

THE SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FORCED MIGRATION

A Multi-Media Educational Tool

Summer 2020

Counting Forced Migrants: Methods, Impact, and Improvements

Target audience: high school (grades 9-12)

Keywords: terminology, data

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The United Nations [reported](#) that in 2019 there were more people forcibly displaced than ever before, but where do these numbers come from, how accurate are they, and what impact do they have on those who are displaced? Estimating the number of people displaced from their homes is much more complicated than might be expected. Numerous organizations, each with unique methodologies and biases, estimate the scope of forced migration. The [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#), [Internal Displacement Monitoring Center \(DMC\)](#), and [Displacement Tracking Matrix \(DTM\)](#) utilize census data, surveys, and, more recently, cellphone and social media data for their counts. Some organizations only count people who fit the legal definition of “refugee,” others try to find the total number of people displaced within their countries of origin, and still others aim to record how many people are forced to leave their home, regardless of legal category. Even in an ideal scenario, there are bound to be miscounts due to double-counts and populations overlooked. Miscounts can cost lives. If the distribution of funding is based on the number of people displaced and the count is too low, there will be families who do not receive their necessary resources and if the number is too high, it can create philanthropic paralysis.

Recognizing that forced migrants are more than their numbers, this bibliography section aims to interrogate the methods and impact of counting forced migrants by compiling sources that ask: who quantifies forced migration and how do they do it? How does precise data positively impact forced migrants? How can data collection harm those it seeks to help? And how can we improve the ways that we count forced migrants to make them more accurate and supportive for forced migrants?

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