

The Sustainable Development Goals and IDPs

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Having adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, States must be helped to make their promise to 'leave no one behind' a reality for IDPs.

In 2015, internally displaced persons (IDPs) were recognised in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, marking the first time an international framework has acknowledged the importance of including in a country's development plan those who have been internally displaced. Launched in 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had set tangible targets including to cut extreme poverty, reduce child mortality and promote universal primary education. The MDGs, however, neglected to take into account the needs of people affected by disasters and conflict, such as IDPs. By the time the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were agreed in 2015 there was much greater awareness that millions of IDPs and refugees had generally been forgotten in development processes, and that this omission needed to be remedied.

Over the years a number of concrete initiatives (primarily for refugees) had attempted to implement development solutions for those forcibly displaced, including IDPs. In the 1980s, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, worked to reintegrate refugees in the aftermath of conflicts in Africa and Central America. In the early 2000s, initiatives such as the Brookings process focused on bridging the gap between humanitarian and development efforts for refugees (and to a lesser extent IDPs) and finding durable solutions. Later, the Transitional Solutions Initiative, launched in 2012 by UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in collaboration with the World Bank, set up small-scale joint humanitarian–development programmes in several countries. These programmes focused on livelihoods and secure and affordable housing to foster the self-reliance of refugees and IDPs.

Other efforts were made to make systemic changes to the international community's

approach to solutions. These include the 2010 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons,¹ which aims to clarify the concept of a durable solution and provides general guidance on how to achieve it, and the 2011 UN Secretary-General's Policy Committee Decision on Durable Solutions in the Aftermath of Conflict.² The latter called on UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators to take the lead in developing strategies, in consultation with national governments, for concrete actions that UN agencies, funds and programmes could undertake in the aftermath of conflict to reintegrate returning refugees and IDPs. Although piloted in a few countries it was not systematically implemented and national governments were not sufficiently included in the development and implementation of strategies. Nevertheless, these decisions taken at the highest level of the UN gave a strong signal that more had to be done to find solutions for those forcibly displaced, and in 2014 the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNHCR, the UN Migration Agency (IOM) and the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs undertook joint advocacy to push for the inclusion of IDPs and refugees in the SDGs, which were then being negotiated in New York.

Among the discussions relevant to IDPs was whether or not to include a specific target to reduce the number of IDPs and refugees by a certain percentage by 2030 through the provision of durable solutions.³ While many governments – including some of those from countries which had experienced internal displacement – agreed to include such a target, consensus could not be reached and IDPs and refugees were only included as part of the definition of vulnerable groups in the political declaration introducing the

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22-year-old woman from Maiduguri, Nigeria: "Insurgents attacked my neighbourhood. They were shooting everywhere, people were completely panicked. Both my father and mother were killed when they attempted to flee. My siblings and I managed to flee in different directions. I don't know where they are now. Aid agencies found a room with a host family for me but I just miss my own family."

goals. Negotiations were undertaken by development officials (overseen by ministries responsible for economic development) and did not generally include humanitarian or human rights experts – those most familiar with IDP and refugee issues.

Progress through the SDGs

While the SDGs do not include specific targets on refugees and IDPs they do acknowledge displaced people as a vulnerable group in need of particular attention. The SDGs also recognise the factors that risk jeopardising progress, including global health threats, more frequent and intense natural disasters, spiralling conflict, humanitarian crises and forced displacement itself.⁴ Since their adoption there has been growing awareness of, and agreement on, the need for a comprehensive approach to displacement, one that goes beyond addressing immediate humanitarian needs, reduces vulnerabilities over time, and is anchored in a country's development plans. This is also the focus of an OCHA-commissioned study⁵ which underscores that IDPs should be able to rebuild their lives in accordance with the fundamental standards of human rights and dignity, even while a conflict is not fully resolved or the impacts of disasters have

not ceased. The study's recommendations encourage humanitarian and development actors to conduct joint analyses of IDPs' needs, vulnerabilities and capacities and of the obstacles to durable solutions as early as possible in order to agree a strategy to achieve clear and quantifiable collective outcomes. The study also promotes cooperation with national governments, recommending that they integrate internal displacement into their national development and SDG implementation plans. In practice, several countries – including Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria and Ukraine – have included the needs of IDPs in their plans to reach the SDGs, even if specific targets for IDPs are not specified.

The UN is supporting governments to implement the SDGs through providing technical support and expert missions. In El Salvador and Ukraine, the UN has provided governments with specific advice on how to include IDPs in their roadmap to reach the SDGs. And, already, as part of the Durable Solutions Initiative, collective outcomes on displacement (strategic and measurable results which allow for multi-year collaborative interventions) have been developed by the Government of Somalia, with UN support. Efforts to

include IDPs as part of collective outcomes between humanitarian and development actors are also under way in Ukraine.

More can be done, however, to help governments include IDPs in their national development plans and SDG roadmaps, and to make sure that they can follow through on their commitments. First, governments should designate a high-level focal point to coordinate action among relevant ministries, national and international partners and IDPs, who could lead efforts to integrate IDPs in national development plans. Second, governments need to have an accurate estimate of where people have found refuge, of their needs over time, their priorities and plans for the future, and the situation in their areas of origin – all of which requires improvements in national statistical systems.⁶ Third, UN efforts to support SDG roadmaps should pay special attention to internal displacement in countries with high numbers of IDPs, as has been done in El Salvador, Somalia and Ukraine. In Ukraine and El Salvador, multi-disciplinary UN teams with expertise on internal displacement have advised national governments: in El Salvador with a focus on ensuring an effective and comprehensive protection system for victims and witnesses, including for those displaced by violence; and in Ukraine with a focus on measures to better integrate IDPs

as part of a fiscally sustainable system of social protection services and benefits.⁷

Alongside these efforts, humanitarian and development actors should cooperate from the outset of the crisis to ensure coherent and mutually reinforcing support of national efforts, with the ultimate aim of ensuring long-term, sustainable solutions for IDPs.

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1. IASC (2010) 'Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons' bit.ly/IASC-Framework-Durable-Solutions
2. UN Secretary-General Policy Committee (2011) 'Decision No.2011/20 – Durable Solutions: Follow up to the Secretary-General's 2009 report on peacebuilding' bit.ly/UNSG-201120-Durable-Solutions-2011
3. This target was proposed in a 2014 open letter to Member States from UNHCR, OCHA, IOM, UNHCR and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs.
4. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>
5. Kälin W and Chapuisat-Entwistle H (2017) *Breaking the Impasse: Reducing Protracted Internal Displacement as a Collective Outcome* bit.ly/Kalin-Chapuisat-Entwistle-2017
6. See EGRIS (2018) 'Technical Report on Statistics of Internally Displaced Persons: Current Practice and Recommendations for Improvement' bit.ly/EGRIS-technicalreport-IDPs-2018
A group of States, UN organisations and NGOs are already providing technical advice on this issue and the Durable Solutions Indicators Library is an important new tool: <https://inform-durablesolutions-idp.org/>.
7. Advice was provided through the UN Development Group's MAPS (Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support) initiative – part of UN efforts to help countries adopting cross-thematic approaches to implement the SDGs.



Additional resources



FMR GP10 special issue

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This special issue of FMR reflects discussions at an international conference on the Ten Years of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement – GP10 – held in Oslo in October 2008. It includes shortened versions of some of the conference presentations, plus a selection of other articles, most of which present case studies on the application of the Guiding Principles in different countries.

See www.fmreview.org/issues for other FMR issues focusing on internal displacement or use the FMR website's search function to search for individual articles/case-studies.

Brookings IDP archive now online

The archive of the Brookings Institution's project on internally displaced persons, which had been donated to Oxford University's Bodleian Libraries, is now available in Oxford's Weston Library and online at bit.ly/Brookings-IDP-archive (Cataloguing made possible by the support of the Refugee Studies Centre and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs)