Using collaborative approaches to improve internal displacement data

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The magnitude, severity and diversity of internal displacement situations cannot be understood – and much less be adequately responded to – without comprehensive and accurate data. Initiatives such as the GP20 Plan of Action offer examples of good practice for the way forward in this complex area.

Governments and international actors need access to comprehensive, reliable evidence to inform responses, policies and programming, especially when seeking durable solutions to internal displacement. Despite various challenges, such as the use of differing standards and definitions, there are many examples of good practice in the collection, dissemination and use of displacement data.

The GP20 Plan of Action initiative has enabled governments and a broad range of global stakeholders to share valuable expertise and good practice, as well as support with capacity development. This article offers three concrete examples of good practice at the global level, from the Central African Republic and Somalia, both in meeting challenges specific to internal displacement data and in helping governments and other actors to make use of the resulting data. These three examples show the importance of working collaboratively and setting standards at the global and national levels to ensure that internal displacement data are relevant and of good quality in order to inform work on addressing the causes and impacts of displacement and securing durable solutions.

Conceptualising measures and indicators

Internal displacement situations are varied and multi-layered in nature and it remains difficult to translate internationally established frameworks such as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs into practice. Measuring the achievement of durable solutions is particularly complex, with many challenges at both technical and practical levels. This has contributed to the development of different approaches and diverging practices.

One of the strongest initiatives to fill this gap is the Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics (EGRIS).[1] Since 2016, EGRIS has worked collaboratively on developing recommendations (aimed at national statistical systems) for the implementation of harmonised measurements of forced displacement across the entire spectrum of human mobility. The International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS),[2] developed by EGRIS' IDP sub-group[3] and endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2020, provide an internationally agreed framework for IDP statistics. These recommendations also include guidance – that builds on the IASC Framework – on how to measure the achievement of durable solutions for statistical purposes.[4]

The recommendations recognise that developing a statistical measure for a complex issue such as durable solutions is extremely challenging. Such a measure needs to balance the inclusion of relevant substantive elements with being globally relevant for a wide range of displacement contexts and realistic in terms of implementation. Therefore, among the major points of discussion in developing the measure was how to identify the more crucial aspects linked to displacement, focusing on the displacement-related vulnerabilities captured by the eight IASC criteria,[5] while still accounting for the physical location of IDPs (that is, location of displacement, location of return, or other settlement location). The physical location matters when making comparisons with the non-displaced community, in particular to identify the IDPs' needs and vulnerabilities specifically related

Families displaced by drought in Somalia.

to their displacement and those shared by both the displaced and non-displaced.

In light of this and taking into consideration the varying levels of resources and statistical capacities available in IDP contexts, IRIS proposes a composite measure that focuses on assessing whether key displacement-related vulnerabilities have been overcome based on five of the eight IASC criteria. However, measuring overall progress towards durable solutions for IDPs is crucial for informing programming and response, and IRIS therefore also includes recommendations for a progress measure that takes into account all eight IASC criteria.

A global set of indicators has not yet been developed. Moving forwards, this means that there is an opportunity to refine the methodology through further testing and continued collaboration between governments and international organisations.

Collaborative workshop on data collection methods in CAR

The need for good, reliable data on people affected by displacement was unanimously recognised during the 2019 humanitarian planning process in the Central African Republic (CAR). However, there appeared to be differences in the understanding of some of the basic concepts of internal displacement. The complex humanitarian crisis in CAR, where several types of displacement coexist

in the same areas at the same time, underlined the need for a common understanding of definitions and concepts among all stakeholders.

In January 2019, in CAR, a workshop was organised by the GP20 initiative that brought together representatives of affected communities, national and local authorities, humanitarian and development organisations, and civil society organisations to discuss the improvement of the quality of internal displacement data. Participants were able to develop a common understanding of the basic concepts of internal displacement and the need to track the total number of persons in a situation of displacement at a specific moment in time and the change in that number over a defined period of time in order to better understand the dynamics of displacement and thereby to enable appropriate protection response and assistance.

They also agreed on an action plan to improve the quality of data on internal displacement in CAR. As part of this plan, they developed a Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) which introduced, among other things, criteria for arbitration to help resolve actual/potential conflicts between providers of information during data compilation, and a methodology for disaggregating data by age and sex both for IDPs living in camp settings and for IDPs living with host families. In addition, the SOP presents a data validation and publication scheme, with clearly assigned responsibilities, and underlines the importance of continued collaboration between the relevant stakeholders to ensure comprehensive, reliable data in CAR.

Planning for durable solutions: profiling in Mogadishu, Somalia

The profiling of informal settlements in Mogadishu, conducted in 2015–16, provides an example of the use of collaborative data collection to inform durable solutions in a protracted displacement context. The

combination of armed conflict and severe and recurrent drought and floods has driven displacement in Somalia for decades. Settling in the informal urban settlements around the capital city of Mogadishu, IDPs seem to face different challenges from those faced by the non-displaced populations in the same settlements. However, given the limited evidence available on the experience of displaced populations, in 2014–2015 federal and city-level government partners and humanitarian actors carried out a profiling exercise to gain a thorough understanding of the displacement situation in the city and to inform planning for durable solutions policies and programmes.[6] The purpose of the profiling was to provide disaggregated estimates of the number of IDPs living in the informal settlements, analyse their displacement history, and examine the families' skills, capacities, specific needs and coping mechanisms that affect their decision-making about their own future.

The results of the profiling fed directly into local- and national-level development plans and durable solutions strategies. They informed the establishment of the Somali IDP Durable Solutions Initiative and the inclusion, for the first time, of internal displacement in the country's National Development Plan (2017). The profiling furthermore informed the creation of a taskforce led by the Mayor of Mogadishu and provided the baseline data for the city's five-year Durable Solutions Strategy (2020).[7] The profiling process also prompted dialogue with development stakeholders, who came to recognise displacement as an impoverishment factor and to understand the importance of the role of municipalities in implementing durable solutions; it thus opened the door for fundraising across the humanitarian and development sector.

Conclusion

The examples presented in this article are only a few of many initiatives to bridge the gaps surrounding internal displacement data in order to ensure common understanding, prevention and resolution of this phenomenon. These initiatives and others should now be expanded and/or capitalised on for maximum effect. The high level of complexity of internal displacement often deters dialogue and action. However, these examples demonstrate that, although not all issues can be addressed at once, tackling the most pertinent challenges collaboratively can create a solid base for the identification of tangible, effective, lasting solutions to internal displacement.

Building on this momentum, governments and international actors should now strive for enhanced collaboration on the refinement and implementation of standardised methodologies and approaches. They should furthermore engage affected communities throughout the data collection and analysis processes, and dedicate the necessary resources to develop capacity to produce comprehensive, good quality IDP data that are both suitable for use by various stakeholders and relevant for decision-making.

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1. bit.ly/EGRIS

2. bit.ly/IDPstatistics-IRIS

3. As part of EGRIS, the IDP subgroup was led by JIPS, with support from UNSD, Statistics Norway and IDMC, and consisted of representatives from National Statistical Offices of 15 Member States and experts from regional and international organisations.

4. IASC (2010) *Framework : Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons* bit.ly/IASC-Durable-Solutions

5. See endnote 4, p27.

6. With technical support from JIPS, the exercise was led by the Somalia Disaster Management Agency of the Ministry of Interior and Federal Affairs, the Banadir Regional Administration, and the Protection Cluster's profiling working group, which included UNHCR, DRC, IOM, OCHA, NRC, IRC, SSWC, ORDO, HINNA, ELMAN, Mercy Corps, DBG, Save the Children, REACH and the Shelter Cluster.

7. The Durable Solutions Strategy is developed for the Banaadir Regional Authority / Municipality of Mogadishu.