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Improving IDP data to help implement the Guiding Principles

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Reliable, comprehensive data are vital for effective programming and practice. Data quality can be improved in many ways to better reflect the Guiding Principles and provide evidence to support their implementation.

Given the increasing levels of internal displacement globally and the growing interest in 'data-driven' policy and programming, it is especially relevant in this 20th anniversary year to ask whether the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement are reflected in such efforts. The experiences of Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) staff reveal that a significant gap exists between the data currently available and key tenets of the Guiding Principles. Analysing these gaps yields recommendations for improving the evidence base on internal displacement, thereby helping to inform more effective implementation of the Guiding Principles.

Contextualising the IDP definition

The definition of internally displaced persons (IDPs), as presented in the Guiding Principles, is broad and encompasses both natural and man-made causes of displacement; however, there is no systematic, comprehensive and authoritative data system that reflects this. Methodologies currently in use employ a significantly narrowed definition as a result of operational and political realities, and may require a series of technical decisions in order to produce contextualised, useful, fit-for-purpose data.¹

Operational challenges can limit the scope of data collection to the detriment of data quality. Limited access to certain geographic areas affects data coverage, for instance where security risks impede entry to informal settlements. Political considerations also come into play where definitions of internal displacement deviate from that of the Guiding Principles. For example, the definition used in Côte d'Ivoire's 2014 census was limited to displacement caused by recent

armed conflicts and hence excluded people displaced at other times or for other reasons.

Even when the operational and political limitations are adequately mitigated, technical decisions related to methodological design may further narrow the definition by setting parameters for data collection, for example selecting a specific timeframe or focusing on certain causes of displacement or geographic areas. These may well be sound decisions for better linking of data collection to specific uses, but they may still limit the ability to capture the complete picture of displacement, potentially omitting some vulnerable groups.

In addition to challenges associated with identifying IDPs, no standard practice for establishing the end of displacement through data exists, despite broad acceptance of the conceptual definition contained in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Framework for Durable Solutions for IDPs.² The decision by some actors to stop monitoring certain caseloads is often based on overly simplified and often politically-influenced criteria (such as physical return) for determining that a durable solution has been achieved, even if displacement-related challenges persist; the use of such criteria is out of step with the Guiding Principles. On the other hand, IDPs may also remain in the data indefinitely because there are no clear criteria for assessing solutions, an issue that creates challenges but is welcomed by some actors as it avoids the danger of IDPs' premature and arbitrary removal from data systems.

Reflecting the principle of non-discrimination

Failing to understand the position of IDPs relative to the non-displaced communities they live among can limit

the understanding and application of the principle of non-discrimination contained in the Guiding Principles. This often results in assistance that prioritises IDPs while overlooking the needs of others, or that fails to reflect the specific challenges that IDPs still face. This can be avoided by adopting a comparative approach between population groups and employing qualitative methods that are specifically designed to discern evidence of discrimination.³

For example, urban profiling undertaken in Mogadishu revealed that all population groups living in unplanned, informal settlements experienced poverty; however, the IDP population faced specific challenges resulting in a comparatively lower standard of living and a higher likelihood of eviction. These results clarified the responses that required a specific focus on IDPs and the responses that needed to target the urban poor as a whole.

Informing durable solutions

The Guiding Principles emphasise IDPs' right to an informed and voluntary choice regarding their future settlement (whether returning to their place of habitual residence or settling in another location); they also outline national authorities' responsibility to provide an environment where IDPs can overcome displacement-related challenges. However, understanding how this can be supported requires disaggregated data on IDPs' preferences, skills, capacities and vulnerabilities, and needs to be combined with an overview of the broader social, economic, environmental and political context.

This contextualisation enables more informed and coherent action between humanitarian and development interventions. This is especially relevant in urban areas, where the vast majority of displaced persons reside and where there are a number of complex systems to navigate, including services, infrastructure and a mix of informal and formal governance structures.⁴ To be sustainable, policy making and programming need to complement and support existing structures and enhance social cohesion. Where IDPs reside in camps in close proximity to urban areas, such as

in El Fasher, Sudan, supporting sustainable local integration requires consideration of urban planning needs, while supporting sustainable returns must be informed by the extent to which return areas offer physical safety, access to basic services, and peaceful coexistence with current residents.⁵

IDP participation in shaping solutions

The Guiding Principles require the guarantee of IDPs' full participation in the planning and management of solutions. This means that IDPs should be involved in shaping and implementing the data processes that produce evidence on their situations, and that they should have access to this evidence to inform their own decisions. In reality this rarely happens, and while there is discussion about data sharing between those agencies providing assistance, there is little emphasis on sharing data and/or findings with the subjects themselves. Moreover, the information needs that IDPs might identify for their own decision making is rarely prioritised over data required for assistance provision and other operational planning.

In Colombia, extensive data collected on the displaced population is used as the basis for the government's programmatic response. Although this analysis has resulted in relevant actions for many IDPs, consultations with communities have revealed that some population groups, such as indigenous communities, perceive their situation and priority needs differently from the majority of the IDP population. Work is underway to improve this approach and ensure that a more consultative analysis is applied.

More broadly, although work is taking place to strengthen the engagement of IDPs in data processes,⁶ bolder efforts are needed to ensure the full and meaningful engagement of affected communities, including as important users of data.

Primary responsibility of national authorities

Although in many contexts national authorities are indeed involved in collecting data on internal displacement, only in a few cases are governments genuinely leading

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these efforts. In even fewer cases are data systems linked to national statistical systems and therefore incorporated effectively into national planning and policy processes.

Colombia offers an example of where a government institution (its Unit for Victims' Assistance and Reparations) has been mandated and given the resources to lead on IDP data, thereby ensuring that the data informs national action. Somalia's federal authorities have also demonstrated leadership in developing their own data systems with support from international partners, aiming to integrate IDPs into national and urban planning processes as well as Sustainable Development Goal implementation and reporting.

In many contexts, the most readily available data on IDPs are produced by international partners who provide humanitarian assistance. While this is valuable where national authorities are unwilling or unable to take on this work effectively, the lack of government leadership or genuine participation in producing data can lead to a disconnect between data and decision making at the national level. This can be particularly damaging in protracted displacement crises where development interventions and planning are critical.

More investment in capacity-building strategies is crucial to address this gap. These strategies should ensure that relevant stakeholders – primarily governmental authorities and statistical agencies at the local, regional and national levels – can increasingly take on leadership roles to shape and implement data processes. To be effective, this requires investment in longer-term partnerships that prioritise trust building, exchange and dialogue as

well as a clear institutional and political commitment to making it work.⁷

Through addressing issues relating to each of these aspects – context, non-discrimination, durable solutions, IDP participation and national authorities' responsibilities – we can create stronger connections between the normative frameworks and the data upon which our work should be based, helping to collectively improve evidence-informed implementation of the Guiding Principles.

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1. See also Chemaly W S, Baal N K and Jacobsen K (2016) *Forced Displacement Go Figure: Shaking the Box of IDP Profiling* bit.ly/Chemaly-Baal-Jacobsen-2016 and Baal N and Ronkainen L (2017) *Obtaining representative data on IDPs: challenges and recommendations* UNHCR Technical Series: 2017/1 www.unhcr.org/598088104.pdf.

2. See Beyani C, Baal N K and Caterina M (2016) 'Conceptual challenges and practical solutions in situations of internal displacement', *Forced Migration Review* issue 52 www.fmreview.org/solutions/beyani-baal-caterina

3. The JIPS Essential Toolkit offers a collection of easily accessible tools and methodology guides for conducting a profiling exercise from start to finish. <https://jet.jips.org/>

4. See also Global Alliance for Urban Crises' Charter bit.ly/UrbanCrisesCharter

5. A recent inter-agency process led by the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs has produced the Durable Solutions Indicator Library and Analysis Guide providing tools for analysing durable solutions based on the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs. <https://inform-durablesolutions-idp.org/>

6. For example, the participation revolution led by the IASC Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations.

7. See *Making Data Useful: How to improve the evidence-base for joint responses to forced displacement?*, JIPS Conference Report bit.ly/JIPS-conf-2017



Improving statistics on internal displacement

The Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics (EGRIS) developed a Technical Report on the Statistics of IDPs that outlines definitional, methodological and operational considerations based on current practice on the production of official statistics on IDPs. Endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in 2018, the group has been mandated for a second phase of work that will develop international recommendations on IDP statistics, addressing many of the challenges raised in this article, including a comprehensive **statistical framework for internal displacement**, as well as guidance for its practical implementation. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/expert-group-on-refugee-statistics>