

THEMATIC SERIES
THE INVISIBLE MAJORITY

This thematic series addresses the gap in awareness, data and knowledge about the relationship between internal displacement, cross-border and return movements.



THE DISPLACEMENT CONTINUUM

Research agenda and call for partners

NOVEMBER 2017

It would be a great failure of humanity to limit whom we help based on lines on a map. Our work is guided by humanity and humanity has no borders ... We must leave no one behind. This was the world's pledge through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Agenda for Humanity. There can be no sustainable development if the more than 40 million internally displaced people are left behind.

- Open letter from the UN's emergency relief coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, and co-signatories,¹ September 2016

Western media have been flooded in recent years with harrowing images and stories of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants risking – and in thousands of cases, losing - their lives on dangerous journeys over land and sea. News of their plight has raised awareness of distant chaos and human suffering and, quite rightly, prompted landmark political agreements such as the September 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.²

The global focus on people who have been forced to flee their countries, or were left with little choice but to do so, is important in these times of fragile solidarity. It contrasts starkly, however, with the meagre coverage given to the millions of people displaced within their own countries. As political efforts are directed toward strengthening borders there is a real risk that what happens behind them will receive even less attention. This has significant and often life-threatening implications not only for refugees and migrants in transit and those returning to their countries, but also for those who stay behind.

The vast majority of people who flee their homes to escape conflict, violence and disasters do not cross an international border. The global number of people internally displaced by conflict and violence has been roughly twice that of refugees

in recent years, and the gap between estimates for the two groups has been growing for the last 20 years.³ Of the 65 million people forcibly displaced around the world today, 40 million – or more than six out of ten – are internally displaced people (IDPs).⁴ They have fled for exactly the same reasons, but because they have stayed within their own countries their plight is all but forgotten. They are the invisible majority of displaced people.⁵

The relationship between internal displacement and movements of refugees and migrants is not well understood, but two assumptions can be made. First, that many if not most refugees were internally displaced before they crossed an international border, even if only for a short period or in transit; and second, that IDPs are prime candidates for becoming refugees or migrants.⁶

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to support these hypotheses, but there is not enough data to determine how many people who flee or migrate across borders were IDPs before doing so, or how many returning refugees and migrants go back home to a situation of internal displacement. Nor is there sufficient understanding of the processes that lead from internal to external displacement and migration, or the vulnerabilities that contribute to protracted displacement or onward movement when people return to their countries of origin. This represents a major knowledge gap.

An evidence base that provides better quantitative and qualitative understanding of the entire displacement continuum, from the drivers of onward movements across borders to return processes, is vital at this juncture. It would allow governments, policy-makers and responders on the ground to better meet displaced people's immediate protection and assistance needs at their points of departure, transit and arrival. This in turn has the potential to strengthen systematic approaches to preparedness and response, and to address the long-term political and development challenges brought about by unresolved and protracted internal displacement.



It is a bee-hive of activity at the Dhobley Way Station, Somalia, where returnees are expected to register before they can proceed to their final destination. Photo: NRC, 2016

In the coming years, IDMC will set out to fill this gap through our monitoring, research and policy work. This paper introduces our proposed thematic programme. It also provides a list of potential case studies and current and targeted partners. To undertake this huge task, we need and invite all the data, information and support that affected communities, international agencies, NGOs, academic institutions and governments can provide. The plans outlined in this paper are also dependent on obtaining sufficient financial support.

The displacement continuum

Every displaced person has a different story. Some leave their homes with little or no notice, fleeing an imminent attack or disaster with only what they can carry. Others have notice of an impending crisis and more time to prepare for their flight. Once they have been forced to leave their place of residence, effectively becoming internally displaced, many have to flee again, whether it be to the next neighbourhood or beyond.

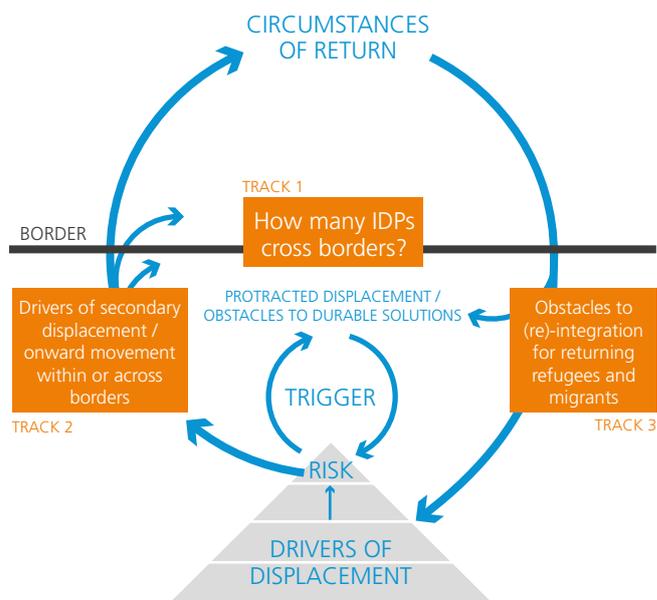
Some may find themselves in pendular displacement within or across borders, coming back to their homes regularly to check on their property or land. Others give up on the prospect of peace or reconstruction and flee further afield or seek refuge abroad, often encouraged by family, friends or countrymen who have made the same journey. Some of these movements happen en masse, but in many cases people leave individually or in small groups, making them even more difficult to detect.

There are also many ways in which a person who has fled across a border may return. Whether they are deported or return voluntarily, and whether they are documented or travel incognito, has a significant impact on their chances of sustainable reintegration in their country of origin. Whether a person returns from abroad or another part of their own country, achieving a durable solution to their displacement is a gradual and often long-term process of removing obstacles to (re)integration.

This involves reducing the needs, risks and vulnerabilities created by their having been forced to flee. Many returning refugees face de facto internal displacement if they are unable to go back to their place of origin or sustainably reintegrate elsewhere, or secondary internal displacement if they are forced to uproot their lives again.

From their initial flight to escaping the displacement cycle, people forced to leave their homes find themselves at different points along a continuum, with different needs, risks and vulnerabilities (see figure 1). Increasing their resilience requires the combined efforts of governments at the national, subnational and local level, international humanitarian and development agencies, IDPs themselves, local communities, civil society, the private sector, and human rights and peace and security organisations. A more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between internal displacement and cross-border movement is vital for policy-makers and donors to identify which of these stakeholders need to be engaged and when.

FIGURE 1. THE DISPLACEMENT CONTINUUM



IDMC's focus

In 2017, IDMC committed to a more systematic approach to understanding the displacement continuum by expanding our monitoring and research efforts to analyse the relationship between internal displacement, cross-border and return movements. A number of questions need to be answered if governments, policy-makers, humanitarian and development agencies and others are to meet the needs of all forcibly displaced people, regardless of whether they flee within or across borders. To do so, we have established the following three monitoring and research tracks for our thematic programme.

Track 1: Building a common data set encompassing internal displacement, migration and refugee flows

We need to get better at capturing quantitative data on internal and cross-border movements. The first step toward building a comprehensive dataset is to adopt a common model that defines and accounts for all of the relevant stocks and flows. Only by adopting a common data model will we be able to consistently determine how many IDPs eventually leave their countries, how many refugees and migrants become IDPs when they return, and where and when these phenomena occur. Adopting a joined-up approach to data collection will also help to identify how many people might have been unaccounted for either before or after crossing an international border.

If datasets on IDPs, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are to be aligned and interoperable, data also needs to be collected using complementary definitions, standards and methods that are systematically applied. Those gathering data should strive for collaborative and regular collection and profiling exercises, and to monitor people's situations and trajectories, including across borders and back again, over longer periods of time.

Key questions:

- What proportion of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants were previously IDPs, and how does this vary between different countries and crises?
- What patterns and trends of onward and cross-border movement emerge, disaggregated by location, age, sex and other characteristics?
- Do some types of crisis lead to more cross-border movement than others, and at what point do IDPs flee beyond their own borders?
- How many refugees and migrants become de facto or secondarily displaced upon return to their countries of origin?

To provide answers to these questions, we will develop and refine our methodology to capture data on the scale of cross-border movements more systematically, and we will work with our data collection partners, notably the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), to make collection systems interoperable. Through shared definitions and standards, we will work toward a global evidence base on the scale of internal and cross border movements.

Track 2: Mapping the drivers and processes of onward movement across borders

We need more qualitative data and clarity on the combination of factors that facilitate and inhibit IDPs' onward and cross-border flight. Available evidence suggests that the push and pull factors for internal displacement from areas affected by conflict are similar to those reported by refugees. Understanding how and when people make the decision to flee abroad and which issues weigh heaviest on them is key, and a prerequisite for national and international responders to prioritise resources and offer the right type of support when and where it is needed.

Key questions:

- Under what circumstances do IDPs cross a border rather than try to find safety elsewhere in their own country? How important is proximity to an accessible and open border?
- Is physical safety and security the prime concern for people who flee abroad, which would reflect a clear failure to protect them at home?
- How important are social and economic considerations, such as livelihoods, employment and education opportunities?
- What other push or pull factors lead to a decision to flee abroad?

Through localised and empirical research we will map the drivers and processes behind onward movement with systemic analyses and system dynamics models of the environmental, socioeconomic, political and security variables that prompt, force or hinder movement across the displacement continuum. Such work has to be a collaborative effort between regional experts, humanitarian responders, economists and development specialists.

These analyses will be validated with quantitative empirical data, but they will also require significant qualitative information, including the anonymised interview transcripts and profiling data that agencies collect at different points of transit and arrival, but which are not currently shared consistently. These exercises need to be prioritised, expanded and adequately funded to increase their coverage and allow for the collection of more data over longer periods of time.



After entering Mexico illegally near Ciudad Hidalgo on their way to the US border, many Central and South American migrants continue their journey on the freight train known as La Bestia, the Beast. Photo: IOM/Keith Dannemiller, April 2014

Track 3: Monitoring cross-border returns and the risk of future and protracted displacement

We need a better understanding of the circumstances in which people return to their countries of origin, whether they go back voluntarily or under external pressure, and the risk this carries of de facto or secondary internal displacement. We need insights into the proportion of people who return to their home areas or find themselves living in internal displacement camps, and those who eventually conclude they have no choice but to go back to their country of refuge or move on to a third country.

Thorough contextual analyses of the conditions in designated return areas, and the ability of national and local authorities to respond adequately to the needs of returnees, will be key to measuring the sustainability of returns and the risk of onward movement or displacement.

Key questions:

- What were the circumstances of return? Was it voluntary, coerced or forced (deportation)?
- Does the availability of cash-based assistance influence the decision to return, and what impact does it have on subsequent sustainability?
- Do returnees go back to their homes/areas of origin or elsewhere, and why or why not?
- What are the main opportunities for and obstacles to returning refugees and migrants integrating sustainably in their chosen place of settlement?

We will advocate for and provide technical expertise to agencies and authorities on the ground to monitor returnees' trajectories over time, not just at drop-off but much further into their settlement and reintegration process. This means gathering data on the full range of benchmarks contained in the IASC framework for durable solutions systematically, comprehensively and longitudinally, and in ways that are collaborative and interoperable.

We also need to reach a consensus on the notion that a returning refugee or migrant who faces conditions of insecurity and precariousness and is unable to integrate sustainably in their place of origin or elsewhere is at risk of de facto or secondary displacement. At this point, they require a set of solutions more specifically tailored to meet the needs of those displaced under the purview of national protection. This reality demands a more integrated response to durable solutions as a measure to prevent future displacement.

Building the evidence base: a call for partners

With this thematic programme, we aim to paint a more complete quantitative and qualitative picture of the displacement continuum, from the drivers of onward movement across borders to the processes of return. Case studies will require in-depth and in some case long-term field research through local partners, and such work is already underway in Afghanistan and parts of Central America. If we receive sufficient financial support, we will also set up multi-year monitoring and research projects gathering evidence across the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas and Asia, in countries such as Colombia, DRC, Iraq, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Sudan and Syria.

To undertake this formidable task, we have formed partnerships with or are currently reaching out to UNHCR, IOM, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the World Bank, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Samuel Hall, REACH, the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS), and a range of academic and local research organisations. We will also need the support of organisations and institutions that advocate for displaced people's rights, such as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs, NRC, Christian Aid, the International Conference of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), Human Rights Watch and the ACT Alliance.

We also invite the support of other international agencies and organisations, NGOs, academic institutions and governments interested supporting the objectives outlined above, whether through a working partnership or financial backing.

Endnotes

- 1 IASC, Open letter by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and co-signatories, *The Invisible Majority: Helping Internally Displaced People*, September 2016, <https://goo.gl/kwQgkt>
- 2 UN New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, A/RES/71/1, 3 October 2016, <https://goo.gl/QAGVRu>
- 3 IDMC, *Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID 2017)*, <https://goo.gl/4Ks8y9>
- 4 UNHCR, *Global Trends in Forced Displacement 2016*, <https://goo.gl/XN1oUy>
- 5 IASC, Open letter by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and co-signatories, *The Invisible Majority: Helping Internally Displaced People*, September 2016, <https://goo.gl/kwQgkt>
- 6 IDMC, *Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID 2017)*, <https://goo.gl/4Ks8y9>

Cover photo: A displaced girl has just arrived to Afghanistan from Pakistan with her family, after repeated detention in Khyber Pashtonkhwa, Pakistan. Photo: NRC/Enayatullah Azad, 2017

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