

November 2020

www.fmreview.org/recognising-refugees

Internal displacement: reflections on prevention, protection and solutions

Samuel Cheung and Sebastian von Einsiedel

With record numbers of people internally displaced, the urgency of the situation has triggered greater international attention and a stronger imperative for States and the international community to act. The GP20 initiative has highlighted a number of opportunities to allow much-needed progress to be made in finding bold, concrete solutions.

In recent years, internal displacement has reached levels unprecedented in the post-Cold War era, with a record 45.7 million people internally displaced as a result of conflict and violence at the end of 2019, and 5.1 million as a result of disasters.¹ This represents an almost two-fold increase since 1998 when the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were adopted.

This rise in internal displacement can be attributed to an increase in the number, length and lethality of armed conflicts around the world over the past decade, the fact that the number of climate-related disasters has doubled over the past 20 years compared with the two previous decades, and the reality that displacement is becoming increasingly protracted. Worryingly, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is projected to rise further due to the adverse effects of climate change, among other things, with people's needs and vulnerabilities compounded now by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

New opportunities

While the numbers might seem discouraging, new opportunities have emerged for a collective effort to make progress. First, Member States committed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind, including IDPs who are often among those left furthest behind. And the number of displacement-affected States developing laws and policies on internal displacement has significantly increased in recent years, particularly those ratifying or domesticating the Kampala Convention. Second, UN agencies, too, have demonstrated renewed

commitment to addressing internal displacement, including UNHCR with its 2019 IDP policy² that reaffirms its commitments toward IDPs. At the system-wide level, the UN Secretary-General's establishment of a High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement,³ with its strong representation of displacement-affected States, has injected new momentum and optimism into the debate around the issue.

And third, we see promising innovative practices and approaches on the ground – by displacement-affected governments, local authorities, UN agencies and others, often working together – to advance durable solutions to internal displacement. The GP20 Plan of Action for Advancing Prevention, Protection and Solutions for IDPs⁴ has demonstrated that joining forces enables more effective identification and fostering of good practices and promotes more inclusive and strategic action. If scaled up, these practices and new approaches have the potential to significantly reduce the number of those in protracted displacement.

Prevention

These practices and approaches, many of which are featured in this special FMR feature, can be helpfully categorised into the three elements of the GP20 slogan: 'prevent, protect, resolve'. With regard to the first element, robust conflict prevention and climate change mitigation would of course constitute the most effective and sustainable measures to prevent internal displacement. Even though such measures may seem out of reach – at least in the short term – in light of the state of global politics, we possess the tools and knowledge to reduce



UNHCR/Gloria Ramazan

Internally displaced woman works with her host family who are helping to build her new home, as part of UNHCR's shelter project in North Kivu Province, DRC.

future internal displacement, in particular with respect to disaster displacement.

In this regard, priority must be given to investing in our capacity to further enable displacement-sensitive emergency preparedness, climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction, with a particular eye to strengthening the resilience of vulnerable communities. Unfortunately, these areas remain woefully underfunded and inadequately targeted at the countries and populations at greatest risk. As of 2020, the 15 countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, of which 11 were the subject of an interagency humanitarian appeal, received only 5.8% of the global funding allocated by multilateral adaptation funds.⁵

Anticipatory action, and forecast-based financing in particular, has been shown to strengthen resilience among vulnerable populations, preventing the conditions that give rise to displacement, for instance by giving vulnerable people the means to adapt to an impending drought.⁶ Prevention also involves analysis of root causes, such as how climate change can simultaneously drive displacement, contribute to conflict resulting in displacement, and exacerbate existing displacement conditions.⁷

Protection

Concrete action that falls under the second element of the GP20's slogan – protect – remains acutely important since each year there continue to be millions of people newly displaced, joining those already living in situations of protracted displacement and facing acute protection challenges. Burkina Faso is a case in point, where conflict has led to the fastest growing displacement crisis in Africa; Syria is another, where war is still being waged nine years on; and then there are places such as Colombia, DRC and Yemen, and numerous others, where

protecting IDPs cannot wait for tomorrow.

Key factors for protection can include commitments to reinforce respect for international humanitarian law in conflict and disasters, and collaboration that takes into account the heightened vulnerability of displaced persons, including intersectional vulnerabilities – for example, for women and girls, men and boys, persons with disabilities, older persons or marginalised communities. With the Guiding Principles as the foundation, protection also works best when it is integrated from prevention through to emergency response; where the 'centrality of protection' (that is, the placing of protection at the centre of all humanitarian action⁸) is applied to the local context and is practically implemented through establishing concrete and achievable priorities for the entire humanitarian community; and where the participation of displaced communities is an integral part of decision-making. With global displacement today more urban than rural, protecting IDPs must increasingly take account of the various demographic, historical, environmental, economic, social and political dimensions of urban contexts, not to mention the collateral effects of urban warfare in cities, the long-term impacts of

November 2020

www.fmreview.org/recognising-refugees

natural disasters on neighbourhoods, and local housing and land tenure systems.

Advancing durable solutions

To advance solutions – the third element in the GP20 slogan – there are two fundamental ingredients for progress. The first, of particular interest to the High-Level Panel, is to strengthen the commitment by displacement-affected States to live up to their primary responsibility to address internal displacement within their territory. While such a commitment has to emerge from among States themselves, the international community can incentivise political will in a number of ways by emphasising the development and economic benefits of addressing internal displacement; by encouraging the adoption of IDP laws and policies; by helping affected countries generate the necessary data and evidence on IDPs' location, demographics and needs; and by helping build national capacities to lead such interventions.

The second key factor for advancing durable solutions lies in strengthening effective partnerships and collaboration across the humanitarian and development sectors in order to help IDPs return to normality, maintain their dignity and ensure their self-reliance. Commitments at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit towards strengthened humanitarian–development collaboration and the recent UN Development System reform (with its reinvigoration of the Resident Coordinator system with independent, more empowered Resident Coordinators) have created a conducive infrastructure for work across the humanitarian–development divide. Durable Solutions Initiatives in Somalia and Ethiopia, anchored within the Resident Coordinators' Offices, provide helpful templates for 'One UN' approaches to international displacement elsewhere. Meanwhile, donors will need to follow suit by introducing greater coherence into their bifurcated funding streams that make it difficult to finance interventions – such as durable solutions – that fall in between the humanitarian–development divide.

Humanitarian–development collaboration is equally required at the national level.

Encouragingly, a number of displacement-affected governments, too, have developed 'whole-of-government' approaches that reflect the multidisciplinary challenge of addressing internal displacement. Most importantly, they will need to ensure IDPs' access to social security schemes and their inclusion in national development plans.

The way forward

How do we build on these opportunities and maintain momentum? Clearly, governments and States remain front and centre, supported by the international community, in the need to reinforce and implement their commitment to address internal displacement from preparedness to emergencies to solutions. Initiatives such as GP20 have a role to play in fostering collaboration across regions and continents and in identifying good practices. Both the collaboration and the good practices have immense potential to be scaled up, and to engender and support solid commitments that will help further prevention, protection and solutions for internally displaced people.

Samuel Cheung cheung@unhcr.org

Chief of Internal Displacement Section, UNHCR
www.unhcr.org

Sebastian von Einsiedel

Sebastian.einsiedel@un.org

Senior Advisor on Internal Displacement, OCHA
www.unocha.org

Samuel Cheung and Sebastian von Einsiedel are GP20 Co-Chairs.

1. IDMC Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020 www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/
2. UNHCR (2019) *Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement* bit.ly/UNHCR-IDP-Policy-2019
3. www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/
4. bit.ly/GPC-GP20PlanOfAction
5. Notre Dame ND-Gain Index at <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/>; data on disbursements by multilateral climate adaptation funds at bit.ly/ClimateFundsUpdate; OCHA Global Humanitarian Overview 2020 bit.ly/GHO-2020
6. See, for instance, IFRC (2018) 'Forecast-based Financing for vulnerable herders in Mongolia', DRR in Action Case Study bit.ly/IFRC-FbF-Mongolia
7. See FMR Root causes mini-feature www.fmreview.org/return
8. bit.ly/Centrality-of-Protection