MIGRATIONS IN CONTEXT: HISTORY AND FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

Roberta Daiane Ribeiro[1] and Welisson Marques[2]

ABSTRACT

This article explores the history and complexity of migration. It examines the concepts and origins of migratory phenomena, addressing the historical, linguistic and cultural aspects involved. However, it informs that the understanding of words such as "refugee" and "immigrant" goes beyond terminological definitions, as full understanding requires reflection on the complexities and subtleties of human interaction with the other throughout the ages. Then, it presents in chronological order some events responsible for significant human displacements, tracing an overview of migrations up to the present day. Among the events raised are mainly wars, which in addition to large numbers of deaths and displacements, are generally responsible for humanitarian crises. It then presents the most recent numerical data related to the global situation of refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons, offering a quantifiable perspective on this global phenomenon. A literature review, research in specialized publications and websites were used for data collection.

Keywords: Migrations. Refuge. Displaced. Stateless persons. Asylum seekers.

[1] Master's student in Professional and Technological Education
Federal Institute of the Triângulo Mineiro - IFTM
Uberaba - MG - Brazil
E-mail: robertadaiane@iftm.edu.br
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5674-3897
[2] Post-doctorate in Education
Federal Institute of the Triângulo Mineiro - IFTM
Uberaba – MG - Brazil
E-mail: welissonmarques@iftm.edu.br
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6766-4651

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a social and historical phenomenon that has accompanied humanity since the earliest times, reflecting economic, political, social and environmental changes. This bibliographic and documentary review article aims to explore, from a historical and conceptual perspective, the aspects of migration, addressing its roots and definitions, in addition to presenting relevant numerical data on the subject.

The central question of this research is: how have migratory flows developed throughout history and what are the main concepts associated with this phenomenon? Understanding these dynamics is crucial for a deeper analysis of the impact of migration on contemporary global society.

The rationale for this research lies in the importance of understanding the historical contexts and fundamental concepts that involve migration. The article was written based on the following objectives: (1) to analyze migration flows historically, (2) to define and contextualize the concepts of migration and refuge, and (3) to examine numerical data on recent migrations. These objectives have been formulated in a specific and measurable manner, seeking to ensure that the reader fully understands the scope of the study and the topics that will be addressed and evaluated.

Finally, this analysis can not only provide a robust and well-founded theoretical basis for future investigations, but also act as a crucial building block for formulating more effective public policies. By deeply understanding the historical contexts and fundamental concepts surrounding migration, policymakers and researchers will be better equipped to address contemporary challenges related to human mobility, thereby promoting solutions that are both just and sustainable.

HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES OF MIGRATION

In this section, we will explore the concepts and origins of migration and refuge, addressing definitions and the historical and cultural aspects involved. Then, we will present in chronological order some events responsible for significant human displacements, tracing an overview of migrations to the present day. Next, we will present the most recent numerical data related to migration, offering a quantifiable perspective on this global phenomenon.

FROM MIGRATION TO REFUGE: CONCEPTS AND ROOTS

The word "foreigner" has roots in the French language, derived from the term *étranger*. This, in turn, has its origin in the Latin *extraneus*, which means "what is outside" or

"strange". It attributes the sense of perceiving the foreigner as different or unknown. The Greek equivalent term for foreigner is *xeno* (Houaiss, 2001), often used to indicate something strange or different, as in "xenophobia", which is the fear or aversion to foreigners.

Taking the Hellenic society of Antiquity as a starting point, the *polis* is commonly associated with an administrative structure composed of a group of Greek citizens (free men), a definition that excluded, among others, foreigners. The *Metecs*, foreigners residing in Athens, had no access to the cults of the gods in the temples, could not marry Athenian citizens, own land, participate in assemblies, courts, or political life; on the other hand, they were authorized to develop, for taxes, economic activities related to education, arts, commerce, and manufacturing. Morales (2008) argues that since *metics* were excluded from political participation, they were not considered an integral part of the *polis*, except with respect to their economic contribution. Foreigners were not considered citizens, but only inhabitants of the *polis*. This view of the foreigner, however, is not unanimous in the ancient world.

Jubilut (2007) informs that, when analyzing the Old Testament of the Bible (Hebrew Scriptures), it is possible to verify several passages in which a differentiated and merciful treatment is imposed on foreigners, who should be treated as equals.

Barbosa (2011) analyzes, from the perspective of the life of the god Dionysus, the antagonism between the Greek concepts of autochthonous and foreign. He states that for the Athenians of the fifth century B.C., what made an individual be considered a barbarian, foreigner or non-Hellenic was the lack of knowledge and adherence to Greek customs, and not necessarily the non-Hellenic ethnicity. Dionysus, the bastard son of Zeus, was born in the Greek city of Thebes, but due to a forced detachment, he took on oriental characteristics in a physical and behavioral sense. In this way, he is considered by the Greeks as a foreign deity, because although his birth was in Greek lands, he emptied himself of his own culture.

Borges (2015), in an article on the use and significance of the word foreigner in Portuguese and Brazilian dictionaries, points out that there has been a transformation in the meaning of this term over time. There was a change in the definition of foreigner, who was no longer considered as one who is not originally from the place, but rather as one who does not have the native language. The author explains that this change established a conception of separation between individuals who speak the official language of a country and speakers of a foreign language. Thus, language is presented as a materialization of the division between subjects, in such a way as to point to a state of foreignness, making it possible for an individual to be considered a foreigner within his own country. This condition

can even be applied to indigenous peoples in the face of the phenomenon of delegitimization of their languages.

As noted, the term "foreigner" embodies a deep linguistic and cultural history that mirrors the complexities and subtleties of human interaction with another. Such a context shows how culture and language have an active participation in social identity and in the acceptance or exclusion of an individual in a given society or group.

Another important phenomenon in which significance is necessary for this study is migration. From Latin *migratio*, *Onis*, whose meaning is "passage from one place to another", is related to the movement of individuals. In this way, an emigrant is a person who leaves his homeland to settle in another country, while an immigrant is a person who has settled in another country. The same individual is an emigrant in his or her home country and an immigrant in the destination country. Regarding the term refuge, from Latin *refuge*, brings the sense of space or place that one resorts to to escape from danger; Consequently, a refugee is one who has taken refuge, or sought protection elsewhere. Stateless, from Latin *Apatris*, *Gone* It means "without a country" and refers to someone who has no nationality   (Houaiss, 2001).

The understanding of the words "refugee" and "immigrant" goes beyond terminological definitions, entering the origin of the social and legal complexities that permeate the concepts. Although these words are commonly used synonymously, they have distinct practical implications and are intrinsically linked to the context in which they occur, reflecting the individual and collective circumstances that lead people to move, as well as the legal and social consequences.

Within the scope of international law, the Refugee Statute of 1951 defines a refugee as a person who "fears being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and who cannot or does not want to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UNHCR, 1951, p. 2). According to Law No. 9,474/1997, called the Brazilian Refugee Law, refugees are also considered those who left their country due to the deep and widespread violation of human rights (Brasil, 1997).

The 1954 Statute of Stateless Persons is an international legal framework that establishes definitions for statelessness. According to the document, stateless is "any person who is not considered by any State, according to its legislation, as its national" (UNHCR, 1954, p. 1), a definition that covers individuals who, for various reasons, do not have nationality recognized by any State. This condition can occur due to some circumstances, including conflict between countries, legal discrimination based on ethnic

origin, conflicts between countries, renunciation or deprivation of nationality, and cases of succession of states.

Although there is no international definition for the word "migrant", it is commonly understood as anyone who moves from a region or country, often in search of better living conditions. Law No. 13,445/2017, known as the Migration Law, states that a person from another country who temporarily or permanently settles in Brazil, and who works or resides in the country, can be considered an immigrant, while an emigrant is a Brazilian who resides abroad, permanently or temporarily (Brasil, 2017).

Immigration, as noted, is not necessarily associated with threats to life or persecution. In many cases, individuals choose to immigrate in search of economic opportunities, education, family reunification, among other reasons that do not involve risks to security or freedom. It is important to highlight that the legal status of immigrants is predominantly determined by the national laws of the host country; Thus, these laws establish the rights and duties of immigrants, as well as the procedures for their admission and stay.

In contrast to the above conditions, refugees and stateless persons, whose situation is often the result of conflict, persecution or denial of nationality, are protected by a set of international laws and agreements. These instruments aim to ensure safe and dignified conditions, recognizing the need for international protection when security and human rights cannot be ensured in the country of origin, and will be further discussed later in this dissertation.

Social and humanitarian issues related to migration and refuge have historical roots and persist to the present day. Although it is essential to understand the definitions for the analysis of migratory phenomena, it is important to take into account the historical context of the facts. Migration and refuge are not isolated events; rather, they are intrinsically connected to historical, social, political, and economic factors. By analyzing the past, it becomes possible to identify patterns, causes, and consequences that have influenced migratory trajectories and refugee conditions throughout history.

BETWEEN YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW

Since ancient times, the history of humanity has been marked by compulsory migrations. These are driven by a range of factors, ranging from armed conflict and humanitarian crises to religious persecution and ethnic cleansing. In addition, natural disasters and environmental changes, the construction of large-scale infrastructure, the

expansion of agricultural and grazing areas, as well as the subjugation and enslavement of populations, also contributed to such movements.

An important episode linked to migrations in the first century was the siege of the city of Jerusalem. In 63 BC, Rome began to rule Palestine, after the annexation of Syria as a province. Decades later, a civil war and an uprising against the Romans in 66 AD were motivated by the imposition of the cult of the emperor, high tax burden, resistance to Roman cultural domination, and the loss of socio-political-religious independence. Four years later, in 70 A.D., about 2.5 million people were in Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover celebration. The city was besieged by Roman legions led by Titus and more than a million Jews died; among the survivors, 96 thousand were enslaved and scattered in the Jewish diaspora; others, forced to fight with animals in Roman arenas (Lobianco, 1999; Rocha, 2004).

Bringing light to the events of the twentieth century, in the period between 1939 and 1945, the Second World War caused the death of 70 million people, in addition to mass displacements. This exodus, of approximately 40 million people, was particularly intense in the regions where the main European fighting took place. Hostilities, along with racial and ethnic policies of extermination of non-Aryan peoples, and subsequent post-war border changes, contributed to the intense movement of people seeking refuge. In order to establish regulations to protect this population, in 1950 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was founded.

In 1948, independence from the State of Israel was declared, marking the culmination of decades of displacement. During this period, thousands of Jews migrated to Palestine, laying the groundwork for the subsequent formation of the State of Israel. The establishment of a new national state, in territory until then inhabited by Palestinian communities , generated the forced exodus of thousands of Palestinians to neighboring regions, and marked the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict (Gomes, 2001).

During the Cold War period, from 1950 to 1970, conflicts intensified in Asia and Africa, driven by decolonization processes. Such processes resulted in a significant increase in the number of refugees, due to political and ideological divergences in the newly emancipated countries. In several Latin American countries, the presence of dictatorial governments and the violation of human rights have intensified local refugee crises (Jubilut, 2007). As a result of the great global conflicts, humanity has witnessed some of the most intense episodes of violation of human dignity, manifested through ethnic cleansing and humanitarian crises.

Although there is no consolidated international definition of ethnic cleansing, it is commonly associated with the action of violently removing people from an area to make it

ethnically homogeneous. The most prevalent forms include forced migration, resulting from mass deportations and relocation of populations to concentration or control camps. Although the primary intention of ethnic cleansing is not necessarily the systematic extermination of persecuted minorities, in practice, the process that begins with expulsions is often intensified to killings and destruction, in whole or in part, of a group (Trindade, 2003). An example of ethnic cleansing that can be highlighted relates to Armenia. After the Ottoman defeat by the Russians in World War I, the Ottoman government attributed the military failure to an alleged support of the Armenian population for the Tsar. In retaliation, 1.5 million Armenians were killed and another 1.2 million deported (Mourenza, 2015).

Although they are not the only ones, three recent events have played a crucial role in the context of forced migration: the war in Ukraine, which began in February 2022, the war in the Gaza Strip, which began in October 2023, and the attacks on Lebanon, which began in December 2024. These conflicts, still ongoing, have resulted in significant humanitarian crises and mass displacement.
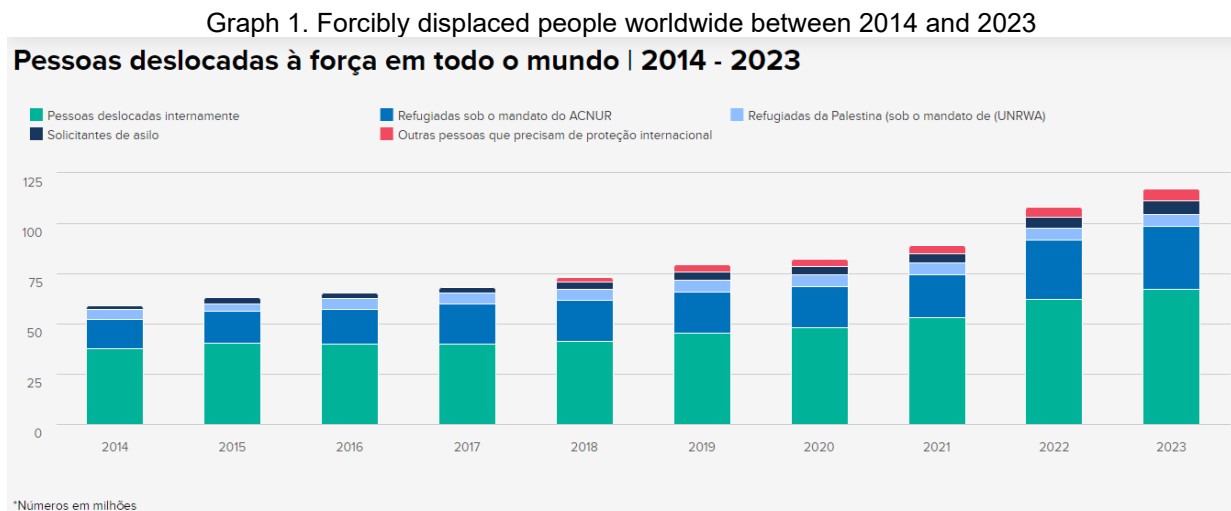
In Ukraine, although it is difficult to quantify precisely, it is estimated that the Russian invasion has caused at least 500 thousand deaths, internal displacement of 9.7 million Ukrainians and 6 million refugees. Simultaneously, in the Gaza Strip, the invasion by Israel resulted in 30,000 deaths, six million refugees and internal displacement of almost two million people. It is estimated that approximately 80% of the population of Gaza has been forced to flee their homes. The region is facing a severe humanitarian crisis, with virtually all inhabitants facing acute food insecurity and the imminent threat of famine (UNHCR, 2024a).

The recent escalation of violence and attacks in Lebanon has generated serious humanitarian consequences, forcing thousands of people to flee. Since September 23, 2024, one million people have been affected by the conflicts, more than 540 thousand people have been displaced and 185 thousand people have crossed the border from Lebanon to Syria. Among these are Syrian refugees, who were already in a situation of vulnerability.

MIGRATIONS IN NUMBERS

The Global *Trends - Forced Displacement in 2023* (UNHCR, 2024a) report presents the latest statistical trends on the global situation of refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons, as well as the number of refugees who have returned to their countries or areas of origin. Published annually in June, it analyses changes and trends in forcibly displaced populations in the previous calendar year (1 January to 31 December).

According to the report, the world's forced displacements – including persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and events that disrupted public order – totaled 117.3 million people at the end of 2023 (Chart 1). This figure represents an increase of 8%, or 8.9 million people compared to the end of 2022. In other words, one in every 69 people worldwide, or 1.5% of the world's population, was displaced.

Graph 1. Forcibly displaced people worldwide between 2014 and 2023

Pessoas deslocadas à força em todo o mundo | 2014 - 2023

- Pessoas deslocadas internamente
- Refugiadas sob o mandato do ACNUR
- Refugiadas da Palestina (sob o mandato de (UNRWA)
- Solicitantes de asilo
- Outras pessoas que precisam de proteção internacional

*Números em milhões

Source: Adapted from UNHCR, 2024a.

It is important to note that the calculation of the number of forcibly displaced people in 2023 included refugees (36.4 million), internally displaced people (68.3 million), asylum seekers (6.9 million) and other people who needed international aid (5.8 million) in the migratory flows.

The total number of refugees in the world increased by 7% in 2023. This increase has been influenced in large part by the conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria, which together account for one-third of all refugees under UNHCR's mandate.

Syria is the country with the largest number of refugees in need of international protection (6.5 million refugees), followed by Afghanistan (6.1 million), Ukraine (6 million), Venezuela (5.6 million) and South Sudan (2.2 million); Together, they represent 73% of the world's total refugees. Among the countries that received the most refugees are Iran (3.8 million), Turkey (3.3 million), Colombia (2.9 million), Germany (2.6 million) and Pakistan (2 million); Together, they received 40% of the refugees in 2023.

In 2023, people under the age of 18 made up 40% of the forcibly displaced population (47 million), while 2 million children were born refugees, with an average of 400 thousand children being born as refugees between 2018 and 2023.

Most of the people who had to flee did not cross an international border, but moved within their countries; In this way, they are considered internally displaced persons. In 2023,

68.3 million people were forcibly displaced internally, accounting for 58.2% of all forcibly displaced persons. The nations with the highest number of internally displaced people in 2023 were Sudan (9.1 million), Syria (7.2 million) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (6.7 million).

In addition to wars, conflicts, and violence, natural disasters also played a role in the forced internal displacement of people in 2023. By the end of the year, 4.3 million refugees, 580,100 asylum seekers and 50.6 million internally displaced people will reside in countries subject to high, severe or extreme levels of climate risks, while simultaneously facing conflict. Approximately one in ten refugees and asylum seekers, and about three in four internally displaced people lived in areas highly exposed to extreme weather risks.

The group of other people in need of international assistance in 2023 refers to those who are residing outside their country or territory of origin, usually because they have been forcibly displaced across international borders, do not fit into the categories of asylum seekers, refugees, people in situations analogous to refugees, but still need international protection, including protection against forced return, as well as access to basic services on a temporary or long-term basis.

In previous periods, voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement were effective solutions for millions of people in situations of refuge or internal displacement, who due to the end or mitigation of conflicts, were able to return to their homes. However, the persistence of some conflicts and the emergence of new ones make voluntary returns increasingly complex. In 2023, approximately 7 million internally displaced people and 1 million refugees returned to their homes. In addition, 6.1 million displaced people and 1 million refugees returned to their areas or countries of origin in 2023. In addition, 158,000 refugees were resettled in a third country and 30,000 refugees obtained citizenship in the host country.

Regarding the condition of statelessness, the calculations take into account two population groups. The first group is made up of people who meet the definition of statelessness in the 1954 Convention because they are not considered nationals of any State. The second group includes people with indeterminate nationality. By the end of 2023, there was a 1% drop in the number of stateless people in the world compared to 2022, totaling approximately 4.4 million people.

Another important UNHCR document is the *Mid-Year Trends* 2024 (UNHCR, 2024b) report. This document analyzes the main displacement trends in the first half of 2024, and serves as a partial update of the Global *Trends - Forced Displacement in 2023* report. In October each year, the biannual trends report is released to provide up-to-date figures on

the first six months of the current year. These results are preliminary, and the final data are included in the subsequent Global Trends report, released in June of the following year.

As presented by the document, at the end of June 2024, approximately 122.6 million people in the world were forcibly displaced from their homes (Chart 2), which represents an increase of 5%, or 5 million people, compared to the end of 2023.

Figure 2 - Forcibly displaced people worldwide between 2014 and 2023
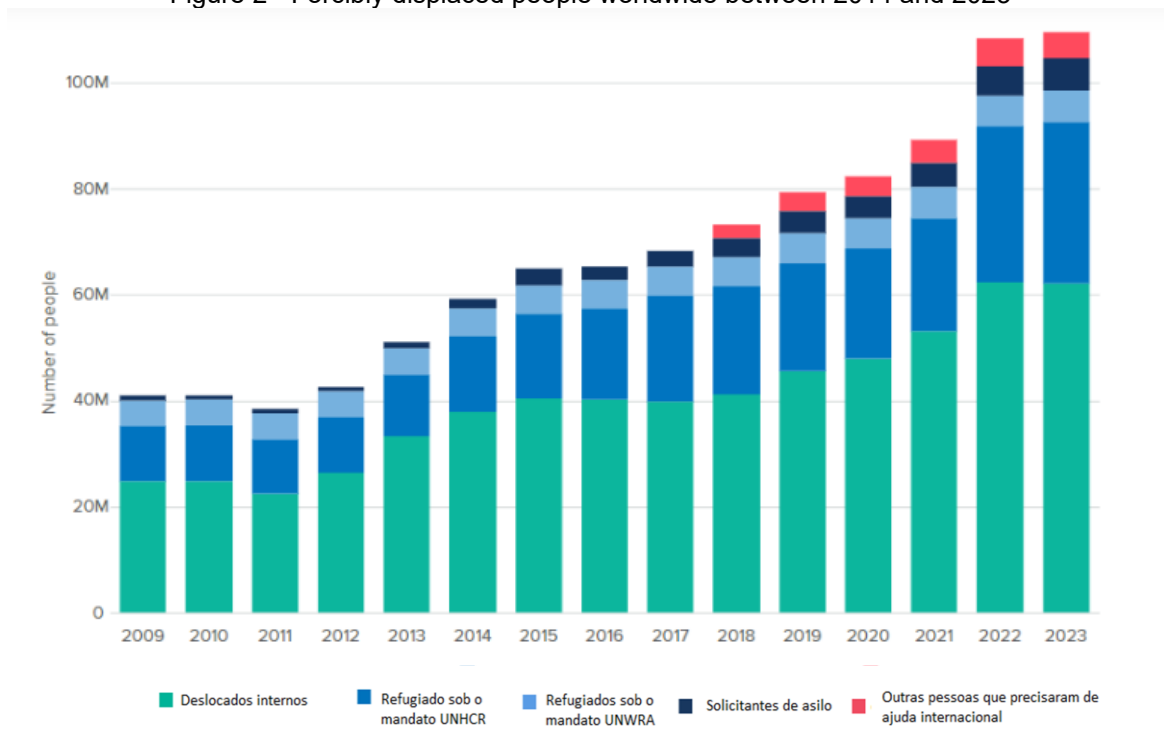
Source: Adapted from UNHCR, 2024b.

It should be noted that the calculation of forcibly displaced persons in 2024 included internally displaced persons (72.1 million), refugees (36.7 million), asylum seekers (8 million) and other persons in need of international assistance (5.8 million).

In the first six months of the year, seven major displacement situations accounted for around 90% of new displacements worldwide. These include new and ongoing conflicts and humanitarian situations in Latin America, the Caribbean, Myanmar, Congo, Mozambique, Sudan and Ukraine.

The global refugee population reached 38 million in mid-2024, a 1% increase from the end of 2023. Syria remains the leading country of origin for refugees and other people in need of international protection (6.3 million refugees), followed by Venezuela (6.2 million), Ukraine (6.1 million) and Afghanistan (6.1 million).

Among the countries that received the most refugees are Iran (3.8 million), Turkey (3.1 million), Colombia (2.8 million), Germany (2.7 million) and Uganda (1.7 million).

An estimated 72.1 million people were forcibly displaced within their own countries, which represents 59% of all forced displacement, and a 6% increase from the end of 2023. An estimated 4.7 million new internal displacements occurred during the first six months of 2024, mainly in Sudan, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ukraine, Haiti, and Mozambique.

In relation to statelessness, the number of 4.4 million stateless people remained, who, because they do not have any recognized nationality, have difficulties in accessing basic rights such as education, health and employment.

In the first half of 2024, 85,000 refugees were resettled in a third country and 26,000 refugees obtained citizenship in the host country. Just over 2.2 million people have returned to their places of origin, including 430,000 refugees and 1.8 million internally displaced people.

CONCLUSION

This article reviewed conceptual, historical, and quantitative aspects related to migrations, highlighting the complexity and diversity of migratory movements from Antiquity to the present day. The analysis of the origin and concepts constructed of terms such as "foreigner", "refugee", "immigrant" and "stateless" exposed the linguistic and cultural depth that shaped humanity's perception of these subjects.

The historical review addressed significant events such as the siege of Jerusalem, World War II, and the Cold War, which caused humanitarian crises, armed conflicts, political and social changes, as well as resulted in major human displacements. The prevalence of internal displacement over other migratory phenomena was highlighted, and the impacts of recent conflicts in Ukraine, the Gaza Strip and Lebanon were cited.

The latest data indicate a significant increase in forced displacements, reaching 117.3 million people at the end of 2023 and 122.6 million people in the first half of 2024.

It is understood that this study provided an understanding of the historical and conceptual contexts of migrations, in addition to offering updated information on these displacements. The elements presented emphasize the need for effective actions to address the challenges related to forced migration.

In short, the article synthesized a wide range of relevant aspects in order to provide readers and researchers with a solid basis for future discussions on the inclusion and protection of migrants and refugees.

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