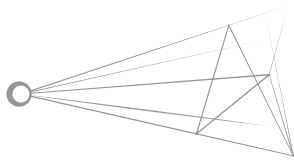
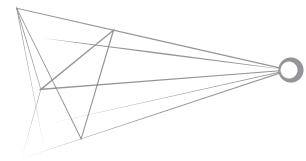


# *Refugees; internal conflict: challenges for humanitarian action*



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It is well known by all that, measuring development is a rather complex task. In order to do this, researchers have reviewed different indicators such as the per capita gross domestic product (GDP), the Gini Coefficient<sup>1</sup> and the Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>2</sup> among others. However, (without ignoring the usefulness of those), determining the social and economic actual conditions of a country is a complex multidimensional task that is not limited exclusively to studying some of the aforementioned indicators.

Colombia has been classified by the World Bank (2018) as “an average-to-high income” country, according to its revenue level in 2017. It also showed a Gini coefficient of 0.51, according to data from the World Bank (2019) and a score of 0.727 in the Human Development Index in 2016. This fact, catalogues Colombia as a country with “a high level of human development” UNDP (2016).

Although these classifications for Colombia are not the most outstanding ones, they are not discouraging; they constitute a reference that is often overcome by the country's reality.

For more than half a century, the Colombian State has undergone a situation of internal conflict and a humanitarian crisis derived from the confrontation and armed violence with groups outside the law. This situation has attracted the attention of the international community, especially with regards to

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1. Measurement for the income concentration of a region's individuals. Its range is between zero (0) and one (1); where 0 indicates that all individuals have the same income (perfect equality) and 1 indicates that only one individual has the income (perfect inequality) (Icesi, 2019).
2. Indicator created by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) that measures the development of a country in terms of life quality, education, per capita GDP and inequality. Its range oscillates between zero (0) and one (1); 0 being the lowest score and 1 the highest.

international cooperation, humanitarian actions and accompaniment for a negotiated solution to the internal conflict (as it happened during the peace process between the Colombian State and the Farc-Ep guerrilla that ended in 2016 with the signing of the peace agreement).

However, this has not been the only situation why the Colombian State has aroused the attention of the international community. According to Migración Colombia<sup>3</sup> (2018), in the last three years, Colombia has received a considerable volume of Venezuelan migrants as a result of the political situation of the neighboring country. It is estimated that 1,032,016 Venezuelans have entered the Colombian territory.

Though, what is the situation of Middle Eastern countries such as Syria, Lebanon and Jordan? Like Colombia, they have deserved special attention from the international community to address the humanitarian situation and internal conflict. Before answering this question, it is important to understand the concept of humanitarian and emergency actions. Throughout history, from ideological and religious points of view, humanitarian action has been conceived as the issues or experiences related to solidarity with vulnerable groups of people. The first large-scale international relief, which prompted an immediate response, was in relation to the great Lisbon earthquake that occurred in the year 1755. Subsequently, other natural disasters occurred and other States got international aid and aroused interest and solidarity (Marcos, Nussbaum, Hernández, & Pérez, 2017).

The current concept of humanitarian action was born from the hand of the first Nobel Peace Prize winner, Henry Dunant<sup>4</sup> who, through his work “the Battle of Solferino in modern-day Italy” in 1862, testified the battle developed in the Italian region of Lombardy. He also showed how, through relief teams, the lives of soldiers were saved during that war which caused more than 6,000 people dead and 40,000 wounded (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1998).

Because of the above, there was a need to create an relief mechanism to act as a response to different types of calamities that would occur in the world. In 1863, the “International Committee for the Relief of Wounded Military Soldiers” was founded. It is now known as the International Committee of the Red Cross (National Institute for Women, 2008). This entity currently has presence in 186 countries and more than 97 million volunteers who serve as support for effective coordination of human, financial and in-kind resources available to respond to any type of emergency, whether local, national or international level (International Federation of Red Cross Societies, 2017).

In 1864, the Geneva Convention was signed to protect the wounded soldiers and those who guarded them; this agreement became the Magna Carta allowing to transcend its scope thanks to the addition of four other agreements that contributed to consolidate humanitarian relief. Although the Geneva Convention was initially created with twelve state members, currently there are more than 190 countries; they have adhered since 1949, when four International Agreements were added. These agreements were meant to: (i) to alleviate the wounded and the sick in the armed forces in the field, (ii) to alleviate the fate of the wounded, sick and shipwrecked in the armed forces at sea, (iii) to appropriately treat prisoners of war and (iv) to properly protect civilians in time of war (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1998, 2012).

This fourth agreement is one of the most effective ones since currently, there are several low-

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3. Migración Colombia is the Colombian State's entity (state authority) in charge of exercising control of immigration processes in the Colombian territory within the framework of the Constitution and the laws.

4. Founder of the International Red Cross.

intensity conflicts that can be internal or external, causing the citizens of a country to make the decision to migrate to another. Therefore, based on the previous agreements, it can be established that there is an evolution of the humanitarian action concept, which has mutated from the term humanitarian relief and more recently, humanitarian action. Initially, the concept of relief was defined as the act of assisting victims, without it being necessarily oriented to the ethical and operative principles of the action implying humanitarianism and neutrality, among others. That is to say, in providing relief, an exclusively partisan support can be given and directed to personnel of its side. (Marcos, Nussbaum, Hernández, & Pérez, 2017).

Subsequently, the term humanitarian aid was conceived as a type of international cooperation for development, which was born to “help the victims of natural disasters, emergencies and armed conflicts” (Fischer & Oraá, 2000, page 19) in order to guarantee their survival. Natural catastrophes and civil wars have been present throughout world history, generating irreparable losses and damage to the economy of the countries involved; this fact compromises the development efforts of the countries that suffer such emergencies.

The international community has always responded spontaneously and in solidarity to assist the victims in the most critical moments by providing medical assistance, food and shelter. Humanitarian assistance expresses the noblest aspect of the human race without taking into account ideological or cultural differences that sometimes separate our countries (Quintana (2005) cited in Zeballos (2008)).

Finally, the concept of humanitarian action, considered as the “set of protection and assistance activities in favor of civilian and military victims of disasters, armed conflicts and other situations of violence” was set up (Marcos, Nussbaum, Hernández, & Pérez, 2017, page 4) and aimed at alleviating suffering and, fundamentally, guaranteeing the protection of human rights.

Humanitarian action encompasses three essential components, namely: (i) assistance, which refers to the need concept of the victims of a conflict or fortuitous event which, must be impartial and independent facing any calamity that may arise; (ii) victim protection which is applied through instruments of international law and the principles of humanity in war and, (iii) testimonies, which refer to the diffusion of the current reality experiencing these territories through narrations (Rey Marcos, 2014, Quintero Lancheros, 2018). Bearing the above in mind, it can be said that Syria, Lebanon and Jordan have experienced all the processes of international humanitarian cooperation in the following way:

### *Graph 1. Evolution of international humanitarian cooperation processes in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan*



*Source: Own elaboration based on Langa-Herrero (2011), De Currea-Lugo (2017), Marcos, Nussbaum, Hernández, & Pérez (2017).*

Currently, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, experience a humanitarian crisis and internal conflict. This directly or indirectly affects other nearby countries where, from humanitarian actions, the situation of the citizens has been improved in order to protect their rights.

In order to answer the previously raised question (about the situation of humanitarian crisis and internal conflict present directly or indirectly in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan) the development indicators of these countries have been reviewed.

The Arab Republic of Syria (hereinafter, Syria) in terms of GDP per capita (2017) is considered as a “low-to-average” income country (World Bank, 2018) with a Gini coefficient of 0.35 in 2004, according to the most recent data registered by the World Bank; it also presented and a human

development index score of 0.536 in 2016. This classifies Syria as a “low-human development” state (UNDP, 2016). The previous scenario shows the effects of the violence wave in Syria, which began as a peaceful protest in 2011 within the framework of the so-called “Arab Spring”. It led to a bloody civil war that has left more than 7.5 million people displaced within their own territory and, about 3.2 million displaced persons to neighboring countries (including Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan); these people hold the refugee status. Therefore, since the end of the Second World War, “the civil war in Syria has caused the greatest humanitarian emergency” (Ghotme & García Sicard, 2016).

Now, as regards the Republic of Lebanon (hereinafter referred to as Lebanon), the indicators reveal that it is an “average-to-high income” nation, with a human development index of 0.763 in 2016; that classifies Lebanon as a “High human development” country; it has a Gini coefficient of 0.31 in 2011, which denotes low levels of inequality. Lebanon is a country that has gone through a protracted period of conflict throughout its history and it is facing a stage of social normalization and peace-building since 2006, thanks to the participation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). In addition to the internal crisis that it has been overcoming, it is estimated that, around two million Syrian refugees live in Lebanese territory; a fact that is creating a serious humanitarian crisis (Sanjuan Martínez, 2018).

Finally, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (hereinafter referred to as Jordan) is an “average-to-high income” country, with a Gini coefficient of 0.36 in 2010 and a high human development index of 0.741 (UNDP, 2016). Jordan’s indicators are relatively satisfactory despite the fact that it is a monarchy with a controlled liberalization, that is to say, hegemonic and restrictive (Rodríguez, 2015). Similarly, Jordan is a recipient country for Syrian refugees; today, 671,551 refugees are estimated on Jordanian soil (UNHCR, 2019), representing 7% of its population.

It is a fact that, international cooperation for development faces several challenges, especially when there are fewer and fewer resources that donors allocate from their national budgets to this type of causes. In addition, there are fortuitous events and humanitarian crises that must be also addressed with these resources; these elements end up compromising the effectiveness of the assistance.

Even so, it should be stressed that beyond the indicators, there is currently a latent humanitarian crisis in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Unfortunately, these conflicts are the product of political crises therefore, humanitarian actions are not enough and contribute to diminish the crisis in the short term; it is the responsibility of each state to carry out pertinent actions leading to the solution.

Finally, in terms of development measuring indicators, it is observed that the Republic of Lebanon and Jordan are countries that have average-to-high income levels, which in turn, have a high human development index scores. Nevertheless, they have been affected by the strong humanitarian crisis in Syria, which unlike the two previous states, has a low human development index score and a low-to-average income levels. The abovementioned indicates that the conflict in Syria has spread internally and towards the neighboring countries of the Middle East and, why not, it has expanded to Europe.