displaced people. By contrast, a systems approach is deeply historical; begins by investigating exit rather than assuming it; adopts a sociological rather than legal definition of displacement; examines factors creating immobility as well as mobility; brings together insights from conflict, refugee, and migration studies; and focuses on interactions and feedback linking policies across places of origin, transit, destination, and return rather than a single isolated stage of displacement.