

Humanitarian Action Study Group Spring Seminar Series 2018

The DSAI Humanitarian Action Study Group brings together researchers, practitioners and policymakers engaged in the study or delivery of humanitarian response. This year, the group's seminar series ran from February to June 2018, comprising three interesting, thought-provoking and necessary discussions on pressing issues in humanitarian action and research. The series gave a platform to presenters from Irish NGOs, academia, UN bodies and Irish Aid for public discussion.

The Rohingya Crisis February 2018



Figure 1: Kutupalong extension site in Cox's Bazar, south-east Bangladesh. Photo: UNHCR/Roger Arnold

The series began in February with a discussion of **the Rohingya Crisis** in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Since the 25th of August 2017, over [700,000 Rohingya people have been forced to flee their homes](#) in Rakhine State on the Western coast of Myanmar and cross into neighbouring Bangladesh. This was the largest influx of refugees in the region in the past 20 years, and [the fastest growing refugee crisis in the world](#). Those arriving report appalling human rights abuses, with entire villages destroyed. They now face difficult conditions, and the threat of forced return to Myanmar (read more [here](#)).

The seminar focused on responses to the crisis in Cox's Bazaar from a range of perspectives across the humanitarian and human rights sectors in Ireland. Speakers included:

- Sam Taylor (Director, [Médicines San Frontières Ireland](#));
- Jody Clarke (Senior External Relations Associate, [United Nations High Commission for Refugees](#));
- Erin Kilbride (Head of Communications, [Front Line Defenders](#)).

One major theme in the discussions was the challenging physical environment of the camp setting. Sam Taylor of MSF presented on the organisation's 'learning around the clock' approach to treating diphtheria. While there have been no major outbreaks of diphtheria for decades, low immunisation rates led to a huge outbreak in the camp December 2017. As it is an airborne disease, MSF teams had to work quickly in terms of case management and isolation areas in a congested camp environment (see more on MSF's work at [here](#)).

Jody Clarke also spoke about what UNHCR are doing on the ground to respond to needs, sharing recent video footage by UNHCR to highlight the scale of the crisis (watch [here](#)). The presentation highlighted the particular challenges faced by single mothers, pregnant women, children and people with disabilities, all of whom are disproportionately affected by the physical environment of the settlements. This includes congestion, limited access challenges due to a lack of roads and pathways, high rates of water contamination and significant risks of epidemics (see more on UNHCR's work [here](#)).

This highlighted a second major theme of the evening's discussions: the disproportionate impact of the crisis on women and other marginalised groups. The panel concluded with a presentation by Erin Kilbride from Frontline Defenders spoke about the work of Human Rights Defenders in Bangladesh, who are supported by Front Line Defenders, the difficult context in which they are operating in and what the reality is like for women in the camps (see more on Frontline Defenders and human rights [here](#)).

Conflict and Displacement in Central Africa

April 2018



Figure 2: Katanika Displacement Settlement, Tanganyika Province, is now home to about 70,000 people. Most of them list food, clean water, cash, clothes, healthcare and education as their most crucial needs. Photo: NRC/Christian Jepsen

The second seminar in the series focused on issues of **conflict and displacement in Central Africa**.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is facing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Over [4.5 million people have been displaced inside the country](#) due to conflict and protracted crises, facing immense obstacles and often uncertain futures in their search for safety. Meanwhile, crisis in neighbouring Central African Republic is driving cross-border movements in a wider region long beset by cycles of conflict and poverty. The UN has referred to crisis as [the fastest growing humanitarian crisis in the world](#). The aim of the discussion was to explore key priorities and challenges in relation to conflict and displacement in the DRC and the wider Central African region, bringing together perspectives from programming, policy and research.

Speakers included:

- Niall O'Rourke (Humanitarian Operations and Performance Manager, [Christian Aid](#))
- Seán Ó hAodha (Deputy Director, Humanitarian Unit, [Irish Aid](#))
- Dr. Caitriona Dowd (Humanitarian Policy Officer, [Concern Worldwide](#))

Two key themes emerged in the course of discussions. The first was the horrific levels of sexual- and gender-based violence that are an often hidden part of wider conflict. Niall O'Rourke from Christian Aid spoke about how there is a normalisation of sexual and gender-based violence and it is perpetrated by armed groups as well as civilians in South Kivu (see more on Christian Aid's work [here](#)).

This was also a key theme in Caitriona Dowd's presentation on Concern Worldwide's draft study on conflict and displacement, drawing on recent primary research carried out in Central African Republic. The presentation highlighted the experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse faced by women and girls displaced *into* the DRC due to crisis in Central African Republic. This vulnerability is often compounded by the severe restrictions placed on men's movements in conflict, and the gendered risks they face of violence and forced recruitment. Following discussion and feedback from the audience and other panellists, the full report based on the presentation was finalised. The report was published as [Conflict and Displacement: Voices of Displacement and Return in Central African Republic's Neglected Crisis](#) in June 2018.

A second key theme of the evening related to the challenges of sustaining public and donor support for protracted crises, as well as the political dimensions of displacement crises. Seán Ó hAodha, of Irish Aid, spoke about the roots of conflict in DRC and the wider political context in the country, the drivers of displacement, and what Ireland and the rest of the international community has been supporting in the region. In April, Ireland announced additional [€5 million](#) funding in humanitarian assistance to the severely underfunded humanitarian crisis in the DRC. Ireland has provided [€16 million since 2016](#).

In the following questions and answers section of the evening, the themes of peacebuilding in protracted crises, the targeting of civilians by non-state armed groups, and the differential experience of displacement for refugees and internally displaced populations were discussed.

Conflict and Displacement in Central Africa April 2018
Education for Refugees and Internally Displaced
Persons (IDPs) at home and abroad

May 2018



Figure 3: Tahira Begum, 26, teaches Rohingya girls at the UNHCR-funded Ashar Alo Junior High School, in Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh. Photo: UNHCR/Roger Arnold

The third and final panel discussion in the series focused on **education for refugees and internally displaced people both in Ireland and internationally.**

An estimated [68.5 million people were forcibly displaced in 2017](#) – the equivalent of one person every two seconds. Around the world, displacement is one of the biggest barriers to education: [refugee children are 5 times more likely to be out of school than other children](#), and [over half \(52%\)](#) of all refugees are children.

In light of the fact that displacement is a global crisis, and education is a universal right, the discussion actively sought to draw out connections, similarities and areas of divergence between initiatives to improve education and access to education for displaced populations both in Ireland and internationally.

Speakers included:

- Andrea Breslin, Global Protection Advisor and Amy Folan, Senior Education Advisor ([Concern Worldwide](#));
- Veronica Crosbie, ([Dublin City University – University of Sanctuary](#)); and
- Emilia Sorrentino, Education in Emergency Advisor ([Plan International Ireland](#)).

In discussions of education responses in emergency settings internationally, the issue of facilitating access to a safe, protective and non-violent learning environment was emphasised by both the presenters from Concern and Plan International. Addressing and removing barriers which inhibit refugee access to education in host countries was also a prominent theme.

Integration of displaced populations into national education systems, and the challenges of social cohesion was a theme that was relevant to both international and domestic initiatives. Finally, support to teachers was identified in discussions as a key area of focus for international responses to improve quality and wellbeing in education, but one that has received relatively less attention in national initiatives. You can read more about Concern's education work in in Lebanon [here](#) and Turkey [here](#); Plan International's work on education in emergencies [here](#); and the University of Sanctuary initiative in DCU [here](#).

The Humanitarian Action Study Group's Autumn series will commence on the 26th of September with a focus on the specific challenges of working in Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The Humanitarian Action Study Group brings together both scholars and practitioners of humanitarian action to share knowledge, expertise and experience in the areas of humanitarian action, humanitarian intervention, human rights / protection, complex emergencies and the inter-section of development and humanitarian programming. If appropriate, the group will also act as a focal point for networking in support new research initiatives (including applied research) in these areas.

To join this study group, or for further information, please contact the Group Convenor at walt.kilroy@dcu.ie, stating your institution/NGO, area of interest/research and any suggestions for activities.