

A new dawn for IDP Data? Standardising IDP identification in large survey programmes will improve national baselines as well as humanitarian & development data.

Stein Vikan, EGRISS and Statistical Expert, and Wilhelmina Welsch, Joint Internal Displacement Profiling Service (JIPS)

Introduction

In anticipation of the upcoming SDG Summit in September this year, the UNSG's Action Agenda implementation in full swing and the overall momentum generated on the issue of Internal Displacement, the calls for data disaggregated by Forced Displacement status are increasingly louder and more urgent. Yet, updated statistics on one of the most vulnerable population groups in the world, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), have for long been missing in many countries – with good reasons. Situations of Internal Displacement bear specific challenges that require adapted methods and approaches – especially when it comes to identifying populations that are sometimes hard to find or do not want to be identified fearing exposure to violence and persecution.

This applies to both counting how many IDPs there are and describing their specific living conditions and key displacement-related vulnerabilities. A key obstacle has been the lack of standardisation of definitions and concepts to guide the production of data on IDPs – both as part of national systems as well as in the humanitarian and development data realms. This has for long impeded the ability to fully describe and compare the challenges those affected by Internal Displacement face.

Who is an Internally Displaced Person (IDP)? How can we make sure that IDPs are identified in a consistent and reliable manner in surveys across contexts and time, while avoiding under- or over-reporting?

With the endorsement of the International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS) by the UN Statistical Commission, a common statistical framework to produce reliable and comparable IDP statistics is now available – providing guidance to begin to answer the above questions. It has the potential to transform how we work by building up high-quality baselines that allow to highlight specific needs and vulnerabilities of those affected by Internal Displacement. While the implementation of the recommendations relies on national ownership and Government buy-in, one of the key pieces of the puzzle will be equally important to implement as part of the data systems of humanitarian and development actors: a standardised way to identify IDPs in sample surveys across the world. JIPS, as a founding member of the Expert Group on Refugee, IDP and Statelessness Statistics (EGRISS), in collaboration with JDC and UNHCR, has led the way in developing these standard questions.

They can pave the way to produce more timely and reliable statistics on IDPs, contribute to the Leave No One Behind agenda, and further allow for a better and more nuanced understanding of displacement and its many-faceted interlinkages with the achievement of the SDGs and the collective response to finding Durable Solutions.

Growing need for data disaggregated by Forced Displacement Status

What is not counted – does not count. To make IDPs more visible in statistics as well as any other analytical outputs, it is necessary to apply approaches that ensure that they are identified in a standardized way in the relevant data processes.

Prior to the endorsement of the IRIS, identifying IDPs was done based on available secondary sources, comparison of administrative data sources or through dedicated stand-alone exercises including specific IDP enumeration exercises. In 2021, JIPS conducted a review of current profiling practices with the aim of reflecting on the approaches used to identify IDPs in data collection exercises.¹ The review documented that broadly speaking three approaches to identifying IDPs in data collection exercises were used. The first is self-identification, where enumerators simply ask the respondents if they identify as an IDP. The second approach is to use a proxy indicator when direct questions are not considered feasible. Neither of these two approaches are considered sufficient for proper identification. The third and preferred option is criteria-based identification. In this approach, a sequence of questions is posed to the respondents and the responses are used to determine if a person/household should be considered IDPs against the criteria of the Guiding Principles². While this was identified as the preferred option, the study also showed that there was no standardised sequence of questions used amongst the countries reviewed. This indicated a clear need for standardization.

The Expert Group on Refugee, IDP and Statelessness Statistics (EGRISS)³ was originally endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2016,⁴ and was established with the specific goal of providing international statistical frameworks for refugee, IDP and statelessness statistics. A key outcome of the work of the Expert Group was the development of the International Recommendations for IDP Statistics (IRIS),⁵ which were endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in 2020.

The IRIS are a game-changer and can herald the dawn of a new era making data on Internal Displacement a predictable and reliable part of national data infrastructures, enable disaggregation and inform tailored policy and programming to addressing horizontal inequalities and displacement-related vulnerabilities, further contributing to conflict prevention.⁶

The recommendations provide National Statistical Offices with a clear statistical framework for producing IDP statistics – further fostering the responsibility of States as primary duty bearers in addressing Internal Displacement. The framework includes a statistical definition of what an IDP is based on the IASC's Guiding Principles for Internal Displacement, disaggregating different IDP-related populations into sub-groups of IDPs in location of displacement, return and other settlement locations and discusses how the end of displacement may be captured. The requirements for a statistical definition stem from international quality standards that states that “official statistics should be consistent internally and over time and comparable between regions and countries, and to allow the organisations of a country’s statistical system to make joint use of related data from different sources”.⁷ The recommendations are valid for all different data sources, whether population censuses, surveys, or administrative data

¹ <https://www.jips.org/jips-publication/identifying-internally-displaced-persons-in-surveys-approaches-and-recommended-questionnaire-modules-jips-2021/>

² <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/idps/43ce1cff2/guiding-principles-internal-displacement.html>

³ The first mandate of the Expert Group comprised refugees and IDPs. Statelessness was added to the work of the Expert Group in its third and current mandate from 2020-2024.

⁴ <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/53rd-session/documents/BG-3f-Terms-of-Reference-2020-2024-for-the-EGRISS-E.pdf>

⁵ <https://egrisstats.org/recommendations/international-recommendations-on-idp-statistics-iris/>

⁶ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/4c36fca6-c7e0-5927-b171-468b0b236b59>

⁷ IRIS, para 4, page 11.

systems. But to get to this point, stakeholders in National Statistical Systems must not only be aware of the recommendations, they also need to secure buy-in across the different government actors and have the necessary technical support and resources to implement them.

Developing IDP identification survey questions

To assist countries in practically implementing the recommendations, the IRIS are accompanied by a Compilers Manual. As part of this Compilers Manual, and building on JIPS's initial work, EGRISS is currently finalising a set of standard IDP identification questions that may be inserted into any sample survey. The challenge is to ensure that all the components of the definition of an IDP from the Guiding Principles are covered and at the same time keeping the number of questions to a minimum. This is important as most established and standardised household survey programs have limited space available to include new questions or to re-negotiate the structures of their established questionnaires.

The aim is to develop a sequence of simple questions that will allow analysts to distinguish IDPs from non-IDPs in household surveys.

The key components of the statistical IDP definition that the survey questions will have to capture are:

- Forced to flee
- Causing event
- Habitual place of residence
- Usual place of residence
- Current place of residence
- Ever lived abroad
- Time and length of stay abroad

At the moment, it is suggested to only capture at 'ever displaced', as capturing a full migration/displacement history would be necessary to examine multiple displacements.

Some Caveats – Remaining Issues

Even if standardized, some methodological challenges remain to fully streamlining IDP identification questions throughout different survey programmes. Firstly, the definition of IDPs requires to be followed up with measure of the end of displacement, i.e., a way to determine if a displaced person has had all their displacement-related vulnerabilities addressed. This is referred to as the "solutions measure" – or the measure of overcoming all displacement-related vulnerabilities. Technically, this would allow for the exit of the IDP stock for those people who were once displaced but have achieved a Durable Solution and are no longer experiencing displacement-related vulnerabilities. EGRISS is currently developing such a measure but so far this is still a work in progress. Once completed, however, IDP data on the 5 proposed core-criteria will need to be available – thus being a pre-condition to apply the measure.

Secondly, a recurring challenge when including IDPs in national surveys is the inclusion of IDPs residing in camps or temporary settlements. National Statistical Offices, who oversee maintaining the sampling frame for national surveys, need to be equipped to include these population groups in their sampling frames. This may require pre-cursory work such as mapping of camp sites as well as informal settlements, IDP enumeration in camp sites or the

use of non-traditional data-sources to capture and identify IDPs. It is thus not uncommon to exclude IDP camps from the general sampling frame and thus leave these populations behind. The close collaboration of humanitarian actors with Governments to facilitate inclusion is key and here again the reference to the IRIS as common denominator can further facilitate the necessary dialogue. Sampling strategies and approaches to identify IDPs must assume and look for IDPs everywhere - not just in camps - as we know that the majority of IDPs in the world reside out of camps – but go the extra mile to ensure that *all* IDPs are included.

Lastly, in many countries IDPs may constitute a small proportion of the total population, or they may be unevenly clustered in specific areas of the country. In a normal survey with a general sampling strategy, these discrepancies may mean that only few IDPs are identified. This, in turn, may not be sufficient to produce reliable statistics. In such situations, a purposeful over-sampling of IDPs may be necessary. This will, in turn, increase the cost of the surveys, but will yield more valuable information. It must be clear that the call for more disaggregated data, more data on IDPs, has to be met with a willingness to provide the necessary resources to do so.

All the above caveats illustrate the importance to nuanced and adapted approaches in the production of official IDP statistics and the need to work closely with all stakeholders to develop these based on the specificities of the displacement context.

Towards meeting the needs for data on displacement and food security

The IRIS is primarily aimed at Government agencies in charge of producing official statistics. **Official statistics are characterized by methodological rigour, comparability over space and time, amongst others.** Sometimes the frequency (often annual statistics) of production is not timely to cover the information needs within the humanitarian sector. The impact of sudden onset crises or the fluidity of conflict dynamics causing displacement may not be fully captured in regular official statistics, certainly not rapidly enough for humanitarian agencies who need information to design their emergency responses. Therefore, several data collection and reporting systems have been set up within the humanitarian sector to fill those information gaps. Key systems producing rapid updates on the scale and nature of displacement are the Protection and Return Monitoring Network (PRMN) by UNHCR and the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) by IOM. However, these systems did not use a common standardized way of identifying who is an IDP, until now. JIPS, IOM and UNHCR are jointly working under the Expert Group’ umbrella to support this transition.

A key framework for official statistics is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework. With the transition from the Millennium Development Goals in 2015, there was an introduction of several new indicators to meet information needs in the various sectors. This also applied to the food security sector where for instance an indicator on “prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)” was introduced. This indicator is frequently used in rapid food security assessments. Comparing such assessments to a baseline from a national survey enables analysts to better understand the severity of any observed changes. Being also able to disaggregate the data by Forced Displacement status in a standardized way will provide better understanding of the interlinkages between displacement and food security and ultimately provide a nuanced picture not only on displacement-related vulnerabilities but also on structural obstacles to overcoming those – considering challenges all those affected by displacement face.

While official statistics may not always be able to meet the needs of the humanitarian sector and data collection from the humanitarian sector may not always be able to meet the

methodological rigour of official statistics, the standardisation in line with IRIS will address a key missing link: comparability.

Opportunities Ahead

In the coming years, the Expert Group members plan to test the approach outlined here by including IDP identification questions in several national household surveys – and many member states have begun the implementation of the recommendations. This will provide insights on the robustness of the questions and showcase the wealth of official statistics possible to generate on the situation of all those affected by displacement.

For the humanitarian sector, who will still need to conduct their own assessments when crises hit, it will be useful to integrate these standard IDP identification questions into their assessments.⁸ Being able to compare findings from rapid assessment to national baseline information is critical to better understand the impact of crises on all displacement-affected populations – displaced and non-displaced alike. Overall, standardizing the identification of IDPs in sample surveys, will bring many advantages. Firstly, it may reduce the need for costly stand-alone IDP surveys, whilst enabling necessary investment in the design of appropriate sampling strategies – particularly where IDPs are not settled evenly across the country, where their distribution is not known or where the percentage of IDPs is too low to bear reliable results using a general random sampling strategy. Resources will be needed to ensure that where needed it is possible to over-sample IDPs in the regular surveys to balance out the above constraints, or it can be used to strengthen the sampling infrastructure by updating the IDP camp sampling frames.

Further, a cost-effective way of including IDP identification in regular survey programs such as Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys or Integrated Household Budget Surveys will increase the availability of statistical information on IDPs manifold and provide solid baselines which will improve the timeliness of producing critical analysis following sudden-onset events or change in conflict dynamics. In addition, as these surveys are often used to measure any population-based SDG indicators, countries will be able to disaggregate SDG indicators by displacement status, as called for by IRIS. This will also support the development of Durable Solutions strategies and provide a more solid basis for measuring progress towards Durable Solutions.

Going forward, National Statistical Offices and humanitarian actors who want to produce reliable and comparable information about IDPs, including their food security status, will have a new powerful tool in their hands. To leverage its full potential, all actors will need to work together to ensure that the puzzle pieces show the full picture. With a standardized way of identifying IDPs in surveys producing continuously updated information a new reality making IDPs visible - is possible.

⁸ This applies for sample surveys where individuals or households are interviewed. Data collection exercises using key informants or direct observations will not be comparable to survey data.