

CONCLUSION

“In terms of the magnitude of the crisis and the challenge it poses to the international community, today’s problem of internal displacement is no less acute or pressing than the post-WWII refugee crisis.”

– Roberta Cohen and Francis Deng, 1998²⁸⁵

IDMC was established almost 20 years ago to provide the international community with a unique source of information on the numbers, needs and vulnerabilities of IDPs worldwide. IDMC was set up to document, collate and centralise data on internal displacement, to analyse its many drivers, patterns and impacts, and to shape and inform government responses to the phenomenon. By synthesising the latest evidence and research on what has become a truly global crisis, our annual GRID report reveals the growing scale and complexity of internal displacement, and the many shortfalls in national and international efforts to address it.

Some reflection is useful before we look ahead. We can’t help but notice recurring patterns and themes in our annual findings, the most glaring of which is the relentless rise in the number of people whose lives are uprooted by internal displacement. Our calls for more data, for comprehensive solutions that bridge the humanitarian to development gap, and for more political investment in addressing the causes of displacement have gone unheeded, leading us to the following three conclusions.

There is a gulf between aspiration and reality. The international community has said it wants to halve the number of IDPs by 2030, but we expect the amount of displacement to continue increasing.

This is because the causes of displacement risk have not been addressed. Donor spending has increased, but not enough international assistance is directed toward the factors that give rise to crises in the first place. This year more money was spent on resettling refugees in

donor countries than in the places where the crises that forced them to flee originated and continue to fester. As our figures for DRC reveal, neglected crises do not go away. They erupt in cycles, sending shockwaves through already fragile systems and institutions, and adding to the misery of long-suffering and increasingly vulnerable people.

Until the structural drivers of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment are addressed, conflict and human rights violations will continue to cause displacement and impede solutions. At the same time, more and more people are expected to move into areas prone to natural hazards, particularly urban centres on floodplains and along coasts exposed to cyclones and storm surges. The displacement and impoverishment disasters cause are not inevitable byproducts of rapid urbanisation and economic development, but they will continue to happen unless more is done to address people’s vulnerability and exposure, and as long as those displaced are regarded as little more than collateral damage in these processes.

The extent of international attention, resources and political will does not match the current scale of displacement and human suffering.

Roberta Cohen and Francis Deng hit the nail on the head as long ago as 1998: “What happens in one country reverberates regionally and even internationally. Conflicts allowed to fester and go unchecked can produce mass migration and leave deep political and economic scars which ultimately affect the economic well-being and political security of neighbouring states and of the international order as a whole... A world in which the privileged among nations ignore the plight of the unfortunate can be neither prosperous nor safe for anyone.”²⁸⁶

The sad truth is that in the 20 years since they made their comments, there have been few meaningful signs of the political will, solidarity

and investment needed to address internal displacement. States continue to renege on their commitments to document, and in some cases even recognise, the phenomenon. We struggle with data gaps largely because of authorities' failure to track IDPs' trajectories and vulnerabilities over time, or to allow others the access they need to do so.

There are roughly twice as many people living in internal displacement as a result of conflict in the world as there are refugees, yet the issue was sidelined at the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants in September last year, considered only in terms of its potential for spilling across borders. The implicit recognition that this happens should be a point of departure, but it remains to be seen whether the international community comes to the all too obvious conclusion that refugee and migrant flows can be stemmed by addressing the causes they share with internal displacement.

We highlight the need for more information on IDPs' cross-border flight in this report in an effort to draw the world's attention to the fact that the underlying causes of displacement within and across borders are broadly the same. We aim to help governments and policymakers make the necessary connections between trajectories that are intricately interwoven and not only share similar drivers and patterns, but have similarly devastating impacts on people's lives.

Evidence alone is not enough.

The GRID reflects our best effort to paint a comprehensive picture of internal displacement. It is the sum of our partners' often heroic efforts to collect data in what can be the most challenging of circumstances. It is a truly collective output that we put forward on behalf of a broad range of people and institutions working to improve the world's understanding of the phenomenon, in the hope that better data and evidence will lead to better responses and better lives. The picture we paint may not be as rich or three-dimensional as we would like, but the evidence is robust and compelling.

Beyond the fact that famine and food security crises are currently taking place in some of the same countries that have produced the largest displacements, there are additional parallels between the two issues. The causes of famine, like those of internal displacement, are well understood and have been for years, but the

required measures are not taken despite accurate and timely early warnings and evidence-based calls to act.

What is needed at this juncture is far more than a solid evidence base. Providing evidence year after year has failed to elicit a response that reflects the scale and complexity of the picture we paint and the challenges we face. To the extent that the GRID holds up a mirror, the reflection it projects is one of indifference, lack of accountability and states' failure to protect their own people.

2018 marks the 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles. It will be an opportunity to reflect on the past, and look ahead to the future. Rather than repeat exhausted pleas to prevent and resolve forced internal displacement, in anticipation of the milestone we call on world leaders to make an explicit expression of political commitment to this end. The adoption of a strong new resolution on IDPs at the 72nd UN General Assembly in September 2017 would provide an opportunity to turn years of aspirational language into definitive and firm commitments.

Addressing internal displacement does not require a separate global compact. Given how interrelated the phenomenon is with other global issues, it can and should be woven into existing policies and frameworks. To do so, a conscious, deliberate and sustained political effort is required. If governments are serious about improving the many millions of lives blighted by internal displacement and preventing others from suffering the same upheaval and trauma in the future, they will need to recognise, as Francis Deng did in 1996, that national sovereignty implies responsibility both "as a national obligation and a global imperative."²⁸⁷