

## Transnational figurations of displacement: conceptualising protracted displacement and translocal connectivity through a process-oriented perspective

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# TRAF'G

Transnational Figurations of Displacement

## Transnational Figurations of Displacement

Conceptualising protracted displacement and  
translocal connectivity through a  
process-oriented perspective

Benjamin Etzold, Milena Belloni, Russell King,  
Albert Kraler, Ferruccio Pastore

## SUMMARY

TRAFIG aims to contribute to the development of alternative solutions to protracted displacement that are tailored to the needs and capacities of displaced persons. This *working paper* contains our central concepts and key terms. We make use of the concept of *social figurations* as the theoretical foundation for our research. We understand figurations as dynamic social constellations between interdependent individuals that are produced in and through interactions and transactions. On this basis, we re-define *protracted displacement* as a figuration, in which displaced people’s capabilities and opportunities are severely limited for prolonged periods of time. Multiple structural forces constrain them from using their capacities and making free choices: enduring *displacing forces* hinder return; *marginalising forces* prevent local integration; *immobilising forces* block chances to seek a future elsewhere.

Protracted displacement is, however, much less static and fixed than commonly perceived. Displaced persons do have agency. They develop diverse strategies to cope with difficult situations and navigate through governance regimes of aid and asylum – and thereby change them. To comprehend the dynamics of protracted displacement a deeper understanding of displaced people’s perspectives, capacities and practices and an acknowledgement of their everyday lives that often transgress places and territories is necessary. *Translocal connectivity* and *human mobility* can serve as resources to cope with and move out of protracted displacement.

Developing new approaches to protracted displacement requires a move beyond the narrow frame of the conventional *durable solutions* (return, local integration, resettlement). A first step towards formulating alternatives, we suggest, is to recognise and effectively build upon displaced people’s own preferences as well as their local and translocal networks. A key question then is how they use *multiple interconnected pathways* to enhance their protection and livelihood security.

### KEYWORDS

Protracted displacement; protracted refugee situations; refugees; IDPs; figuration sociology; translocality; connectivity; mobility; agency; durable solutions; complementary pathways

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## Introduction

This *working paper* explains the central concepts and key terms of the project “Transnational Figurations of Displacement” (TRAFIG), which is financed by the European Union within the Horizon 2020 work programme (Societal Challenge 5 ‘Europe in a changing world’; call MIGRATION-08-2018 ‘Addressing the Challenge of Forced Displacement’) over the course of three years (2019–2021). As a living document, it will be developed further as our conceptual, contextual and empirical knowledge advances throughout the project.

The overall **objective of the TRAFIG project** is to contribute to the development of alternative solutions to protracted displacement that are better tailored to the needs and capacities of persons affected by displacement. In our reading, current policies do not adequately address the challenge of forced displacement and, in particular, fail to offer long-term perspectives for those refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are stuck in ‘limbo’ in certain places, who live in situations of vulnerability and dependency due to continuous cycles of displacement and a lack of durable solutions. Numerous studies have shown the significance of social networks and both intra-regional and international mobility for displaced persons. Building on these insights, the project seeks to answer the questions whether and how protracted displacement, dependency and vulnerability are related to the factors of translocal connectivity and mobility, and, in turn, how connectivity and mobility can contribute to enhancing self-reliance and strengthening the resilience of displaced people.

TRAFIG is grounded in the concept of ‘translocal figurations of displacement’, which builds on Elias’ (1978) **figurational sociology** and stresses the networks and interdependencies of displaced people at distinct places, but in particular across the borders of nation-states. It is the purpose of this *paper* to develop further and clearly define this concept so that it can serve as a unique conceptual lens for our project. By systematically applying a figurational perspective, we aspire to achieve a more coherent analysis that allows us to make sense of the structural constraints and dependencies of displaced people on the one hand, and of their agency, their practices and local and translocal connectivity on the other. The inherently **process-oriented concept** helps us to assess how structures and practices dynamically evolve, and thus, how figurations of displacement arise, how they become protracted, and how they can be dissolved.

We seek to contribute to the academic debate by linking partially disconnected fields of study. Above all, we bring together the state of the art in forced migration and refugee studies with anthropological, sociological, political and geographical studies of translocal mobility and connectivity, and with figurational so-

ciology. It is true that links between these academic fields have indeed been established before by empirical studies of refugees’ transnationalism (see Al-Ali, Black, & Koser, 2001; Horst, 2006; van Hear, 2006; Monsutti, 2008 for earlier interventions in the debate) and by scholars reflecting upon migration and displacement from a distinct figurational perspective (see Kirk, 2012; Brandhorst, 2015; Sökefeld, 2015; Hansen, 2017; Rosenthal & Bogner, 2017). However, significant gaps in research remain.

It is not yet clear how translocal figurations of displacement arise, how they are maintained, and how they shape the everyday lives of persons who experience protracted displacement. How do specific translocal figurations of displacement contribute to providing protection, securing livelihoods or facilitating mobility, or conversely impede access to protection, livelihoods or mobility? Moreover, the specific relations between local, territorially bound and transnational figurations are not well understood. What role do displaced persons’ transnational networks play in societal and economic transformations? And how do they react to and how are they governed by international humanitarian assistance and the mobility regimes of territorial states? Overall, we present a more systematic framework for the analysis of refugees’ everyday lives, the making and unmaking of protracted displacement situations (PDS), and the translocal dimensions of both.

The approach advanced through this *working paper* seeks to provide a conceptual basis for the TRAFIG project and a link for the insights derived from multiple Work Packages (WP) in our project: a comprehensive assessment of historical trajectories of protracted displacement in selected regions (WP 2 ‘Learning from the Past’), a review of current policies and instruments of protection, asylum and humanitarian aid policies (WP 3 ‘Governing Displacement’) and, in particular, our empirical research in Africa (Ethiopia, DR Congo, Tanzania; WP 4), in Asia (Jordan, Pakistan; WP 5), and in Europe (Greece, Italy, Germany; WP 6) that rests upon a multi-sited, mobile and flexible methodology. Building on these insights, we hope to contribute to the development of new approaches towards protracted displacement (WP 7 and 8). As is evident from the literature (Long & Crisp, 2010; Cohen & van Hear, 2017), such approaches should move beyond the territorially-bound and place-based thinking of the three conventional ‘durable solutions’ (repatriation, local integration, resettlement), and rather recognise and effectively build upon displaced people’s own preferences, experiences as well as local and transnational strategies to find security, sustain their livelihoods and become resilient again. We thereby seek to shift the attention of policymakers to translocal connectivity and mobility as part of the solutions to displacement, and not as problems in themselves.

This *working paper* is structured as follows: **Section one** gives an introduction into Elias' figurational approach and the potentials of the key principles of figurational sociology (namely relationality, power, temporality, spatiality, and scale) for empirical investigations of translocal figurations of displacement. Building on this, **section two** discusses the UNHCR's definition of protracted refugee situations and expands it in several ways. First, it adopts a people-centred perspective, focusing on individuals' ability to find durable solutions, and thus not limiting it to a particular number of people and an arbitrary timeframe. Rather, the TRAFIG concept of protracted displacement focusses on the structural forces that are at play and dynamically shape figurations of protracted displacement. It also addresses the notion of 'agency-in-waiting' (Brun, 2015) to acknowledge displaced people's power to move within and out of protracted displacement. **Section three** focusses on the micro- and meso-level of displaced people's practices and networks. It presents transnational and translocal connectivity and mobility as defining features of figurations of displacement in this age and as potential pathways out of protractedness. **Section four** brings together the elaborated state of the art in figurational sociology, refugee and forced migration studies as well as translocal mobility and connectivity studies, explains the basic assumptions of TRAFIG and introduces the five central themes that will be empirically explored throughout the project in the coming three years. Finally, the **last section** indicates what and, in particular, how, our concept of translocal figurations of displacement might add to current debates on protracted displacement in policy-making, humanitarian aid and development.

# 1. Social figurations

Displaced people are embedded in multiple social settings and networks of interdependence—what we call here ‘figurations’. These range in scale and type: From the family, neighbourhoods, labour markets, nation-states that they left, passed through and entered into, to the global protection regime and the transnational diaspora. Individuals take on positions in such figurations that shape their behaviour, social relations and identities, while they, in turn, shape figurations. At the same time, different figurations are interdependent and influence each other. Building on the work of Norbert Elias and other theorists, the following section aims to set the base for a better understanding of the social relations, interdependencies and power structures that shape the everyday lives of people affected by protracted displacement.

## 1.1 Key principles of the figurational approach

The figurational approach is a meso-level concept developed by the German sociologist Norbert Elias (1897–1990) to describe the organisation and contingent emergence of social life and the inherent interdependence of actors and groups (see Treibel, 2008; Killminster & Mennell, 2009; Dépelteau & Landini, 2013 for introductions to Elias’ work). Elias (1978, p. 130) believed that thinking in terms of ‘the individual’ and ‘the society’ as different and antagonistic was misleading. He thus developed the concept of figurations to overcome the division within sociology between a micro-perspective that focusses on individual actors, their perceptions and actions on the one hand, and a macro-perspective that centres on structures and functions within whole systems or societies, on the other. He shared this interest with other sociologists who spoke about these micro-macro relations in terms of agency and structure (Giddens, 1984) or in relation to practices, habitus and field (Bourdieu, 1985; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and who thought about social life in terms of ever-emergent, and often contested, relations rather than fixed structures (cf. Emirbayer, 1997).

The figurational approach should not be seen as rigid theory, but as a heuristic tool that can be adapted to the needs of empirical research (Baur & Ernst, 2011, p. 119). With this in mind, we present some of the key principles of figurational sociology, namely relationality, power, temporality, spatiality and scale. We believe that these aspects are particularly valuable for empirical investigations into ‘translocal figurations of displacement’.

## Relationality: Figurations consist of chains of interdependence between individuals

Already in 1857, Karl Marx argued that “society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand” (Marx, 1978, p. 247, cited in Emirbayer, 1997, p. 288). Whilst structural or individualistic approaches dominated social sciences thereafter, such a relational understanding of social life was revitalised by Elias, amongst other sociologists, who used the concept of figurations. By drawing attention to people’s interdependencies—the central question being “what binds people together?” (Elias, 1978, p. 132)—the concept of figuration can thus be considered as a key approach in relational sociology (Emirbayer, 1997; Dépelteau, 2013).<sup>1</sup>

According to Elias, **figurations are dynamic social constellations between interdependent individuals that are produced in and through interactions and transactions**. Elias often referred to the core idea of the concept as a football match or a card game:

*If four people sit around a table and play cards together, they form a figuration. Their actions are interdependent. [...] The course taken by the game will obviously be the outcome of the actions of a group of interdependent individuals. [...] By figuration we mean the changing patterns created by the players as a whole—not only by their intellects but by their whole selves, the totality of their dealings in their relationships with each other. It can be seen that this figuration forms a flexible lattice-work of tensions (Elias, 1978, p. 130).*

**Actors** are always part of and form multiple figurations (see Figure 1)—this is why analysing actors’ positions and actions is the point of departure of figurational analysis. Individuals’ options and everyday practices are structured by ‘chains of interdependence’ in which they are embedded, their respective position in these relational networks and the institutions or ‘rules of the game’ that have been established in a figuration (see Bourdieu, 1985; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992 for a similar understanding of agents’ practices within relationally constituted ‘social fields’; and Paulle et al., 2012 for a comparison of

<sup>1</sup> Relational sociology reverses some of the basic assumptions of classical sociology. It does not focus on specific entities such as (rational) actors, social norms or systems, but on the relations between these entities and “depict[s] social reality instead in dynamic, continuous, and processual terms” (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 281).

Elias' and Bourdieu's key concepts). Elias stresses that interdependency relations in figurations take on different forms; in the most simple expression, the 'players' are either allies or opponents (Elias, 1978, p. 130).

What needs to be added is that figurations are not merely shaped by interactions of independent social units. They are rather constituted by transactions of interdependent agents, as highlighted by Emirbayer (1997, p. 287): "the very terms or units involved in a transaction derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction." Individuals' perceptions and actions can then only be understood via their wider sociality. Figurations are thus the outcome of a continuous interweaving of social practices of relationally positioned actors (Bogner & Rosenthal, 2017, p. 23).

Figure 1 sketches the central idea of a social figuration. Individuals are relationally positioned vis-à-vis one another and involved in multiple transactions such as the circulation of resources, ideas and information. Some take on more central positions of power (indicated by a larger actor), form important hubs in intrapersonal networks (being involved in more transactions than others) and can thereby shape the figuration as such and its rules decisively. Others are in marginal positions: While they cannot influence the institutional setup, they are nonetheless 'part of the game'. There is always an overlap of different figurations. To stick with Elias' example above, some of the card players might also be neighbours or colleagues

at work, others might be relatives, but at the card table, their primary role is that of players. They adapt their behaviour to the situational setting in which they find themselves in certain places and points in time.

### Power: Figurations are characterised by un-equal and dynamically fluctuating power relations

Figurations are embedded into a wider field of forces and thus are structured by, and themselves structure the surrounding power relations. Elias applies a similar understanding of relational power to other key thinkers in relational sociology such as Bourdieu or Foucault (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 292):

*The concept of power has been transformed from a concept of substance to a concept of relationship. At the core of changing figurations—indeed the very hub of the figuration process—is a fluctuating, tensile equilibrium, a balance of power moving to and from inclining first to one side and then to the other. This kind of fluctuating balance of power is a structural characteristic of the flow of every figuration (Elias, 1978, p. 131).*

Elias does not conceive of power as a feature of a nation-state or a characteristic of an individual in the sense that power can be 'possessed', but as necessarily inscribed in the social relations within a figuration. In principle, figurations cannot be considered as 'flat' with equal horizontal relations between actors. Instead, figurations are always structured by **unequal power**

Figure 1: Schematic sketch of the notion of social figuration

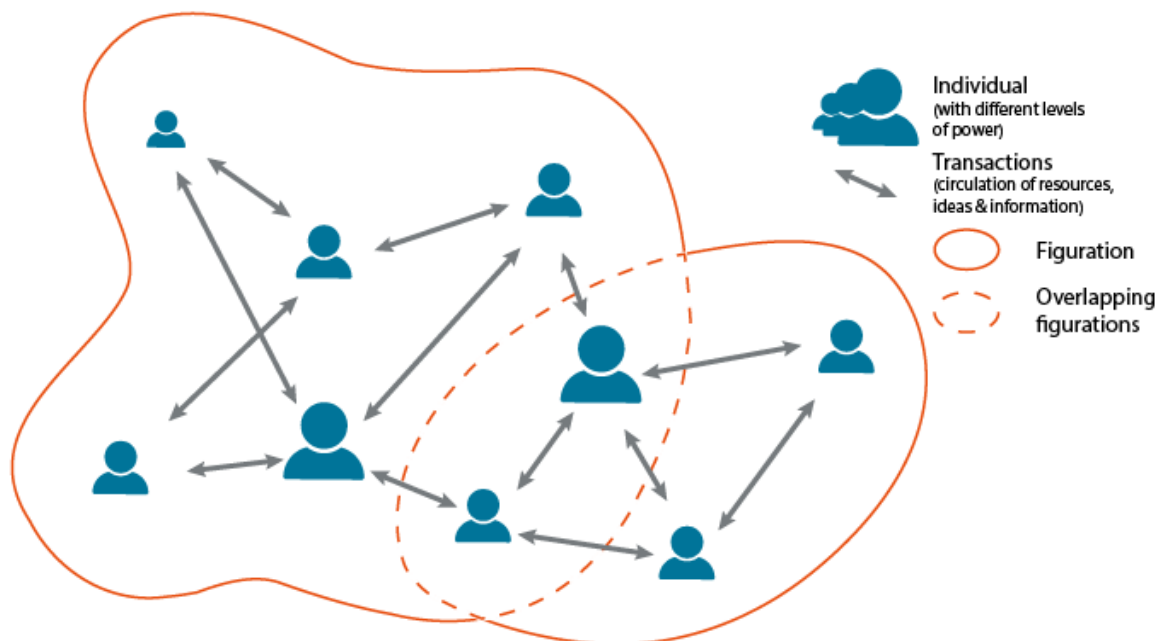
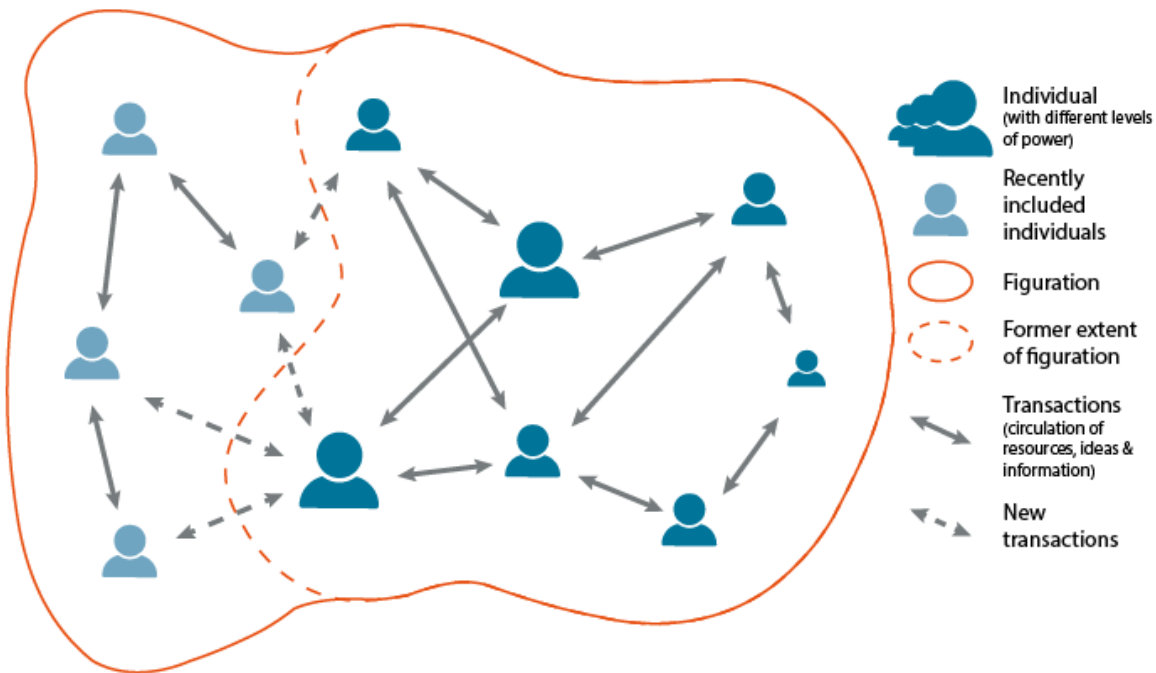


Figure 2: Schematic sketch of figurational change over time



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**relations** in three ways: In the existence of social hierarchies ('situational rankings' or 'positions of power'), in the sense of dependencies between individuals and groups ('power over' or 'dependencies on'), and reflective of unequally distributed capacities to act ('power to') (see Haan & Zoomers, 2005; Pansardi, 2012 on these different connotations of power). Positional hierarchies, dependencies and different power potentials—in other words, the scope of agency—shape the figuration and its institutions and pre-structure the practices of individuals within any given figuration.

The quote above highlights that shifting power relations drive processual changes. Dependency relations can intensify, dissolve or be actively reworked. Moreover, capacities to act can be accumulated by individuals, while 'capital' (understood as social power in the sense of Bourdieu) can gain or lose its value within a figuration. Intergroup hierarchies are not given and fixed but under constant contestation.

**Temporality: Figurations evolve dynamically through interactions and power shifts**

Figurations are not static but dynamic, as the positions, networks and power relations within figurations as well as the broader relations between different figurations are "always moving, changing and developing" (Kaspersen & Gabriel, 2008, p. 374). The strongly simplified graph in Figure 2 might help to comprehend the different kinds of dynamics that are inherent to figurational change, and that might even take place

simultaneously. New individuals might become part of the network of interdependencies; the figuration can thus grow. The type, extent or rhythm of transactions within the figuration might change. The balance of power between actors might also change as some gain power in terms of social recognition, capacities to act and resources that can be further circulated while others' relative position deteriorates in comparison. Figurational change might also be evoked by external factors (see below).

**The temporal dimension is at the heart of the figurational approach**, which does not merely seek to describe how a particular social constellation is, but seeks to explore its processes of becoming and transforming, and which has thus also been coined as "process sociology" (cf. Baur & Ernst, 2011). Methodologically, Elias tried to understand and explain long-term societal changes by analysing the sequencing of events and by reconstructing the socio-genesis of figurations, what he termed 'figurational flow'. One of his central assumptions thereby is that the lengths of the 'chains of independence' within figurations and thus the complexity of social life increase over time, leading to ever more differentiated figurations:

*Every relatively complex, relatively differentiated and highly integrated figuration must be preceded by, and arise out of, relatively less complex, less differentiated and less integrated figurations. Without referring back to the figurational flow which produced them, it would be impossible to understand or explain the interdependence of all the positions in a figuration at a particular time (Elias, 1978, p. 161).*



Social development, in a figurational understanding, can be driven by external factors, such as a violent conflict that leads to the displacement of thousands and then to subsequent transformations of places of reception, by positional changes within figurations, for instance as some actors move up in an existing hierarchy, or by the introduction of new ‘rules of the game’. Figurations and their hierarchies of power can thus hardly be considered as fixed, but rather are always contested and renegotiated. A specific situation can thereby only be understood in its evolution and, in particular, the “consequent shifts in power balances” (Elias, 1978, p. 172) are investigated in detail (Baur & Ernst, 2011, p. 125).

While the processual figuration approach emphasises change—even to the extent that certain figurations can cease to exist—it must be noted that figurations can still be quite **stable over time** and thus resilient to change, a notion that in itself is worth further investigation. Even though different players leave and enter a figuration, and technological, social and political transformations take place, the general constellation with the respectively distributed positions might remain the same. This might be so for several reasons: Generally, a majority of conservative players may resist more fundamental change due to deeply internalised social norms; those in power might strategically defend a hierarchical social order to keep their positions of privilege, or forces outside that figuration might have an interest in maintaining the status quo. Resistance to or systematic prevention of power shifts and subsequent figurational flows might be the most important reasons for situations to become protracted.

**Protracted displacement situations** and other forms of blocked social developments can be regarded as manifestations of un-equal power relations that are stable over a long period of time. One might think of a large refugee camp such as Dadaab in Kenya as a figuration that emerged at a particular place due to violent conflict and subsequent enforced mobility—the Somali civil war had led to the displacement of more than 800,000 people in 1991/92—yet is embedded in the wider geopolitical, social and economic context of a region. While new cohorts of refugees arrive and longer-term inhabitants leave, resulting in constantly changing positions within the figuration, the camp in its general structure continues to exist. While new policies, humanitarian instruments and livelihood support strategies are introduced, the underlying political and economic root causes that led to conflict and displacement in the first place could not be resolved. While no leeway is created for dissolving the camp and for the camp residents’ long-term integration and acquisition of citizenship in the country of reception, displacement became more and more protracted (Abdi, 2005; Horst, 2006; Mattner, 2008).

## Spatiality: Figurations are embedded in places, operate through networks and are shaped by territorialisation

According to Elias (2004), figurations are not merely grounded in places, but actors actively produce places and spatial relations through their practices, which in turn reflect their specific positions of power (Hansen, 2017, p. 14; Hüttermann, 2018, p. 15). In our reading, the distinct spatiality inherent in figurations can be better understood when three particular socio-spatial approaches—place, network, and territory (Jessop, Brenner, & Jones, 2008)—are taken into account that largely seem to reflect Elias’ relational and constructivist understanding of space.

Figurations are ‘emplaced’ as they are built and transformed at distinct **places**, which must not be simply understood as points on the earth’s surface. In social geography, the relationality, specificity and processual character of places are emphasised: places are socially produced sites where social interactions, economic exchanges, and political negotiations are realised. The uniqueness of a place stems from its history and its connectivity, i.e. a specific trajectory of influences on and interrelations with other places, which give that place its distinct form, function and meaning. This implies that places inevitably change and that these transformations owe much to the specific modes of (dis)connection between places. It also implies that the direction of transformations is open and shaped by human action (Amin, 2002, pp. 391–395; Massey, 2005, pp. 67–68). Such a social constructivist approach that considers places not as given, static and clearly bounded entities, but as processual outcomes of transactions between interdependent actors, suits Elias’ approach of the ‘figurational flow’ perfectly.

Figurations have **networks** and nodal places as their skeleton. By centring on the notion of interdependency, the figurational approach can be seen as predecessor to contemporary theories of globalisation; many of which refer to networks as central structures of a world that has seen a fundamental increase in the scope, quality and speed of connectedness across space (Castells, 2000, pp. 440–459; Amin, 2002, pp. 390–395). Networks create a relational space of interdependencies. Each network rests on a distinct physical structure as nodal places are connected by multiple threads along which material and non-material flows circulate. Such network structures have been created by the interactions and transactions of people; at the same time, the network provides a structure for these practices (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 295). Due to the different nature, function and spatial scope of network relations, different figurations thus also have different geographies. Following such logic, an actor or a place’s central or marginal position in networks and the modes of connection or disconnection in figurations are decisive indicators of societal power relations (see Massey, 2005, p. 102 for a reflection of such power geometries).

Figurations are fundamentally shaped by **territorialisation**. A territory commonly refers to an area on the earth’s surface delineated by borders over which actors exercise control; territorial nation-states or private properties are the most obvious examples. Territory has long been considered as a self-evident, given entity that functions as a stage for human actions (Elden, 2010, p. 800). While social relations and everyday practices are formed through the very idea of territoriality and the institutions and structures that define and defend a territory, such as a sovereign state, a territory in itself and its modes of regulation must also be seen as the product of social practices and political contestations, in particular. That is why political geographers prefer to look at the processes of territorialisation rather than at territories as pre-given spatial containers. Territorialisation can be considered as a distinctive mode or process of socio-spatial organisation (Elden, 2010, p. 810), which always reflects existing power relations, and which involves a broad range of political–strategic, technological, legal, and social practices of ordering, boundary-making, parcelisation and controlling of a geographic area as well as the people within and the flows into that territory. Territories are then always the historical products of societal and political power geometries. Changes in territorial orders would then be the outcome of respective power-shifts. Based upon such an understanding, Elias would have certainly argued in favour of investigations into territorial socio-genesis, a process of which the territorial nation-state is one specific, but not the only product (Sassen, 2013).

Figure 3 summarises some critical spatial dimensions that matter in and for figurations. A figuration can be rooted in one particular place and largely relies on that place’s infrastructure, while, in turn, it shapes this place through the interactions

and transactions of its actors. As explained with regard to territorialisation above, different figurations can not only be separated by space, but also by territorial borders as well as social institutions and cultural codes that create and reaffirm a specific territorial order. Two different figurations, each territorially defined and more or less politically closed like a nation-state, then stand next to another. A third option is that one particular figuration transgresses both single places and territorial borders. In that case, which is particularly relevant for this project, individual actors are embedded in networks of interdependency that are not defined by one place or confined by one territory. Instead, resources, ideas and information as well as people themselves circulate in a wider web of relations. These place-to-place transactions thereby constitute a wider translocal figuration with its own inherent rules, a specific logic of interactions, certain codes of communication and a distinct spatiality that revolves around closely connected nodal places (see Section 3.2).

**Scale: The figuration approach can be applied at all social levels**

The concept of figurations can be applied to smaller, more clearly delineated groups such as a family, a school class, the residents within a refugee camp or a local neighbourhood, or to more differentiated social entities such as a city, a nation or the world society. From a conceptual point of view, this openness can be applauded as flexibility as it allows for empirical investigations in different kinds of social relations at and across different scales. It has, however, also been criticised as vagueness as it is difficult to discern the boundaries between the multiple figurations in which interdependent actors are embedded (Hansen, 2017, p. 8).

**Figure 3: Schematic sketch of key spatial dimensions of figurations**

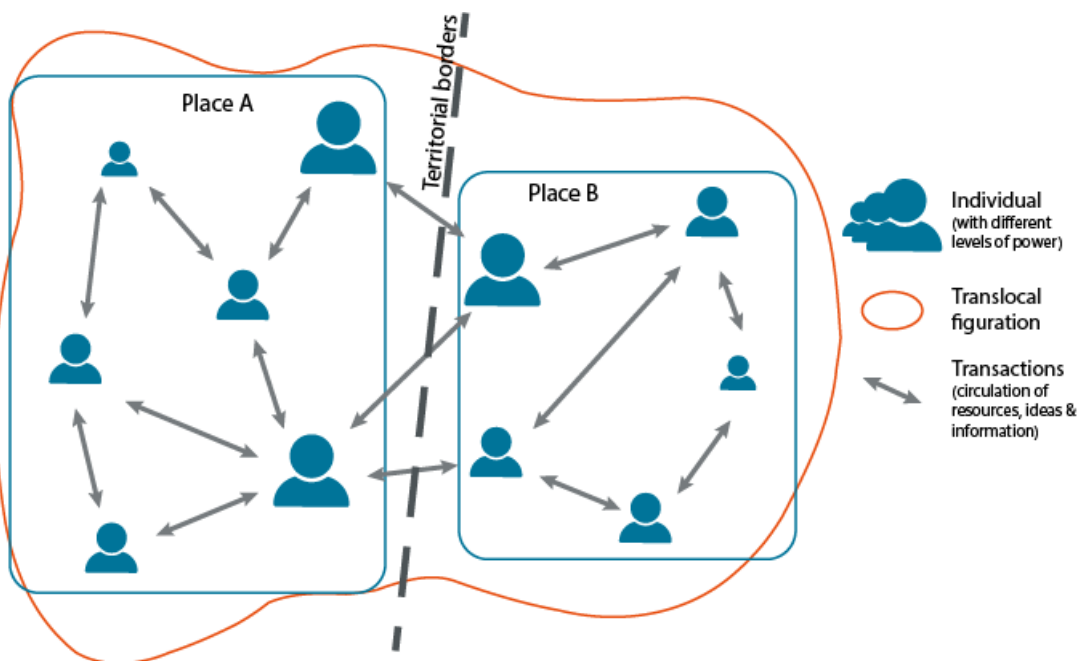
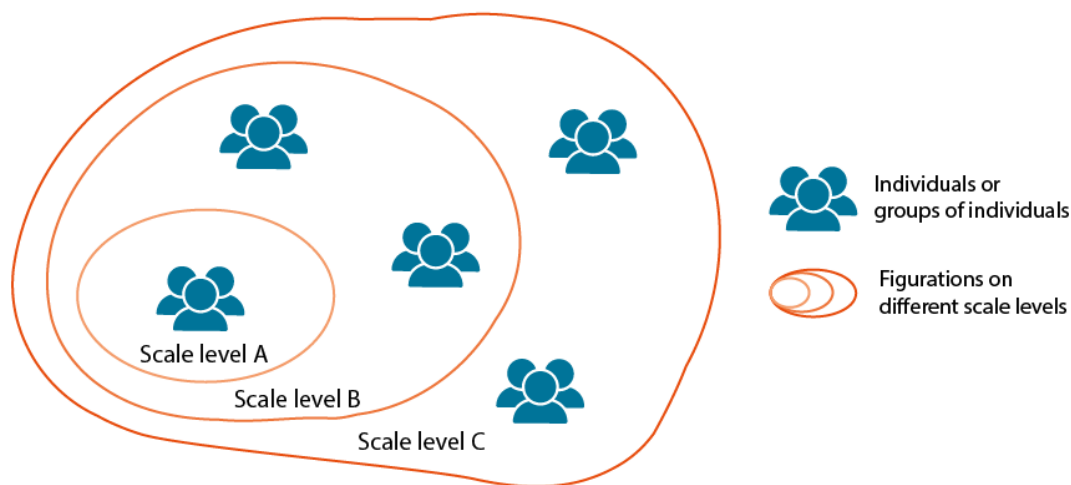


Figure 4: Schematic sketch of figural scales



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Generally speaking, a figuration is as broad or narrow as the linkages and interdependences between actors. An important difference between figurations lies in the **structure and length of the ‘chains of interdependence’** which link people together. The longer and the more differentiated these chains of interdependence, the more complex a figuration and the more difficult a scientific assessment (Elias, 1978, p. 131). Moreover, figurations have specific relations to one another (Elias, 1978, p. 168). Some stand independently next to another without any clear links; others are distinct in their logic but overlap at certain points; and others are hierarchically nested inside one another like a Matryoshka doll as exemplified in Figure 4 (see Herod, 2011 for explanations of different principles of scale).

For our study of figurations of displacement, the **survival unit**, an elementary form of a figuration around which social life is organised needs further elaboration (Elias, 1978; Kaspersen & Gabriel, 2008). A survival unit revolves around the principles of security (e.g. the exertion of violence to defend the members of this figuration), economic sustenance (the production and reproduction of goods and services for its members), identity (there is a common belief in its function, its unity and accordingly its institutions and symbols), and territoriality (i.e. a clearly demarcated space in which interactions take place, which is defended against the claims and interventions of others, and which is recognised by those outside this figuration). The territorial state is the most dominant form of such a survival unit in present times, but other social and spatial forms of survival units have served the same basic survival functions in the past, too, such as tribes, village-states or city-states. According to Elias, the key is that these survival units are, at least to some extent, functionally autonomous from other figurations, that a legitimate actor has a monopoly over the means of violence within this figuration and that people are born into this survival unit, that is why it is not a community by choice, but a community of fate (Elias, 1978, pp. 134–140; Kaspersen & Gabriel, 2008, pp. 374–381).

#### Box 1: Social figurations

*The concept of figuration is a heuristic tool to understand structured social relations and the contingent emergence and inherent dynamics of social life.*

*In TRAFIG, we understand figurations as social constellations between interdependent individuals that are produced in and through interactions and transactions. They are fundamentally shaped by the power dynamics inherent in all social relations. Figurations are dynamic as they are constantly transformed by external influences and, in particular, people’s practices and the power shifts between individuals. Figurations are embedded in places, operate through networks and are shaped by territorialisation.*

*The concept of figurations can be applied at different scale levels from smaller groups with intense connections such as a family to more complex, differentiated social entities such as a nation-state.*

## 1.2. Applying a figurational perspective in empirical studies of displacement

A figurational perspective has been applied to a wide array of themes ranging from state formation, courts, sports and community relations by Elias himself, literature and culture (Landini & Dépelteau, 2014), war, conflicts and violence (Landini & Dépelteau, 2017), organisational change in industries (Frerichs, 2014) as well as to family relations and their inherent dynamics (Castrén & Ketokivi, 2015).

Comparatively few studies explicitly use this approach in the field of migration, displacement and refugee studies (but see Kirk, 2012 on the journeys of unaccompanied Afghan refugee children; Brandhorst, 2015 on the transnational lives of Cuban migrants; Sökefeld, 2015 and Hansen, 2017 on conflicts, mobility and development in Central Asia; Rosenthal & Bogner, 2017 on life courses and collective experiences during mobilities). More common instead is the focus on the so-called established–outsider figuration (Elias & Scotson, 1994) that is marked by segregation, stigmatisation and power contestations between longer-established and newer groups of residents that has been applied to research in immigrant societies (see Pratsinakis, 2013 for a case from urban Greece; Hüttermann, 2018 for several case studies from Germany). Recently, such studies have also been conducted with an explicit focus on displaced and multiply marginalised people and their efforts to build new alliances in their everyday lives (see Mielke, 2016 on immobilised former nomads in Kabul’s informal camp settings; Rosenthal, 2016 on segregation, conflicts and group formation between Palestinians and Israelis; Grawert & Mielke, 2018 on displaced people’s coping practices in Afghanistan and Pakistan).

The notions of figuration, and survival unit as one of its distinct forms, can be utilised in several ways in the context of displacement. Building on the studies above, we briefly reflect upon **central features of figurations of displacement** along a ‘typical’ mobility trajectory of people who have fled a country due to violent conflict, persecution, human rights violations or other existential threats. Important to note is that the turbulence of violent conflict and spatial mobility lead to a *multiplication and fragmentation of figurations* compared to pre-conflict and pre-displacement situations, and that displaced people are often severely constrained in their mobility and their everyday life actions by multiple structural forces (displacing, marginalising and immobilising forces, see Section 2.2).

1. Violent conflicts, as well as other existential crises which can evoke displacement such as large-scale natural disasters or severe food crises, evoke highly turbulent and fundamental **transformations of larger figurational settings**. Every armed conflict, for instance, is marked by different phases during which warring parties gain and lose territorial control, military power, economic assets, authority and public recognition. Shifting power balances in figurations are the very reason for, explain the dynamics within, and determine

the outcome of conflicts. The figurational landscape after a war is never the same as it was before—another reason why to return ‘home’ is no realistic option for many refugees and IDPs.

2. People are displaced because they have lost their position in and their protection of their survival unit. In the context of war, some people are no longer protected because those at the centre of the figuration they are part of have lost their authoritative and military power over the territory that is attacked by an enemy. The figuration might not dissolve as such, but loses the protective capacity for its citizens. In other cases, a person is persecuted by its own state because s/he is part of an opposition party or a political movement. In either case, positional hierarchies in society are altered radically, leading to a **de-coupling of individuals from the state figuration** to which they once belonged.
3. During conflict and initial displacement, **pre-conflict figurations that shape people’s everyday lives are transformed and sometimes even dissolve**. While some families might flee together, others are displaced at different points of time and flee to different places, leading to a dispersion of the family across multiple places, and potentially to a fragmentation of a family’s internal sense of unity and belonging. Neighbourhoods, work units, sports clubs or other figurations that structured everyday life before the war are also torn apart and unlikely to reconstitute themselves at another place or even at the same place years after a conflict has ended.
4. While fleeing, people enter into **multiple, somewhat fluid and insecure figurations of mobility**. As they are not adequately protected by any state while moving through border zones and transit spaces, refugees often search for support and protection outside of the state, for instance from militant groups, smuggling networks or smaller social units of trust such as their core family or fellow refugees. Due to their existential needs, stark power differences, the specific modes of operation of the migration industry, a lack of recognition of their rights by states, and other strong structural forces that limit their agency, people in flight are highly vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and death whilst navigating their way through the temporary figurations encountered on their journeys. Figurations of displacement are particularly marked by violence, precarisation and marginalisation.
5. Having fled to the countries of (first) reception, **displaced people take on positions in new figurations in these countries**, whose structures and rules are initially unfamiliar to them. They might find protection and support in a camp that is run by a humanitarian organisation; they might enter into the asylum regime by applying for asylum in a host state; or they might seek self-protection and livelihoods outside the formal refugee regime, for instance in the neighbourhoods and informal economies of an ‘arrival city’. In each of these figurations, they are confronted with pre-existing hierarchical structures within which they have to navigate; they create new personal relations and learn the respective rules

of the game, and they have to adapt their behaviour to get by and to move on in their lives. Displaced people might find themselves stuck in **figurations of protracted displacement**, over which they have limited control, and which they perceive as limiting, insecure and precarious (see Section 2.2).

**6. Figurations can stretch across a translocal space of care, solidarity and trust.** While all figurations described in the previous paragraphs are somehow embedded in the places and territories that displaced people dwell in and pass through, it needs highlighting that figurations are not necessarily tied to a single place or territory. The figurations in which displaced people find emotional and livelihood support, some security and a sense of belonging, can transgress borders and be situated in a translocal space. **Translocal figurations of displacement** are constituted, on the one hand, by de-territorialised interdependency relations and transactions between nodal places in networks—for instance, the multiple interlinked sites where family or diaspora members live. On the other hand, they are structured by territorial orders in the sense that access to mobility regimes, protection and asylum systems as well as labour markets and social services are organised by states (see Section 3.2).

These last two aspects of figurations of displacement are the focus of our TRAFIG project and will thus be elaborated upon further in the following. First, we will explain *figurations of protracted displacement* that unfold in particular places and countries of reception on a more structural level building on the debate in forced migration and refugee studies on protracted displacement (Section 2). Second, we will outline *translocal figurations of displacement* in detail, focussing on the micro- and meso-level and on displaced people's practices and everyday lives that span a wider space of interconnections (Section 3).

#### Box 2: Figurations of displacement

*In TRAFIG, we use figurations of displacement as a summary term for a diverse set of dynamic social constellations between displaced persons, state actors, humanitarian actors, host communities, communities of origin and transnational diasporas, which have arisen in the wake of conflict-induced mobility, and which manifest themselves at particular places under quite specific social, political and economic conditions.*

*Thereby, displaced persons find themselves in a multitude of interdependency relations—some more and some less institutionalised—that shape concrete conditions of displacement.*

## 2. Protracted displacement

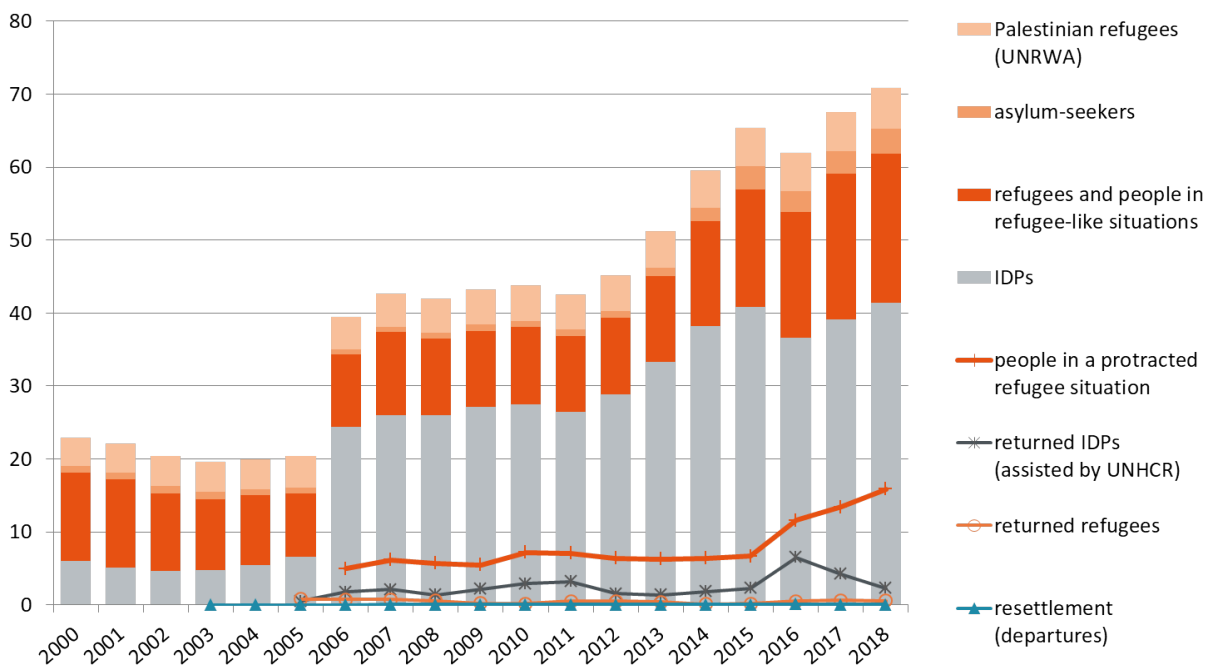
### 2.1 The scale of the problem

Since the early 2000s, protracted displacement has received increasing attention from academics and humanitarian actors alike (Crisp, 2002; Adelman, 2008; Loescher, Milner, Newman, & Troeller, 2008; Milner & Loescher, 2011; Bohnet, Mielke, Rudolf, Schetter, & Vollmer, 2015; Hyndman & Giles, 2016; Vollmer, 2019), although already much earlier studies had noted that durable solutions remained elusive in many displacement contexts for long periods of time (see Stein & Clark, 1990 on refugee settlements in Africa). Following the earlier contributions in this debate, UNHCR formally adopted the concept of “protracted refugee situations” as key concept guiding its analysis of and response to refugee situations worldwide (see below). The observation that a large and growing share of the global refugee population lives in a state of deracinated existential uncertainty for decades with little prospect for repatriation, resettlement or local integration—the metaphor of ‘living in limbo’ is frequently used (see UNHCR, 2004; Kits, 2005; Brun & Fábos, 2015)—lies at the heart of the concept. The heightened significance of protracted displacement situations is also a reflection of broader changes in patterns and the scale of displacement:

Figure 5 shows the scale of the problem: Since the turn of the millennium, the world has witnessed a more than threefold increase of the number of people who have been forcibly displaced either within or beyond state borders—from a total number of 22.8 million in the year 2000 to 70.8 million at the end of 2018. International and internal armed conflicts, as well as massive human rights violations and oppressive regimes, have caused more and more people to flee; in 2018 alone 13.6 million people fled—both within their countries and across borders.

Global displacement has also grown exponentially because none of the three classical ‘durable solutions’ (repatriation, local integration, and resettlement) actually seem to provide a sustainable solution for the majority of those affected (Crisp, 2002; Long, 2014; Crisp, 2016). Given the comparatively small number of refugees and internally displaced people who returned or who were resettled (on the global level, there is no reliable data on the number of refugees who acquired citizenship status in their country of asylum—an indicator for local integration), it is no surprise that both the absolute number and the share of displaced persons who are stuck in long-term displacement situations have grown significantly.

Figure 5: Global trends of displacement



Sources: UNHCR Population Statistics (<http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview>), UNHCR Global Trends 2005-2018, Resettlement Data Finder (<https://rsq.unhcr.org/en>)

## 2.2 Defining protracted displacement

### Protracted refugee situations

While the number of displaced persons is often presented in an aggregated manner, it is useful to distinguish different forms of displacement to highlight differences and commonalities. For statistical purposes, UNHCR (2019, p. 22) defines a **protracted refugee situation** “as one in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five consecutive years or more in a given asylum country”.<sup>2</sup> According to this definition, UNHCR estimates that about 15.9 million refugees were living in protracted refugee situations at the end of 2018, which corresponds to three-quarters of all refugees. Some of these situations have lasted for decades such as that of Palestinians in Jordan and Syria, Afghans in Pakistan and Iran, or Somalis in Kenya (see UNHCR, 2019, p. 23 for an overview of PRS by size and duration). In a more encompassing definition, the executive committee of the UNHCR (2004, p. 1) sees

*a protracted refugee situation as one in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile. A refugee in this situation is often unable to break free from enforced reliance on external assistance.*

Although it is arguably these qualitative features that lie at the core of protracted refugee situations, it is the duration of displacement which has come to dominate debates on protracted refugee situations, in which long-standing exile situations are conflated with protractedness.

#### Box 3: Protracted refugee situations

*In TRAFIG, we do not primarily use the notion of protracted refugee situations (PRS) in terms of a statistical definition. In line with UNHCR’s more encompassing definition, we rather see PRS as a particular social condition of insecurity, vulnerability and dependency, in which people who have fled across international borders might find themselves for prolonged periods of time.*

In addition, in measuring the scope of protracted refugee situations, the focus of UNHCR’s statistical concept is on the aggregate situation, i.e. that a refugee situation has lasted for five years or more, rather than the situation of an individual refugee, i.e. that she or he has been in exile for five years or more without access to a durable solution.

<sup>2</sup> The definition originally was proposed in 2004 as a “crude measure” of protracted refugee situations (UNHCR, 2004, p. 2). The original definition limited the concept to developing countries, a limitation since abandoned in the definition.

### Protracted internal displacement situations

While there is now an established debate on protracted internal displacement situations (Kälin & Entwisle Chapuisat, 2017; Bradley, 2018; Kälin & Entwisle Chapuisat, 2018), there is no statistical definition comparable to that of protracted refugee situations in respect to protracted internal displacement situations. As a result, comparable figures on the scale of protracted internal displacement are not available on the global level (see IDMC, 2019, Part 2 on internal displacement data). This also reflects the fact that protractedness in the context of internal displacement has tended to be discussed in terms of a variety of qualitative features of the situation internally displaced persons (IDPs) find themselves in rather than merely in temporal terms. Indeed, the duration of displacement in itself is insufficient to explain the wellbeing and vulnerability of IDPs.

Critically reviewing different definitions, Kälin and Entwisle Chapuisat (2017, p. 20) propose to define **protracted internal displacement situations** as

*situations in which tangible progress towards durable solutions is slow or stalled for significant periods of time because IDPs are prevented from taking or are unable to take steps that allow them to progressively reduce the vulnerability, impoverishment and marginalization they face as displaced people, in order to regain a self-sufficient and dignified life and ultimately find a durable solution.*

A key aspect of this definition is that it directly relates protracted displacement to the absence of durable solutions, which the UNHCR definition does not. In the context of internal displacement, the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC), a UN mechanism for the strategic coordination of humanitarian assistance created in 1992, has set forth a definition of durable solutions that relates these to the absence of assistance and protection needs, defining a **durable solution** as “achieved when IDPs no longer have specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and such persons can enjoy their human rights without discrimination resulting from their displacement” (IASC, 2010, p. 5).

While also referring to the three classical solutions developed in the refugee context, i.e. return and reintegration at the place of origin, local integration in areas of refuge, and (re)settlement and integration in another part of the country, the IASC framework on durable solutions for IDPs additionally defines a set of qualitative criteria to assess whether a durable solution has been achieved.

These criteria are (IASC, 2010, p. 27):

- long-term safety and security
- enjoyment of an adequate standard of living without discrimination
- access to livelihoods and employment

- effective and accessible mechanisms to restore housing, land and property
- access to personal and other documentation without discrimination
- family reunification
- participation in public affairs without discrimination
- access to effective remedies and justice

Recognising that conditions for IDPs may change and that these criteria cannot always be ascertained, IDMC (2018, p. 50) also speaks of provisional solutions, mirroring earlier debates in the context of refugee protection (Kälin & Entwisle Chapuisat, 2017, p. 24).

#### Box 4: (Durable) Solutions

*In TRAFIG, we use the term solutions (to displacement) to refer to the capabilities of displaced persons of rebuilding their lives after displacement and the opportunities available of doing so.*

*We generally use ‘durable solutions’ as a reference to the three convention-al solutions discussed in the context of displacement (return and reintegration, local integration, and resettlement, or in the context of internal displacement, settlement in another part of the country). When assessing whether a solution has been achieved, we will use the criteria developed in the IASC framework on durable solutions for IDPs.*

*In recognising displaced people’s translocal connectivity, one must bear in mind that there might not be one ‘durable solution’ for all members of a group, but rather multiple solutions that have to be seen in relation to one another.*

## 2.3 Redefining protracted displacement

### Reframing protracted displacement

The notion of protracted refugee situations, which is now well established since its introduction in the early 2000s, has numerous merits, notably the recognition that UNHCR should not only focus on emergencies (Crisp, 2016). To move beyond lifesaving interventions towards real durable solutions is now a commonly acknowledged priority. Nonetheless, UNHCR’s most widely used definition of PRS, which it developed as a ‘crude measure’ of refugee populations in a protracted situation (UNHCR, 2004, p. 1), has several **limitations**, as UNHCR (2018, p. 22) itself recognises. The arbitrarily set threshold numbers and time frames; the disregard of internal displacement and vulnerable migrant groups who find themselves trapped ‘in limbo’; the disregard of onward mobility out of formally accounted for refugee situations to cities or other coun-

tries; the focus on camp situations and thus a neglect of urban refugees and self-organised urban livelihoods; and a blind eye to displaced people’s informal strategies of de facto integration are some of the aspects that are highlighted by critics (Milner, 2014; Bohnet et al., 2015; Crisp, 2016).

In reformulating the classical definition of protracted refugee situations that arguably shapes the broader notion of protracted displacement, we move away from the focus on refugees and refugee situations and use displacement as a broader, more inclusive term.

The IOM defines (forced) displacement as the “forced removal of a person from his or her home or country, often due to armed conflict or natural disasters” (IOM, 2011, p. 29, 39), which could be further transferred to a condition of having been removed from one’s home.<sup>3</sup> In the context of a highly politicised debate, such a definition does not necessarily depend on the legal category of the ‘refugee’, which has long been criticised as an exclusionary ‘label’ (Zetter, 2007; Pastore, 2015; Crawley & Skleparis, 2017; Erdal & Oeppen, 2018) that leads to the exclusion from protection of various categories of migrants who have been forced to move but who do not qualify as refugees in the sense of the Geneva Convention or beneficiaries of what UNHCR has termed ‘complementary protection’ (Mandal, 2005).

#### Box 5: Displacement

*TRAFIG uses the term displacement to describe the situation once individuals or groups have fled or have been removed from their country or region of origin or habitual residence and to highlight the inability to return for reasons of persecution, armed conflict, civil unrest, or natural or man-made catastrophes.*

- *Such a definition can be applied to a broad range of situations:*
- *refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP), including disaster-related displacement*
- *sur place refugees and IDPs who initially left for other reasons, yet became refugees or IDPs at a later stage of their mobility trajectory*
- *migrants who have been forced to move for personal, social, political or economic reasons but who do not qualify as refugees in a narrow sense but find themselves stuck ‘in limbo’*
- *second- and third-generation refugees and IDPs who themselves were not forced to move; and*
- *all people irrespective of the type of ‘force’ that keeps them away from the country or region of origin who have no way to return.*

<sup>3</sup> Webster’s English dictionary defines removal as “act of removing or fact of being removed” (Gove, 1993, p. 1921). The latter thus also applies to sur place refugees or persons born into the condition of displacement.



TRAFIG's definition of protracted displacement stresses the qualitative dimension of protractedness and at the same time emphasises some of the temporal aspects of this particular figuration—here expressed in terms of enforced stasis rather than dynamic change.<sup>4</sup>

We suggest that the term displacement should not be restricted to refugees and IDPs, i.e. those who were clearly *forced* to leave in the context of violent conflict or due to persecution, but also include those migrants who are caught in crisis situations and become displaced after their initial departure and require protection and assistance (MICIC, 2015), and those whose agency is severely constrained by structural factors ranging from political instability, environmental hazards and economic crisis to deprivation.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, displacement should be referred to as a *condition after initial mobility* and should also encompass all those persons who are unable to return home (Brun & Fábos, 2015, p. 8) for the aforementioned structural reasons or who are constrained in their decisions to move on and thus find themselves out of place.

#### Box 6: Displaced person(s) and related terms

*TRAFIG will use displaced persons as a general term for all those included in the definition of displacement (Box 5).*

*We use asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other terms whenever we refer to a specific legal category.*

*Reflecting recent terminological debates, we use the term migrants as an overarching term for all people who have been spatially mobile. We use it in particular when we highlight migratory aspects, such as secondary mobility or when referring to persons who may not be formally recognised as beneficiaries of international protection.*

4 The project's approach to protracted displacement builds on the empirical findings and the conceptual work of the BICC research project 'Protected rather than Protracted' (Bohnet, Mielke, Rudolf, Schetter, & Vollmer, 2015; Vollmer, 2019).

5 In line with recent debates in (forced) migration studies, we refrain from using the terms 'refugees', 'displaced people' and 'migrants' exclusively in the sense that an actor belongs either to one or the other category. The term migrants is used more comprehensively and encompasses those actors who have been spatially mobile—here across international borders—and then live in another country without foreseeing return in the near future and without further delineating the exact contexts and motives for these movements. 'Refugees' can then be considered as a particular sub-group of migrants, whose particular reasons of movement are recognised by states as 'legitimate', because they fled violence, conflict or persecution (Crawley & Skleparis, 2017; Erdal & Oepen, 2018; Fiddian-Qasbiyeh et al., 2014; Crawley & Skleparis, 2017). Like the MIGNEX project (see Carling, 2019), we seek to avoid using formulations such as 'refugees and migrants' that indicate lines of separation that owe much more to legal and current political debates than to the fluid experiences and trajectories of mobility in 'mixed migration flows' (Sharpe, 2018). Recognising that reasons for mobility and categorisations of mobile people are fluid (Zetter, 2007), we will use formulations such as 'refugees and other migrants' or 'migrants, including refugees', instead (Carling, 2019, p. 5). After departure, all migrants, including refugees, can enter into conditions of displacement and can thus also be referred to as 'displaced persons'.

## Structural forces shaping figurations of protracted displacement

As indicated above, displacement is usually considered to be the result of involuntary movement to another place. However, in our understanding, protracted displacement does not only refer to the initial action (and resulting condition) of being forced to leave one's home. The prolonged geographic, material, social and political state of 'being out of place' in fact does not simply depend on the conditions of migrants' departure. It is also more than a mere phase of 'involuntary immobility' (Lubkemann, 2008), confinement or 'stuckness' (Jefferson, Turner, & Jensen, 2019) after an initial displacement. **Protracted displacement** should rather be re-conceptualised as a persisting, although constantly evolving figuration, which unfolds at particular places and points of time in cycles of displacement, and which is shaped by distinct structural forces that limit migrants' agency in three distinct directions, namely displacing forces, marginalising forces and immobilising forces.

Figure 6 graphically portrays these more structural power dynamics intrinsic to our figural approach to protracted displacement.

In this framework, protracted displacement can be analysed as the result of three different sets of **constraining forces** that shape the social figurations of displaced people in a country of protracted stay:

- **Displacing forces** are at play in the country, or in the case of IDPs in the region, of origin and host countries or regions. These forces are not only the reasons for which migrants have left their homes in the first instance but also those that **hinder their return**. Protracted conflicts that are marked by unclear boundaries between war and peace, cyclical oscillation of violence, political instability and persistent insecurity (Bohnet et al., 2015, p. 23; Bank, Fröhlich, & Schneiker, 2017) are some of the most obvious reasons why people flee, and why they cannot or do not desire to return home permanently. However, loss of assets and property rights, destroyed infrastructure, disruptions of livelihoods and community ways of life, and, in particular, ruptured connections within an extended family are further important factors that hinder return and thereby contribute to reproducing displacement over time (Grawert, 2018, p. 24). Moreover, displacement forces are not limited to playing a key role in countries of origin but can be reproduced in first and second countries of reception.
- **Marginalising forces** are at play in the country or region of current stay and effectively **block local integration**. This set of forces, ranging from legal limitations, most notably hurdles to the acquisition of citizenship (or lack of recognition of citizenship in the case of IDP situations), to social exclusion and economic disadvantage, restricts displaced people's potential of *de jure* as well as *de facto* integration

and participation in receiving societies (Hovil, 2014). In first countries of reception, refugees are often excluded from the right to work and to move freely. Moreover, they often have to live in refugee camps in geographically remote areas that are disconnected from the social and economic life of the host country. While camps are generally installed as temporary measures in a state of emergency—they are thus positioned outside the normal territorial order—they soon evolve into permanent structures and thereby become symbols of protracted displacement and social exclusion (Turner, 2016). This said, the vast majority of refugees and IDPs are believed to live in urban areas (UNHCR, 2018). However, they are often not supposed to be there and may not have access to support. Marginalisation through encampment and systemic barriers to local integration is no distinct feature of the politics of reception in the Global South. Similar situations are increasingly common in high-income countries of asylum (see Section 2.3).

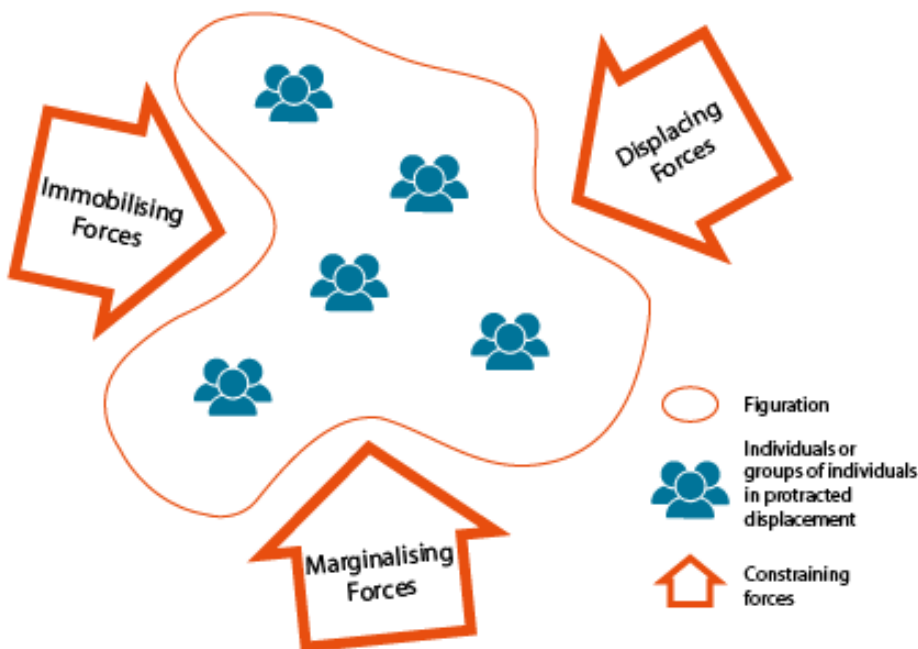
- **Immobilising forces** are at play that **hinder (onward) mobility** to preferred destinations. Violent conflict can impact people’s (im)mobility in multifarious ways (Bank et al., 2017; Etzold, 2019). After the initial forced mobility, displaced people are often stuck in areas where protection opportunities are limited, yet being fully aware that more durable solutions are available in other locations. Restrictive visa regimes, rigid migration management, deliberate border closures and blockades of widely used mobility infrastructures as well as minimal resettlement quotas are some of

the strategies states use to systematically hinder displaced people from migrating elsewhere (Long & Crisp, 2010; Hyndman, 2012; Long, 2013; Black & Collyer, 2014). In the context of internal displacement, immobilising forces follow a different logic, but are nevertheless effective in keeping IDPs at a place, most often a city, and hindering return or onward mobility (IDMC, 2019). On the side of migrants, a lack of resources and information and, in particular, a lack of supportive social connections contribute to becoming entrapped (Schapendonk, 2015). Immobilising forces are present not only in low-income hosting countries but also in Europe where, for instance, the Dublin Regulation (Schuster, 2011) or the so-called ‘hot spot’ system (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2018) severely restrict asylum seekers to follow their aspirations by moving towards destinations with better life prospects.

### Countering protractedness on the basis of displaced people’s agency

Being situated at the centre of this complex field of converging restrictive and marginalising forces does not a priori exclude the agency of migrants, even if constrained, in situations of protracted displacement. In his discussion of agency in migration theory, de Haas (2014, p. 21) argues that “agency reflects the limited but real ability of human beings (or social groups) to make independent choices and to impose these on the world and, hence, to alter the structures that shape people’s opportuni-

Figure 6: Structural forces shaping figurations of protracted displacement



ties or freedoms”. Such a reading of migrants’ agency not only reflects a useful adoption of the notion of relational power, but it also resonates with Elias’ understanding of social figurations and recent academic debates on the temporalities of stuckness and waiting (Hage, 2009; Brun, 2015; Jefferson, Turner, & Jensen, 2019).

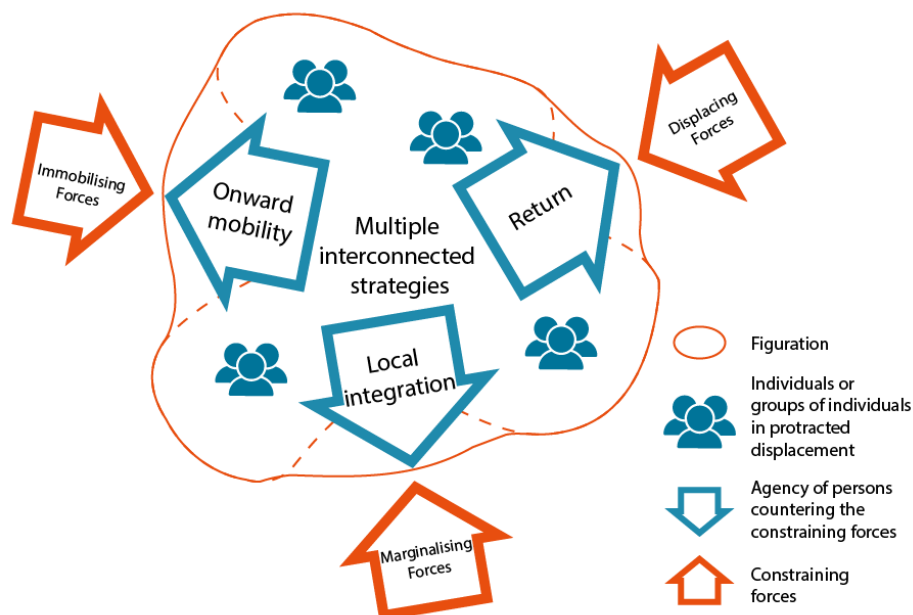
Despite recognising the significance of structural forces, the figural approach centres on people’s positional power within a wider web of interdependency relations and their capacities to act, and thus also to evoke a change of figural settings to make a life—now and in the future. On this basis, Figure 7 reverses some of the structural power relations of protracted displacement as mapped in Figure 6.

- In **countering the displacing forces**, many refugees enact their agency and return. The modes of return are, however, not necessarily the ones foreseen in repatriation policies. **Return** might be self-organised and undocumented rather than facilitated by formal assisted voluntary return programmes; it might only entail temporary visits to one’s home region or “split return” (Harpviken, 2014) of some family members (Grawert, 2018; Rudolf & Schmitz-Pranghe, 2018). Returning also does not always mean moving back to the place one has left, but rather a move to the country of origin’s urban centres. It is often also just a stage in the next cycle of mobility (Bohnet et al., 2015).

- In **countering the marginalising forces**, refugees engage in several tactics to reconstruct a viable livelihood and new ‘home’ for themselves and their families in the country of settlement. As highlighted by several scholars, displaced people navigate through complex bureaucratic and political landscapes to sustain their living and move on. **De facto integration** takes place despite the many obstacles that they face (Horst, 2006; Jacobsen, 2006; Hovil, 2014; Brun, 2015).
- In **countering the immobilising forces**, displaced people often take significant risks to reach destinations where they perceive a potentially better future for themselves. As part of their self-organised onward mobility, they cross territorial borders clandestinely, often with the help of smugglers and other agents in the migration industry. They endure violence and discrimination on their journeys and draw on local and transnational networks to move ahead (van Hear, 2006; Collyer, 2007; Long & Crisp, 2010; Schapendonk, 2015; Brigden & Mainwaring, 2016). But many also access other complementary pathways, such as labour migration, study programmes and, in particular, family reunification to not only find temporary protection and to reunite with family members but to build a future on the basis of their skills and potentials (OECD & UNHCR, 2018; van Selm, 2018; Ruhs, 2019).

As posited in the TRAFIG project, *mobility* and *connectivity* can thus also be seen as expressions of the agency of displaced people under conditions of protracted displacement. One needs to bear in mind, however, that both mobility and connectivity require substantial resources, and that these are highly unequally distributed among the displaced, which partially explains their different trajectories of mobility and becoming stuck in protracted displacement (Bloch, Sigona, & Zetter, 2011; Black & Collyer, 2014; van Hear, 2014a).

Figure 7: Countering constraining forces on the basis of agency



## Agency-in-waiting: Transformations inside figurations of displacement

While discussing protracted displacement, one must consider not only the concrete living circumstances of those who cannot access durable solutions, but also their feelings and subjective understanding of their condition and, in particular, their orientation towards the future. This implies moving from a policy-oriented category such as a protracted refugee situation to a less static understanding of what displacement, in the sense of being stuck, means in the lives of people.

*The experience of stuckness is not simply an expression of physical confinement and spatial closure but expresses the way people make sense of confining dynamics and practices. To be stuck is a quality (not simply an effect or a product), we argue, of confined lives [...]. To be existentially and socially stuck is not just a question of being stuck in place but equally about being stuck in time. It is the sense of not making progress, of not seeing a future, which leads to a sense of stuckness that may linger (Jefferson, Turner, & Jensen, 2019, pp. 2–3).*

Along these lines, Brun and Fábos (2015) argue that conceptualisations of protracted displacement should overcome the idea of ‘limbo’ in scholarly and policy discussions. While limbo in these discussions usually refers to “a fixed, locked and static situation in which people wait for a better life” (Brun & Fábos, 2015, p. 10), they propose to shift towards the vocabulary of **liminality** that can grasp not only marginalisation and stasis, but also transformation, fluidity, threshold experiences and in-betweenness (Thomassen, 2015)<sup>6</sup> that are certainly part of the experience of protracted displacement (Mielke, 2016). Following such a reading, protracted displacement is more than ‘being stuck’ in the sense of passive waiting. Waiting can instead also be considered as an active process in a transitory phase (Hage, 2009), by which displaced people recreate homes, re-establish familiarity with the surrounding environment and imagine the future while at the same time engaging with their past (Brun, 2015, p. 23).

This focus on the **lived experience of protracted displacement** brings us to different temporalities of displacement, defined as the personal and social appropriation of time. While the five-

year period is the static frame that defines protracted displacement according to the most widely used policy definition, one also has to understand how displaced people make sense of the condition of protractedness, i.e. the time they spend in exile (Brun & Fábos, 2015). In the sense of figurational sociology, *de facto* integration, home-making attempts, resistance to existing power hierarchies and imaginations of a future ‘elsewhere’ are all expressions of displaced persons’ agency-in-waiting (Mielke, 2016, p. 266). They try to improve their positions, enlarge their scope of actions, re-arrange the rules of the game, and eventually leave them behind. Nonetheless, more powerful actors often succeed in constraining their agency so that “they are denied the possibility of moving from the past to the future. People’s lives are kept on hold, and they feel stuck in a present they cannot escape” (Brun, 2015, p. 34).

A **process-oriented figurational understanding of protracted displacement**, which underlines TRAFIG’s research approach, is able to grasp the continuum from stasis to dynamics that is inherent to protracted displacement. On the one hand, being ‘trapped in limbo’ is experienced as a lack of protection and legal recognition, existential uncertainty, livelihood insecurity, social marginalisation, and reliance on external assistance. Such a rather static situation is structured by displacing, marginalising and immobilising forces and in particular by legal uncertainty.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, protracted displacement can also be regarded as a transitory phase in the cycle of displacement, and indeed in individuals’ life courses. From this more dynamic perspective, displaced people are not passive victims but enact their agency-in-waiting while countering the structural forces mentioned before and making their futures based on their everyday practices and social relations.

A process-oriented figurational approach thereby allows for better recognition of the **dynamics in protracted displacement**. Figurations of displacement unfold at distinct places and become consolidated over time. The protractedness is then the result of a larger power play between the actors involved. Continuation of displacement stands against its dissolution, and strict regulation of and better control over the displaced population against their freedom to develop their futures, inside or outside this constellation.

<sup>6</sup> An extended understanding of liminality goes beyond merely looking at rituals in traditional societies (rites of passage). The concept rather centres on the “experience of finding oneself at a boundary or in an in-between position, either spatially or temporally. [...] Simply put, it is about how human beings, in their various social and cultural contexts, deal with change. [...] In other words, liminality involves the experience of inbetweenness itself, as well as how exactly that experience is shaped and structured anew as subjects and collectivities move through the in-between, try to overcome it, and leave it behind—with a difference. Human beings tend to ritualize and symbolize such moments and passages” (Thomassen, 2015, p. 40).

<sup>7</sup> When speaking of ‘living in limbo’ in the project, we generally refer to temporary situations that are all too often prolonged, in which the legal status of displaced people is not clear, they cannot access adequate legal support and their basic rights remain unfulfilled.

**Box 7: Protracted displacement**

*Protracted displacement situations arise when and where (durable) solutions are not made available, or progress towards achieving these is stalled.*

*We see protracted displacement as a specific social constellation, in which the capabilities of displaced persons to rebuild their lives after displacement and the opportunities available to do so are severely limited for prolonged periods of time due to*

- *enduring displacing forces that hinder return,*
- *marginalising forces that prevent real local integration, and*
- *immobilising forces that block displaced people's mobility and chances to seek a future elsewhere.*

*Protracted displacement does, however, not equal stasis. Many displaced people actively enlarge their spaces of action at and beyond the places where they are entrapped and thereby 'move on' in their lives.*

**2.4 Protracted displacement as a global challenge**

Protracted displacement exists in most parts of the world, but the overwhelming share of displaced people living in protracted displacement is found in low- and middle-income countries and particularly in least developed countries (Crisp, 2002; Loescher et al., 2008; Milner, 2014; Bohnet et al., 2015; Crawford et al., 2015; Hyndman & Giles, 2016). The most prominent cases are Palestine, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Colombia and Somalia—all of which continue to date. In recent years, in particular since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, the collapse of the newly formed nation of South Sudan, and the massive displacement of Rohingya from Myanmar, new protracted displacement situations are emerging in the Middle East, South Asia and East Africa (Bohnet, 2016; UNHCR, 2019; Vollmer, 2019).

The political debate, as well as the academic literature, overwhelmingly focus on protracted displacement in low- and middle-income receiving countries. Refugees' vulnerability and marginalisation and lack of durable solutions are, however, not problems exclusively found in the developing world. While it usually is taken for granted that migrants arriving in Europe have reached durable solutions, such an assessment does not correspond to the realities on the ground. Research on refugees and other migrant groups documents instances of **protracted displacement in Europe**, in particular, but not only in countries of first entry in southern Europe, as a result of ill-equipped asylum regimes, new 'hot spot' politics and failing relocation schemes. The most evident cases are the overcrowded and under-equipped refugee camps on the Greek Aegean islands

like Moria on Lesbos (Franck, 2017; Monsutti, 2017; Tazzioli & Garelli, 2018) and several informal transit camps along inner-European borders such as Bihać in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ventimiglia in Italy, or Calais and Dunkirk in France (Beddoe, 2017; Monsutti, 2017). Many asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants live in these 'sites of exception' for months and some for years, hoping to gain access to other destinations where they anticipate protection and better socio-economic opportunities.

Besides these local nodes of transit, many European cities and rural peripheries host migrants who experience a condition of protracted displacement not only because they have limited access to the formal labour market and social protection, but also because they feel that they are in transit to another place. Highly exploitative labour relations of a heterogeneous migrant population in the agricultural sector in southern Italy are one example (Cavanna, 2018). The discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation of Eritrean refugees who desire to move onward from Italy, yet remain stuck in Roman squats is another case in point (Belloni, 2016b). Another instance of protracted displacement in Europe is represented by those failed asylum seekers who are trapped in a situation marked by the impossibility of safely returning home, of moving onward, and of local integration (Griffiths, 2012).

These scenarios require a revision of categories and a refocus of theoretical discussion to grasp the continuities and similarities across first countries of asylum and further onward destinations. Despite the continuities between receiving countries in Africa and Asia and those in Europe and other high-income countries, we can identify three contextual features that help to differentiate protracted displacement situations in low- and medium-income countries from those in more affluent regions:

1. *Different levels of clarity and stability in the administrative status of forced migrants*

The administrative status of internationally displaced persons in many African and Asian receiving countries has traditionally been blurred and precarious. By contrast, in Europe, it is assumed that persons in need of international protection are granted a clear legal status as defined by the Qualification Directive (Directive 2011/95/EU). In practice, this is not the case, especially when individuals are deemed to have sought protection in another country, but also when persons are considered not to qualify as beneficiaries of international protection but still cannot return home. Indeed, there seems to be a certain tendency towards a long-term confinement of large numbers of forced migrants in indeterminate and precarious statuses (see Pastore, 2015 on the problem of established migrant categorisations in Europe; Parusel, 2017 on the reception conditions of Afghan Asylum seekers in the EU).

## 2. *Different patterns of settlement of forced migrants*

The typical model for the territorial and social management of large groups of forced migrants in low- and middle-income countries has been to concentrate them in large, usually internationally managed and geographically isolated camps (Turner, 2016). Having recognised the social and economic unsustainability of long-term encampment, many countries in the South nowadays try to limit the concentration of displaced people in larger camp infrastructures. Uganda is, for instance, implementing a comparatively advanced refugee policy in terms of access to land, employment and protection (Betts et al., 2017). By contrast, the use of camps has long been limited in the EU and has generally been restricted to initial reception. However, post 2015, there is a marked tendency in the EU towards creating and maintaining camp-like situations, be they formal (often associated with backlogs in asylum procedures as on the Aegean islands) (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2018) or informal (large squats in urban contexts, informal settlements in rural areas during harvest season as in Italy) (Kreichauf, 2018).

## 3. *Different degrees of informality and irregularity in the economy*

The greater diffusion of informality and irregularity in the economy and particularly in the labour market of countries in the Global South as opposed to those in the North has traditionally been constraining opportunities for migrants' long-term integration. However, in several OECD countries, the stability and regularity of employment for low-skilled workers, amongst which migrants are over-represented, has substantially decreased—a long-term trend that was reinforced through the 2007/08 economic crisis. The preconditions for long-term social and economic integration have thus structurally changed.

It is crucial to highlight aspects of displacement that are specific to certain countries and local contexts. However, it is also crucial to **use protracted displacement as an analytical category that encompasses quite different geographic contexts**. This can be useful not only to better understand the continuities of migrants' experiences in earlier and later stages of their journeys but also to respond to the needs highlighted in the Global Compact on Refugees (UN, 2018), for a truly global and consistent terminology. The TRAFIG research design will account for continuities in protracted displacement: Fieldwork will be carried out in places of origin in East Africa, the Horn of Africa, South Asia and the Middle East, but also in different European countries, in particular in Greece, Italy and Germany.

### 3. Translocal connectivity and mobility

#### 3.1. Why translocal connectivity and mobility matter in displaced people's lives

Doubts have frequently been raised whether the three classically proposed 'durable solutions' could adequately address the challenges of forced displacement (Loescher & Milner, 2008; Long, 2014; Bohnet et al., 2015; Crisp, 2016). Repatriation, local integration and resettlement were, for instance, long considered as separate rather than complementary solutions. Strategies of policymakers and the humanitarian sector also seem to centre on individuals and groups at the one place where protracted displacement unfolds to address the most immediate economic, social, political and administrative challenges.

A narrow place-based view does, however, disregard the intense transnational connections that many displaced people maintain to members of their family and kin networks in the country of origin, in neighbouring or third countries (Cohen & van Hear, 2017, p. 494). Quite often, as in the case of Afghan, Eritrean, Sudanese, and Palestinian refugees, displacement has contributed to the emergence of a widespread diaspora that is scattered across many parts of the globe (see Cohen, 2008, for an introduction to diaspora studies). Given the fact that families and kin networks are dispersed across multiple places, mobility decisions are largely made based on the wider range of available options in a transnational or diasporic space. Permanent repatriation, the widely preferred policy solution, does, thus, not necessarily correspond to the preferences of displaced households. Some family members are often sent 'back home' temporarily to "re-establish their entitlements and to integrate these assets into their networks of cross-border livelihood activities" (van Hear, 2006, p. 12).

Echoing such statements, several authors concluded that instead of looking into place-based and territorially-contained solutions to protracted displacement, new concepts are needed that centre on displaced people's agency, their diversified livelihoods, their cross-border relations, circular mobilities and more fluid life-worlds (Long, 2014, p. 479; Cohen & van Hear, 2017, p. 495; Rudolf & Schmitz-Pranghe, 2018, p. 31). Such alternative approaches towards protracted displacement must rest on empirical evidence.

For the case of Afghan refugees, for instance, several studies assessed that after years of multiple displacements and a protracted life in precarity in the diaspora, in Pakistan and Iran in particular, temporary "split return" (Harpviken, 2014) and onward mobilities of family members create cross-border networks that serve to diversify risks across space. The transnational social spaces that are created through displacement and multiple mobilities thereafter must not be seen as an exception; they have instead become normal in the region (Monsutti, 2008; Schetter, 2012; Grawert & Mielke, 2018).

Research in the Horn of Africa also demonstrated that translocal networks shaped not only the trajectories of displaced people from Somalia but also Somali refugees' lives in Kenyan camps, their onward mobility to and their informal livelihoods in Kenyan cities. Moreover, once networks across longer distances have been established, these connections are carefully maintained and subsequent transnational transfers—both financial and social remittances (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011)—have become absolutely vital for the economic survival, everyday life and identity formations of the multi-local Somali diaspora (Abdi, 2005; Horst, 2006; Lindley, 2007; Hassanen, 2014a).

Following on from such empirical observations, **transnationalism has been proposed as a 'fourth durable solution' to protracted displacement**, acknowledging that cross-border interactions provide more than mere functional links between those who have remained in or returned to countries of origin, those who have fled and are living in countries of first reception and transit, and those who have found refuge in a country of asylum (van Hear, 2006; Koser, 2007; van Hear, 2014b). Cohen and van Hear (2017) further developed the idea of transnationalism as a solution into the utopian vision of "refugia", a transnational polity formed by displaced persons and diaspora communities and based on a deterritorialised notion of citizenship. The notion of transnationalism is taken up by more and more scholars in forced migration and refugee studies, as it enables investigations into the linkages between family members who were left behind, labour migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and diaspora groups beyond national borders. This has led to a more nuanced debate where transnational mobility and connectivity (cf. Faist, Fauser, & Reisenauer, 2013; Dahinden, 2017) have been linked to other issues such as the important theme of development (Glick Schiller & Faist, 2010).

#### 3.2 Translocal connectivity through a figurational perspective

##### Translocality: Grounding transnationalism in places

Migration research as well as forced migration and refugee studies had been locked in territorial container thinking until quite recently. The prevailing idea was that migrants, including refugees, (are forced to) leave a country of origin, travel—often crossing borders by irregular means—, then arrive and settle in a country of destination. Their mobility trajectory was commonly described as a linear, unidirectional and predictable process:

Once migrants left, they left their home for good and settled down ‘elsewhere’, cutting connections to places they came from.<sup>8</sup> Scholars, however, noted that many (former) migrants keep up and carefully maintain relationships with their countries or places of origin, while nonetheless developing dense relations and embedding themselves in places of arrival. According to the founders of the concept, “**transnational migration** is the process by which immigrants form and sustain simultaneous multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Szanton Blanc, 1995, p. 48). Whilst such statements were at first disputed, after more than 20 years of scholarly debate, the interwovenness of life-worlds across nations, people’s practices and bridge-building relations across borders, and the emergence and reproduction of ‘transnational social fields’ have become mainstream in the academic study of international migration (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Vertovec, 2009; Faist et al., 2013; Dahinden, 2017).

The concept of **translocality** builds on the transnationalism paradigm as it pleads for a relational, networked, and plurilocal understanding of space. The key difference to transnationalism lies in the departure from “methodological nationalism” (Glick Schiller, 2007, p. 6). Not disputing the relevance of territorial borders, state actors and national identity politics as structural frames for migration, authors using translocality as their analytical perspective free themselves from a too narrow view of migration and *transnational* relations. More importance is instead given to the specific ways of how actors embed themselves in different social settings—what we would refer to as figurations—and distinct places and localities before, during and after mobility (Brickell & Datta, 2011; Smith, 2011; Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013). By stressing migrants’ “simultaneous situatedness across different locales” (Brickell & Datta, 2011, p. 4), the concept emphasises the significance of place. Translocality can thus be viewed as a grounded or rooted version of transnationalism. It also highlights the multiple, often intersecting connections between places, the circulations of people, capital, material goods, ideas, and ideologies (Appadurai, 1996), and how translocal ties and flows transform local settings.

Another motive to move beyond methodological nationalism in migration research has been to abandon the categorisation of immigrants into homogenous national groups and to overcome the artificial distinction between internal and international migration (King & Skeldon, 2010). The latter aspect is particularly crucial for our study that seeks to disentangle how different groups that have been uprooted for various reasons and across various distances—such as internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees and migrants without legal status—enter into and

seek to overcome protracted displacement. In the following, we will thus continue to use the notion of translocality instead of transnationalism as the former is more comprehensive than the latter,<sup>9</sup> and as it is better suited to the purposes of our project.

## Translocal figurations: Simultaneous embeddedness across multiple places

Understanding people’s practices and lives that transgress single places requires an additional theoretical amendment. Like multiple authors before, we, therefore, propose to draw on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu for a theoretical grounding of the concepts of transnationalism (Pries, 1997; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Kelly & Lusia, 2006) and translocality (Brickell & Datta, 2011; Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Etzold, 2017; Peth, Sterly, & Sakdapolrak, 2018). In a Bourdieusian reading, mobile agents—no matter whether they are rural–urban, urban–urban or international migrants, whether they have economic motives or are displaced by war—not only move through physical spaces and across administrative boundaries, but also traverse and expand different “social fields” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 724). Like Elias’ concept of figurations, these social fields are shaped by the power differentials between relationally positioned actors, a distinct inherent logic and specific ‘rules of the game’, and they are not bound to a single place or territory.<sup>10</sup>

Migrants, including refugees, do not necessarily depart from places of origin for good and then settle in a place of destination and integrate into that setting permanently, which would indicate that they leave their home behind. Rather, most remain simultaneously situated in one socio-spatial unit that includes different social settings and stretches over multiple places. Such a **translocal figuration** is (re)produced by personal relations, transfers and transformations of various types of capital (in the sense of Bourdieu), organisational networks and systemic interdependencies. This underlines that all figurations are characterised by uneven power relations. In translocal figurations, constant negotiations and struggles over power and positions are not situated in one place, but in multiple interdependent places (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013, p. 375) (see Figure 3). Importantly, translocal figurations have not only a distinct spatiality but also a distinct temporality: they develop and change over time due to transformations in power hierarchies and to the specific rhythms of actors’ practices (Peth et al., 2018) (see Section 1.1).

8 To date, a nation-state centred logic and overly simplistic and linear representations of both displaced people’s journeys and their assumed locally oriented lives before and after displacement are also deeply inscribed in the politics of migration management and asylum, in particular in Europe (Crawley, 2018, p. 143).

9 To some extent, all social figurations encompass translocal relations in the sense of place-to-place transactions between interdependent individuals. The particular spatial forms and distances covered in these translocal figurations differ, of course. Only in certain cases are international borders transgressed. It is then justified to speak of transnational relations. In short, while all transnational figurations are per se translocal, only certain translocal figurations are transnational in nature.

10 As the notion of the field closely matches Elias’ understanding of figurations (Paulle, van Heerikhuizen, & Emirbayer, 2012), we will use the terms figurations and fields as synonyms in the following.



Figurations can be conceived of at different scales depending on the length of the ‘chains of interdependence’ that link people together (see Section 1.1). For displaced people, three distinct figurations that can bridge across different places are particularly significant: The family, the community and the state.

First, **the family** is the smallest and often most intimate social unit.<sup>11</sup> Transnational families have been defined as “families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of a collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood’, even across national borders” (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002, p. 3). This definition can be transferred directly to translocal contexts. Besides this focus on emotional bonds, further features of translocal families are the separation of family members and the diversification of livelihood sources across space. Moreover, responsibilities and resources are shared and frequently transferred among family or household members who live in different places (Lohnert & Steinbrink, 2005, p. 97).

Care arrangements for children or the elderly are particularly pertinent issues in translocal family figurations. Providing care, therefore, is divided among family members and between places (Madziva & Zontini, 2012; Baldassar & Merla, 2014, p. 7). Depending on the power geometries within a family and the distinct spatial set-up of a figuration, which is subject to changes over time, the meaning and lived reality of “landscapes of care” (Milligan & Wiles, 2010) are quite specific and complex. Families experiencing forced migration also experience different forms of socio-spatial organisation within their translocal figurations; each implying specific spatial trajectories of their family members and distinct options and barriers to stay connected, to engage in providing care and intra-family transfers, and eventually to reunite. These figurations include jointly displaced families, families separated from an adult family member, children separated from their families, i.e. unaccompanied minors, and reunited families (Ensor & Goździak, 2016; REACH, 2017; Sauer et al., 2018).

Within the translocal figuration of the family, the notion of ‘home’ plays a significant role. A home is not merely the place of birth or the geographical place where one has spent most of one’s lifetime, or where other family members currently live. As a physical site and a “space of belonging and identity” (Brickell & Datta, 2011, p. 13), a home serves as an anchoring

point in ever-more fluid social life-worlds; a “mooring” for migrant families (Boccagni, 2017). In the context of violence-induced mobility, losing home due to deliberate destruction by war parties or due to abandonment in the case of existential threat can be considered as the essence of displacement. Maintaining values, traditions, memories and idealised imaginaries of one’s home as well as—often unrealistic—plans to return to and rebuild one’s family home are vital psychological strategies in post-displacement situations (Brun & Fábos, 2015; Collingwood Esland, 2017). Yet, the notion of home itself and the desire to return home can change fundamentally in the course of prolonged displacement; new homes are built and desired, while the memories of old homes slowly fade away or are rejected, as Boer (2015) has shown in her study on Congolese refugees living in Uganda.

A second figuration, which can become translocalised in the context of displacement and which people normally develop a sense of belonging to, is the **community or neighbourhood**. According to Appadurai (1996, p. 191), neighbourhoods are locally situated communities or “life-worlds constituted by relatively stable associations, by relatively known and shared histories, and by collectively traversed and legible spaces and places”. They are sites of meaningful social interaction and provide the ground for collective identity formations. Neighbourhoods turn into translocal communities once their members become spatially dispersed, yet remain connected through functional interdependencies and shared identity constructions. In a new city, where many migrants share similar experiences of mobility and re-emplacement in a new setting, reference to one’s community of origin can be an important asset in everyday life. A translocal neighbourhood is then imagined and re-asserted (Lohnert & Steinbrink, 2005, p. 98; Brickell & Datta, 2011, p. 15). New translocal neighbourhoods are also produced in the wake of displacement as people without a common background are thrown together in a condensed space such as a refugee camp or a densely inhabited quarter of an arrival city, which provides the setting for the emergence of new local and new translocal figurations.

A third, and most commonly referred to socio-spatial figuration that matters in the context of displacement and translocalisation, is the **territorial nation-state**. Countering the academic debate about hyper-globalisation and transnational identities as well as critiques of methodological nationalism, Kibreab argued that speaking of an emerging trend of deterritorialised identities, and indeed practices and figurations, would be illusory. At a time when spaces are more territorialised than ever before, the level of exclusion and discrimination of outsiders based on the category of citizenship has reached unprecedented levels: “There can be no de-territorialized identity in a territorialized space” (Kibreab, 1999, p. 387). He referred to ‘Fortress Europe’ and Tanzania’s refugee policy as examples; both still relevant cases 20 years later. Territorial states—as a distinct

<sup>11</sup> We explicitly refrain from defining family here and use it as a strictly empirical and descriptive category that is interpreted differently in diverse cultural and social context. Nonetheless, we also note that a modern and hetero-normative understanding of families as nuclear families dominates contemporary migration and asylum policies, in particular in Europe (Kofman et al., 2012, p. 13) and that the categorisations of family members in these policies often contradict migrants’ understanding of (extended) families, dense webs of reciprocal exchange and care as well as kinship relations (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Fleischer, 2007).

type of a figuration (see Section 1.1)—are certainly decisive in shaping people’s identity and the formation and structure of the previously mentioned figurations, i.e. the family, home and neighbourhoods, the modes of and barriers to translocal mobility and thus also the shape of translocal figurations of displacement (see Koser, 2007 for a thought-provoking discussion of the manifold relations between refugees, transnationalism and the state). Instead of rejecting the territorial nation-state as a relevant category, it, thus, seems to be much more fruitful to analyse case by case how translocal figurations are influenced by territoriality or, more precisely, how structures and governmental practices at different scale levels relate to one another, as Levitt recommends:

*It is critical to examine how these connections are integrated into vertical and horizontal systems of connection that cross borders. Rather than privileging one level over another, a transnational perspective holds these sites equally and simultaneously in conversation with each other and tries to grapple with the tension between them (Levitt 2004 cited in Smith, 2011, p. 185).*

For our project, it is then decisive to decipher the effects of local and translocal as well as territorial and transnational dynamics on the lives of people affected by protracted displacement.

#### **Box 8: Translocal and transnational figurations of displacement**

*TRAFIG looks into the role of mobility and translocal connectivity for people living in protracted displacement.*

*Displaced people engage in multiple practices that reach out beyond their current place of living and thereby connect actors and localities in one figuration. A group that has been separated by displacement, yet maintains ties through communication and transactions, forms such a translocal figuration. If group members are dispersed across multiple countries, it is also justified to speak of transnational figurations of displacement.*

*Translocal figurations evolve dynamically and can thus also dissolve. As all figurations, they are not free from tensions, conflicts and hierarchies. The TRAFIG project assumes, however, that dense translocal networks of care, solidarity and trust provide a significant pathway out of protracted displacement.*

## Translocal practices: How translocal figurations emerge and are transformed

Translocality does not automatically arise from mobility. One, if not the central question in the study of translocal figurations is then ‘how and why do translocal figurations emerge and under which conditions are they maintained, fade away or change?’ (paraphrasing Dahinden, 2017, p. 1478). Following Elias’ and Bourdieu’s ideas, a translocal figuration is actively produced and re-produced through the practices of actors who are in a relation of interdependency, for instance, current and former refugees or family members who have not been mobile themselves. **Translocal practices are those inter- and trans-actions that reach from one place to another and thereby connect these actors and localities in one network-like figuration.** According to Etzold (2017, p. 53), translocal practices include:

1. human mobility, i.e. labour migration, business trips, tourists’ travels and refugee journeys, which rely on material infrastructure and are contained by mobility regimes;
2. communication, i.e. the transfer of information, ideas, emotions and beliefs across space, which nowadays rests on a digital connectivity infrastructure;
3. transactions of resources, i.e. money, material objects, personal artefacts, which—depending on the circulated unit—requires material and/or virtual connections;
4. investments in figurations, i.e. creating and maintaining social ties and relations across space, and in the material and/or virtual infrastructure that enables connectivity.

Comprehending these four different sets of translocal practices is crucial for a better understanding of the translocal dimensions of protracted displacement.

First, **mobility practices** are a logical part of displacement and a prerequisite for the production of migrants’ translocal spaces. Yet, the actual physical practices of fleeing, moving, travelling or border-crossing and thereby connecting different nodal places in a translocal figuration have received comparatively little academic attention. Recently, following a seminal article by BenEzer and Zetter (2015) on refugee journeys, this surprising neglect of “the most significant processes of ‘becoming’ and ‘being’ a refugee” (2015, p. 299) seems to be slowly redressed, in particular with a focus on the mobility trajectories towards Europe (Kuschminder, 2017; Lyytinen, 2017; Mallett & Hagen-Zanker, 2018; Belloni, 2019; Etzold, 2019).

Four points are often emphasised in this debate. First, access to mobility is generally unevenly distributed across the world’s societies, and so are the options to flee from existential threats. Second, translocal practices of mobility, the conditions of transport and the personal experiences of journeys differ fundamentally according to a refugee’s age, gender, class and legal status. Third, the material and immaterial transport infrastructure between places is a prerequisite for the circulation of entities

along specific threads (Walters, 2015), and also shapes the directions, spatial patterns and rhythms of refugees' movements. And fourth, while practices of mobility cannot be fully controlled and regulated, they are nonetheless and inevitably structured by territorial borders, visa regimes, migration policies, and nation-state centred discourses, i.e. the 'politics of mobility' (Cresswell, 2010).

The second set of translocal practices revolves around **communication and feelings of connectedness**. Emotions, such as feelings of (be)longing shape translocal family figurations fundamentally (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2012). Children, for instance, experience feelings of abandonment or miss family members (Gardner, 2012; Christ, 2017). In translocal figurations of displacement, concerns about the safety, welfare and health of family members left behind in conflict-affected areas or refugee camps cause feelings of guilt and sorrow among the family members who have moved away (Lim, 2009; Madziva & Zontini, 2012; Choumanivong, Poole, & Cooper, 2014; Damir-Geilsdorf & Sabra, 2016). A Sudanese respondent living in the United States described the literally vital need to maintain his family relations across continents as follows: "Loss of connections is death" (Lim, 2009, p. 1038). While such emotions were practised at a distance in the past, subsequent revolutions in information and communication technologies (see Castells, 2000) have fundamentally altered the preconditions for translocal connectivity and, in particular, the modes of emotional exchange.

Today, social media and phone calls not only enable the easy transfer of information across distances, for instance on available mobility services during flight (Frouws, Phillips, Hassan, & Twigt, 2016); they also provide the technological platform for new forms of self-representation, for simultaneity of experiences and emotional encounters and thus for shared feelings of belonging that are essential for maintaining translocal relations. Because separation across space is not voluntary, virtual practices are a particularly vital part of displaced people's lives (Bernal, 2006; Wilding & Gifford, 2013; Witteborn, 2015). Communication is "the glue between the members of a mobile community", as de Bruijn (2014, p. 332) summarises. Changes in translocal figurations that depend to a large extent on ICT (information and communication technologies) are then not necessarily driven by the mobility of actors or the previously mentioned power shifts. They can also be influenced by changes in the technology and members' appropriation of connectivity technologies or ruptures leading to disconnectivity: "it is the nature of the connection and the way people come to embrace connections that may help us to understand social transformations" (Bruijn & van Dijk, 2012, p. 4).

Third, **transactions** between interdependent actors are a defining feature of any figuration (see Section 1.1). Comprehensive research has demonstrated the significance of material

and social transactions across space for the everyday lives and identity formations of translocal families and communities (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Material remittances include money, gifts and consumer products, while social remittances encompass knowledge, ideas, values and norms. Both circulate within families that have been separated by displacement and within more extensive networks of kin. Transfers do not necessarily flow back home, but can be directed towards those places where 'optimum returns to investments' can be expected in the sense that the impact within the translocal figuration is the greatest. Financial remittances, for instance, contribute to financing refugee journeys (Koser, 2008; Belloni, 2016a). Most importantly, however, they can contribute to securing the lives and livelihoods of those family members who stayed behind or who are stuck in a protracted situation in another country of reception (Horst, 2006; Lim, 2009; Hassanen, 2014b; Grawert & Mielke, 2018). While material transactions contribute to upholding a sense of belonging in a spatially dispersed figuration, the obligation of translocal support also creates significant emotional and financial pressure on those family members who already find themselves in a supposed position of security in a (Western) receiving country (Lindley, 2007; Lim, 2009; Huennekes, 2018).

The fourth set of practices revolves around **investments to create and maintain connections** within translocal figurations. Displaced people's networks (can) provide access to protection, livelihoods and long-term perspectives, but they can also entail multiple obligations, restrictions and dependencies. A person with 'translocal social capital' belongs to networks of lasting relations that enable her/him to access resources circulated among its spatially dispersed members (paraphrased from Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Recognition by others as a network member is a valuable asset; ties have to be carefully maintained, for instance, by spending time together, by sharing information and emotions, and by transferring gifts or money. While social capital is accumulated in the course of transactions, uneven investments reinforce hierarchies. Actors in dependent positions then navigate through an uneven power landscape of networks, but can hardly 'get ahead' in their lives by making use of them (cf. Cleaver, 2005 on the notion of bonding, bridging and linking social capital).

The necessity, respectively obligation, to invest in networks and the consequences of disconnection become tangible on "fragmented journeys" to Europe (Collyer, 2007). En route, clandestine migrants create new ties to fellow migrants, engage in local alliances and establish translocal networks through ICT and transactions. In many cases, these are the only ones that enable them to move on. When stranded without money and hope, some intentionally cut translocal connections, because they sense that they do not fulfil their family's expectations, cannot send remittances, and do not dare to return home with empty hands (Bredeloup, 2013; Schapendonk, 2015). In another

case, Stevens (2016) showed that many Syrian refugees now living in urban Jordan have lost both their sense of belonging and their informal networks of mutual support and protection in the wake of displacement. Often, the resources that normally circulate in such networks have simply been used up. While the humanitarian system can cater for many of the most immediate economic needs, it largely disregards displaced people's psychological well-being and cannot compensate for their social losses. In this context, the collapse of social networks due to the financial and emotional strain of exile can be understood as a major reason why people first enter into and then get stuck in protracted displacement.

Institutions also create networks that provide mobility out of protracted displacement, even if these networks are more tenuous and potential rather than actual. Resettlement is a prime example of how a specific translocal setting involving various institutional actors (such as UNHCR, IOM or NGOs engaged in organising resettlement and other actors such as municipalities that accept resettled refugees) leads to the creation of new networks between these different actors, displaced persons and their family members. Existing family relations, personal characteristics such as age, education and skills as well as other selection criteria play significant roles in the context of government-led resettlement schemes, private sponsorship programmes and family reunification policies (Fratzke & Salant, 2017).

#### **Box 9: Connectivity in translocal figurations of displacement**

*Connectivity refers to the connections that people have with others at, in and across places and to the technologies that enable and constrain transactions in these translocal figurations. Actors' capacities to appropriate existing and to create new connections and to make use of the respective connectivity technologies differs.*

*Technologies of connectivity shape translocal practices, i.e. inter- and transactions that reach from one place to another and thereby connect actors and localities in one network-like figuration, fundamentally. They influence displaced people's mobility, their communication and feelings of (dis)connectedness, the circulation of resources, and the structure of the translocal figuration as such.*

To sum up this section, **translocal figurations are re-constituted by social practices and by the connectivity technology** that provides its material basis in the context of displacement in at least three ways. First, pre-existing translocal network connections shape the mode, timing and direction of displaced people's journeys. Spatial mobility, communication, transfers, as well as social and material investments by its members, partially in connectivity infrastructure and technology, then transform already existing translocal figurations.

Second, the movement of a member of a figuration who is seeking refuge 'elsewhere' implies a spatial expansion of social relations to multiple places and thus a translocalisation of an originally highly localised figuration. A prerequisite is, however, that relations with other members of the figuration are maintained by communication and transactions across the distance. This requires actors appropriation of connectivity technology.

Third, as translocal figurations always need to be reproduced through people's practices, structural constraints, disconnections and respective (in)actions can also lead to the dissolution of a translocal figuration and its (involuntary) re-rooting in a local context. While translocal relations are always characterised by distinct rhythms of actions and temporal dynamics (Peth et al., 2018), under conditions of forced displacement and multiple containment policies, participating in translocal circuits of exchange and return, circular or onward mobility is often impossible. Some of those who have been violently displaced are then being forced to lead a highly localised and immobile life. Material deprivation, disconnection from needed technologies, ruptures in network relations and traumatic experiences can then add to or aggravate social isolation in immobility.

In TRAFIG, we assume that displaced people whose agency is systematically constrained and who cannot access and use translocal connections are most likely to become stuck in protracted displacement and are also amongst the most vulnerable groups in the respective local settings.

## 4. Translocal figurations of displacement—Hypotheses and key themes

Building on our state-of-the-art review of figurational sociology, refugee and forced migration studies as well as translocal mobility and connectivity studies, the next section explains the basic assumptions of the TRAFIG project and introduces the five central themes that will be empirically explored in the coming three years.

### 4.1 Underlying assumptions

As explicated, figurational sociology builds the conceptual foundation of our project. We, therefore, think of protracted displacement as a specific social figuration that is shaped by structural forces and within which social relations and practices unfold dynamically.

- At the *macro-level*, displacing, marginalising and immobilising forces lead to larger constellations, in which displaced people find themselves in a receiving country or region where options to return home, or prospects of local integration, or realistic options for (re)settlement elsewhere are limited.
- On the *micro- and meso-level*, people affected by protracted displacement are positioned in stratified social orders and overlapping webs of interdependence within which they make sense of their lives, participate in (translocal) transactions, seek to enhance their potentials and counter the structural forces that delimit their agency.

We discussed how figurations of displacement have a distinct temporality and spatiality:

- Figurations of displacement are not fixed or frozen, but instead unfold dynamically and are constantly re-produced through the practices of displaced persons and those of other actors such as receiving states, local communities, or humanitarian organisations and the power shifts between them. TRAFIG studies the dynamics of displacement situations—how they become protracted or resolved and how actors enact their agency despite constraining conditions—from a processual perspective.
- Figurations of displacement arise, are sustained and re-arranged at and across interconnected places and territories with the engagement of stakeholders, designated policies and legal frameworks. TRAFIG seeks to investigate these spatial relations and aims at identifying alternatives to protracted displacement that are networked and translocal, departing from single place-based and territorial solutions.

### Central hypothesis

To investigate the making and unmaking of figurations of protracted displacement and displaced people’s lives, we formulated a hypothesis that guides our research (Table 1):

**Table 1: Risk of living in protracted displacement**

	Mobile	Immobile
Connected	Low risk	Medium risk
Unconnected	Medium risk	High risk

*The more connected and mobile refugees, IDPs and other migrants are, the less likely it is that they end up in a situation of protracted displacement. Conversely, the less connected and the more immobilised displaced persons are, the greater the risk that they are vulnerable, dependent and become stuck in precarity.*

This hypothesis is built on two key factors for moving out of protracted displacement: Connectivity and mobility.

- **Connectivity** refers to the connections that people have with others at, in and across places and territories and that they can utilise as resources. Our premise is that *the better connected displaced people are and the more diverse their network structure is*—including stable relations to members from receiving communities—*the greater their self-reliance and the less risk they face of living in an intractable state of vulnerability, dependency and immobility.* In other words, strong local and translocal network connections and reliable transactions contribute to enhancing people’s agency and resilience. Both strong dependencies in hierarchical social relations and disconnection from networks of support, trust and solidarity must be conceived of as factors contributing to protracted displacement and as a risk in itself.
- Displacement situations arise through forced **mobility**, yet immobilisation—multiple hurdles to onward or return mobility—leads to the protraction of displacement. We presume that *the more freely displaced people can move within or across borders, the more easily they can find security, pursue livelihood opportunities and become resilient again.* Potentials for spatial mobility depend in part on people’s own capacities and connections, but also on institutional and legal structures that either limit or allow mobility within a certain space. Displaced people’s mobility is most often situated in the logic of families and wider social networks and rests upon pre-existing and newly formed patterns of connectivity.

## 4.2 Five core research themes

In our research in Africa, the Middle East and Europe on translocal figurations of displacement as well as connectivity and mobility as two central factors, we will focus on five central themes. The choice of themes reflects previous research results on the significance of these topics for people in protracted displacement, the distinct requirements within the scope of the call MIGRATION-08-2018 in the Horizon 2020 work programme, through which this project is being financed, and the specific competencies and experiences of the twelve partner organisations that are involved in this joint research.

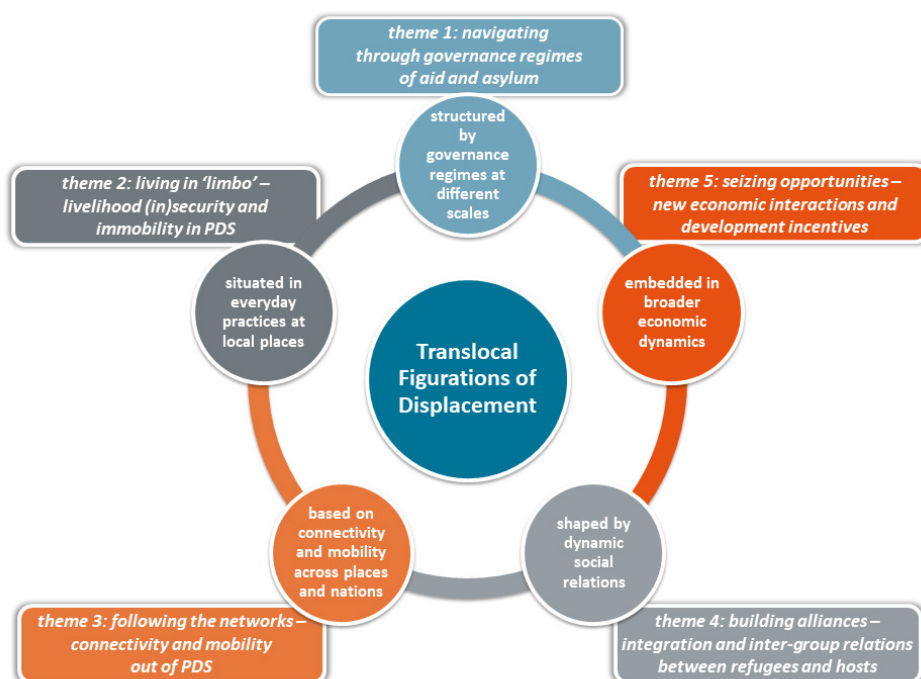
The concept of translocal figurations of displacement allows us to investigate displaced people’s everyday lives, their local relations with hosts as well as their network connections to communities of origin, other sites in the same country or other nations. Importantly, overcoming the dichotomy of structure and agency, it enables us to assess the role of legal norms, state policies and specific programmes in shaping distinct figurations of displacement. The approach permits us to examine how displaced people find their own solutions in and beyond single places and see how protracted displacement situations and new translocal—often transnational—transactions impact and interact with host communities and economies.

With our central hypothesis in mind, we will dissect connections and mobility into five key themes, as illustrated in Figure 8.

### Theme 1: Navigating through governance regimes of aid and asylum

After their initial displacement, displaced people enter into new social figurations that are structured by regulatory regimes and power differentials at different scale levels. Multiple constraining structural forces are at work, defined here as displacing, marginalising and immobilising forces (see Section 2.2). Displaced people try to find access to, are conditioned by, and react to humanitarian aid, development, asylum and migration policies. Protection regimes at the global level (e.g. the 1951 Refugee Convention), at the regional level (e.g. OAU’s Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems or the EU’s Common European Asylum System), at the national level (e.g. asylum, immigration and integration laws), and at the municipal level (e.g. norms, directives and orders) all shape the dynamic evolution, prolongation or dissolution of displacement situations—often constraining the options for displaced people rather than expanding them. For instance, Europe’s highly restrictive migration regime, enhanced border security, the unresolved question of relocation after first entry and resettlement quota that reach only a minimal share of vulnerable populations all contribute to the emergence of protracted displacement in places outside of Europe. Refugee protection in this context evolved as a rather exclusive category of third-country nationals with a broad range of special rights vis-à-vis other third-country nationals. This exclusive role, in turn, leads to restrictions on the mobility of refugees for labour purposes through the strict divide between refugees and those deemed to be labour migrants (Ruhs, 2019, p. 22).

Figure 8: Defining translocal figurations of displacement along five themes



Our project will analyse the historical emergence of protracted displacement situations in four focal regions—Great Lakes Region, Horn of Africa, South Asia and the Middle East. We will assess how policies were designed to react to and dissolve protracted displacement. Using empirical research in Africa, Asia and Europe, we will examine how displaced individuals, families and other collectives navigate through institutional landscapes of refugee protection, migration and labour market regimes to find protection, assistance, sustainable livelihoods and a future. From a figurational perspective, a decisive question is how displaced people enter into new ‘survival units’ elsewhere or re-create them themselves translocally once their previous survival units have been destabilised or destroyed by conflict or persecution. On a more practice-oriented side, findings from Theme 1 will help to understand how future policy-making and humanitarian work can better meet the needs of displaced people and how the EU as a key stakeholder can support their self-reliance and resilience.

### Theme 2: Living in ‘limbo’—Livelihood, (in)security and immobility in PDS

Figurations of displacement manifest in the everyday lives of people. The social practices of displaced people, instead of state’s policies or humanitarian agencies’ instruments, are at the heart of our analysis. We aim to understand better the everyday life of displaced people in the places where they find themselves stuck, for instance, in refugee camps or informal settlements in cities. Our research will examine which different strategies to sustain livelihoods are being used when displaced people enter into and experience intractable phases of waiting and immobility, how they seek shelter and protection and look for external assistance and access to labour markets, education and health services.

Understanding displaced people’s practices requires investigations into individuals’ and families’ basic needs and well-being, their strategies of self-protection and livelihood security, local networks of support within and beyond families and social groups, and access to housing and labour markets and how governance regimes unfold locally. We also seek to analyse power differentials inside these local figurations, for instance, to what extent access to livelihoods or protractedness are gendered processes. With the findings, we hope to show interdependency relations inside figurations and to be able to point to experiences and strategies how affected people enact their agency-in-waiting to move beyond constraining conditions.

### Theme 3: Following the networks—Connectivity and mobility out of PDS

Translocal figurations of displacement are based on connectivity and mobility across places and nations. TRAFIG looks into displaced people’s mobility trajectories in the wake of displacement, their current mobility patterns and future mobility aspirations. Initial displacement often brings about distinct spatial patterns and temporal rhythms of further mobility such as regular circulation and secondary moves within countries of reception, onward mobility or resettlement to third countries, or return to the country of origin. We seek to observe the mobility and connectivity of four focal groups (Congolese, Eritreans, Afghans, and Syrians) in and across multiple sites and countries. Particular attention will be given to the use of information and communication technology and the role of resource transfers by families and groups that are dispersed across multiple countries.

To understand circulating flows within translocal figurations of displacement, we seek to follow the connections and networks of these groups across borders, in particular towards other third countries in and outside of Europe. Here, we hope to see how governance structures and translocal family and kin networks facilitate members’ mobility and hence contribute to providing protection, securing livelihoods and widening future life chances. From a figurational perspective, we will also pay due attention to the emergence of new dependencies, positional transformations and ruptures inside translocal figurations and their respective effects on individuals. With our results, we hope to convince policymakers and practitioners to open up and design complementary pathways out of protracted displacement (OECD & UNHCR, 2018; van Selm, 2018) that are built upon displaced peoples’ own capacities and networks, instead of systematically blocking the potentials that emerge through translocal connectivity and mobility.

### Theme 4: Building alliances—Integration and intergroup relations between refugees and hosts

Translocal figurations of displacement are shaped by dynamic social relations and interactions between receiving communities and displaced people—an issue that the international community has increasingly become aware of (Betts et al., 2017). Social integration must be conceived of as an interactive process that requires adaptation and learning by those who have entered a new figuration, but also mutual understanding, cooperation and adaptation by those who have been living in a local neighbourhood for longer periods of time, who have appropriated established positions of power and who thus shape local discourses as well as modes of interactions and regulation (Pastore & Ponzio, 2016). According to Elias’ concept of the established–outsider figurations (Elias & Scotson, 1994), relations between the established actors and those who have arrived

more recently, in general, and between receiving communities and refugees, in particular, are constantly contested and transformed (see Pratsinakis, 2013; Belloni, 2016b; Rosenthal, 2016; Knudsen, 2017; Grawert & Mielke, 2018; Hüttermann, 2018 for case studies in quite different settings).

Understanding these intergroup relations will deliver insights on the mutual perception and interactions between receiving communities and refugees, on the nature and dynamics of local conflict, and on the local resistance to temporary reception respectively permanent integration of displaced people. Findings from our project might thereby enhance the ability of practitioners to foster dialogue and build trust between host communities and refugees.

## Theme 5: Seizing opportunities—Development incentives and new economic interactions

Translocal figurations of displacement are not only social phenomena; they are embedded in broader economic dynamics. Hosting displaced populations is generally portrayed as a burden for local and national societies and economies. Yet, local housing markets, labour markets as well as local services can get significant development impulses through the very presence, specific needs and cultural practices of larger groups of displaced people. Moreover, new arrivals bring along new skills, potential for investment in local businesses and industries, and translocal as well as transnational connections that matter in particular in the field of trade (Betts et al., 2017; Knudsen, 2017; World Bank, 2017).<sup>12</sup>

We seek to map the broader economic impacts of protracted displacement by looking at select cases in Africa, Asia and Europe. We will ask how the provision of shelter, food and services to displaced people can have positive effects on local and regional economies, and how the local population can participate in these. We will investigate how the influx of external skills and ideas transforms local labour markets. We are particularly interested in new markets and transnational trade linkages between regions and countries that are initiated by displaced people themselves. Insights from three case studies in Ethiopia, Jordan and Greece will enable progressive policies and investment strategies to utilise potential positive economic spillover-effects and set new incentives for regional development.

<sup>12</sup> Economic transformations within local figurations can thus come from economic and human resources that have entered that local figuration through mobility and transnational connectivity, but they can also be initiated and further advocated by easing restrictions to displaced people's participation in labour markets and through area-based development incentives such as large-scale public investments in infrastructure, cash-for-work programs or support to private sector development in designated economic zones as in Jordan under the EU Jordan Compact (Betts, Bloom, Kaplan, & Omata, 2017).



## Conclusion: Bridging research, policy and practice

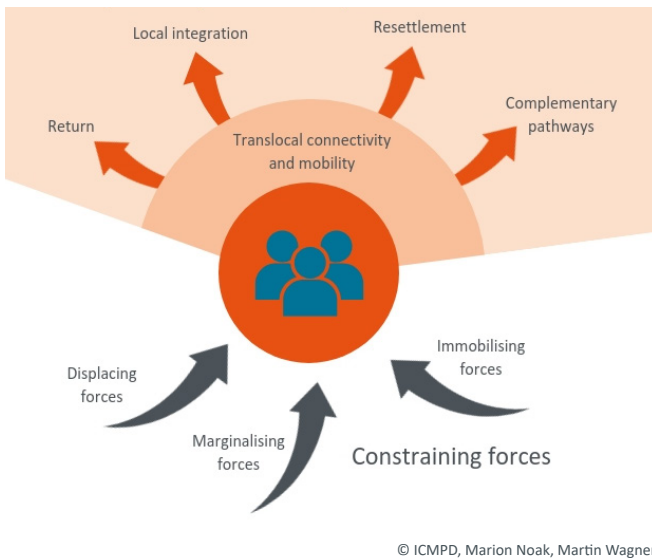
The overall objective of the project ‘Transnational Figurations of Displacement—Connectivity and Mobility as Solutions to Protracted Refugee Situations’ is to contribute to the development of alternative pathways out of protracted displacement that are better tailored to the needs and capacities of persons affected by displacement. As a first step towards achieving this goal, this *working paper* contains our central concepts and key terms.

In **Section one**, we laid out the concept of **social figurations** that has been developed by the German sociologist Norbert Elias and which will be used as a theoretical foundation for our policy analyses and empirical research. In essence, figurations are social constellations between interdependent individuals that are produced in and through transactions. They are fundamentally shaped by shifting balances of power and thus inherently dynamic—always in the making and under transformation. Figurations are embedded in places, operate through networks and are shaped by territorialisation. We explained that the concept of figurations can be applied at different scale levels from smaller groups such as a family to more complex differentiated social entities such as a nation-state. In TRAFIG, we use the notion ‘figurations of displacement’ as a summary term for the dynamic social constellations between displaced persons, state actors, humanitarian actors, host communities, communities of origin and transnational diasporas, which have arisen in the wake of conflict-induced mobility. As argued (both in Section 1.2 and 4.2) a figurational approach suits the investigation of the governance of protracted displacement (TRAFIG’s theme 1), refugees’ everyday lives under conditions of livelihood insecurity and immobility (theme 2), displaced people’s translocal networks and mobilities (theme 3), host–refugee relations (theme 4), and the economic dynamics emerging out of protracted displacement (theme 5) very well. For each of these aspects, it is crucial to understand the processual nature of the specific figurations that displaced people bring along, enter into and transform, how they unfold in and across particular places, and how both temporal and spatial dynamics relate to the interdependencies and power relations within and between different figurations of displacement.

In **Section two**, we reflected upon UNHCR’s definition of protracted refugee situations and more recent debates about protracted displacement that also acknowledge the conditions for and pathways of other displaced groups, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), *sur place* refugees and other migrants that have become stuck at certain places. We argue that **protracted displacement situations** arise when and where (durable) solutions are not made available or progress towards

achieving these is stalled. In contrast to the original quantitative understanding of protracted refugee situations, we plead for a qualitative approach and re-define protracted displacement as a specific social constellation—a figuration—in which the capabilities of displaced persons to rebuild their lives after displacement and the opportunities available to do so are severely limited for prolonged periods of time. In our understanding, a defining feature of protracted displacement is that multiple constraining forces limit affected individuals from using their capacities and making their own free choices: enduring *displacing forces* that have led to forced mobility in the first place and that continue to hinder return to places of origin; *marginalising forces* that lead to social exclusion and prevent real local integration in recipient communities; and *immobilising forces* that block displaced people’s mobility and chances to seek a future elsewhere. Nonetheless, we want to highlight that protracted displacement is much less static and fixed and more dynamic than commonly perceived. This dynamism, we argue, is largely due to displaced people’s creativity and resilience—their ‘agency-in-waiting’—despite restrictive governance regimes and constraining structures that largely seem to work towards continuing and deepening protractedness. Programmes and policies designed to address protracted displacement should acknowledge and make use of the capacities, everyday practices, networks and aspirations of displaced people.

In **Section three**, we build upon empirical observations and other studies that have proposed to think of transnationalism as a ‘fourth durable solution’ to protracted displacement. Yet, to shift the focus from refugees’ international movements, protracted displacement in third countries and a too narrow territorial thinking towards finding durable solutions, we combine our figurational analysis of protracted displacement with a *translocal*—rather than a *transnational*—*perspective*. We thereby aim to demonstrate how displaced people interact with others across a multitude of places, how they maintain relations locally and across distances (translocal connectivity), and how such translocal networks of care, solidarity and trust as well as their own mobility present resources to cope with and potentially resolve situations of protracted displacement. We expect that through a **translocal approach to displacement**, we will be able to better comprehend displaced people’s everyday lives. We also seek to evoke a better understanding of the institutional and political dynamics of onward mobility, for instance along complementary pathways such as family reunification, private sponsorship, humanitarian admission or labour mobility, of temporary or ‘split’ return, and of local integration. Our understanding of protracted displacement thus prioritises affected

**Figure 9: Pathways out of protracted displacement**

persons' lived experiences and how they use *multiple and interconnected pathways* to enhance protection and livelihood security in the present and to move on in their lives in the long run over a formal achievement of one of the three classic durable solutions (return, local integration, resettlement). Overall, we favour an analytical over a policy perspective, focusing on categories of analysis over categories of practice (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Our innovative research perspective—and the policy analyses and empirical findings we hope to generate—have the potential to inform, if not reformulate, current policy and public debates on forced displacement (see Ruhs et al., 2019 for a discussion of the triangular relationship between research, public debate and policies). In particular, our understanding of figurations of protracted displacement shifts the attention away from formal and statistical to qualitative criteria, while paying attention to transnational or translocal dimensions of displacement and appropriate responses to it.

Following debates on protracted displacement and durable solutions in the context of internal displacement (Kälin & Entwisle Chapuisat, 2017; Bradley, 2018), protracted displacement then appears less an issue of a particular time spent in exile than one of the conditions under which agency and dignity can be regained and self-reliance can be strengthened. This certainly requires a de- and re-construction of the policies and structures—the displacing, marginalising and immobilising forces—that continue to hinder displaced people from moving out of protracted displacement and from shaping their futures. The task of addressing 'the challenge of forced displacement' can thus not be limited to protecting displaced people and to finding livelihood opportunities, but should rather be expanded to the fundamentally political question of how the people affected by displacement can access solutions that they deem sustainable and desirable.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IASC</b>	Interagency Standing Committee
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communication technologies
<b>IDMC</b>	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally displaced persons
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>MICIC</b>	Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative
<b>MIGNEX</b>	Aligning migration management and the migration development nexus (EU-funded research project)
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>OAU</b>	Organisation of African Unity
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PDS</b>	Protracted displacement situations
<b>PRS</b>	Protracted refugee situations
<b>TRAFIG</b>	Transnational Figurations of Displacement (EU-funded research project)
<b>UNHCR</b>	UN Refugee Agency

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TRAFIG provides academic evidence on refugee movements and protracted displacement; analyses which conditions could help to improve displaced people's everyday lives and informs policymakers on how to develop solutions to protracted displacement.

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