

Submission from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) to the United Nations Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement

Summary

Data and evidence on internal displacement are a critical tool to raise national and global attention and guide action to address and reduce internal displacement and its impacts. Investing in States’ capacities to monitor and report on internal displacement can help them align their existing priorities and accelerate progress across a range of areas including prevention, peace building, humanitarian action, sustainable development and climate change.

In line with the HLP’s call for submissions and requests for a focus on what can drive solutions and political change, IDMC’s submission lays out:

1. How data and evidence can guide States’ responses
2. The type of data needed to respond, monitor and track progress
3. A roadmap to strengthen national and global reporting and accountability

In his statement announcing the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, UN Secretary-General António Guterres underscored the fact that internal displacement is “undermining the efforts of affected countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.”¹ The purpose of the High-Level Panel is “to raise international attention to the issue of internal displacement and its impact.”

With this in mind, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) offers this submission which draws on more than 20 years of monitoring and reporting on internal displacement and on IDMC’s analysis of how governments have addressed this challenge across multiple contexts over the years.

As we prepare this submission, we are particularly mindful of the health-related risks that many IDPs now face across the world. We are particularly concerned about how the coronavirus pandemic and measures

¹ United Nations, 2019. [Secretary-General's statement announcing the establishment of a High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement](#).

to mitigate its spread could further exacerbate IDPs' vulnerabilities and compromise their longer-term socio-economic prospects. This crisis only reinforces in our eyes the need to strengthen responses to internal displacement across humanitarian and development planning and programming, and to find approaches that can address the immediate as well as the longer-term needs of IDPs.

This submission also takes as its starting point the need for national governments to play a central role in identifying and implementing these solutions. Governments' investment and commitment will be determined by the priority they give to the issue of internal displacement, which in turn will be determined by their knowledge and understanding of how it relates to other structural challenges they face.

For this, they will require better data and evidence. They will need systems and tools to inform their planning and responses, enhanced institutional and technical capacities to take action, and the right incentives to do so. The following submission proposes solutions that explore the role of data and evidence in enhancing States' capacities to report on the issue, in generating more political interest and commitment to it, and fostering greater national and global accountability.

The challenge

For many years, internal displacement has not been recognised as a global priority nor a significant challenge to longer-term development and stability. Neither internal displacement nor IDPs are specifically mentioned in any of the 17 goals and 169 targets of the global Sustainable Development Goals monitoring framework. There is no mandatory reporting on IDPs in national plans, and no standardised indicators for reporting progress on internal displacement. Data and evidence on internal displacement, though generally improving, remain incomplete.

As a result, States often face a challenge when trying to prioritise the issue or deciding how to weigh trade-offs between different options. Critical blind spots remain concerning the drivers, patterns and impacts of internal displacement across different contexts, as well as future displacement risk. There are also inconsistent standards and methods for collecting data, lack of coordination and insufficient funding for both data collection and analysis. Many of these challenges are presented in detail in IDMC's annual Global Reports on Internal Displacement (GRID).²

Cutting across both problems is the fact that few countries have the systems and tools in place to comprehensively account for and report on internal displacement. This means there is little opportunity for integrated analysis nor for linking the issue of internal displacement to a broader set of social, economic and security concerns, or to countries' longer-term development plans and objectives.

² See in particular IDMC Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) 2016 p. 33-42 (<https://www.internal-displacement.org/globalreport2016/>), GRID 2017 p.69-85 (<https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2017/>), GRID 2018 p.72-81 (<https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2018/>), and GRID 2019, p.52-75 (<https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2019/>), and GRID 2020, Methodological Annex, pp.19-21 (<https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/downloads/2020-IDMC-GRID-methodology.pdf>).

How data and evidence can guide States' responses

1. Improving accounting and reporting on internal displacement

Several countries have begun to recognise the potential that lies in systematically accounting for the number of IDPs, assessing the impact of preventive measures and assistance, and reporting on progress toward durable solutions. Countries with a national data strategy, regular reporting, a dedicated budget aligned with a legal framework are able to communicate their efforts and intentions in ways that are more likely to attract internal and external support.

While the capacity to generate, analyse and use robust data varies enormously from one country to another, **a number of promising practices exist**. The rapid response mechanism (RRM) in Mali has been supported by a more comprehensive national system for data collection, verification and sharing. The system includes a network of focal points at different levels that share information from the communal to the regional level and operates in partnership with the Regional Social Development Authorities and local administrations. Another example comes from Sri Lanka, where daily weather reports, early warnings and daily updates on disaster losses are published by the government's disaster risk reduction agency. These include displacement figures that are used for planning response and longer-term rehabilitation.

Another example comes from Colombia's Victims' Unit, which has built and maintains a database of all people affected by the country's internal conflict, including those who have been displaced. By following up with displaced people on an annual basis, the government is able to track the wellbeing of displaced people over time, assess their vulnerabilities and use this information to inform programming. Similarly, the Philippines' Disaster Response Operations Monitoring and Information Center (DROMIC) collects and publishes real-time information on people displaced by both disasters and conflicts, capturing the spatial and temporal impacts of displacement. Together with its civil society and international partners, it uses this data to inform pre-emptive evacuations through to recovery processes.

2. Building integrated data systems to facilitate longer term planning

An integrated system that links internal displacement directly to relevant economic, social and environmental metrics **can become the basis for a country's longer-term development planning**. For example, monitoring the numbers of internally displaced children by different age groups does not just enable improved response, but broken down by age group, the numbers should also directly inform sector planning. This can help make multi-year budget adjustments in the education departments of certain states and municipalities to accommodate increases in primary school demand for longer periods or required changes in state curricula to include children with language barriers.

In the Pacific, several States are providing leadership in linking national development planning with addressing displacement risk, recognising that development is potentially increasing disaster risk and with it displacement. The region's governments endorsed the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP), stating that managing climate- and disaster-related risk must be undertaken in the context of economic development and the achievement of the SDGs. In the context of the FRDP, many states have recognised that managing internal displacement risk is a fundamental governance issue and one that needs to be addressed holistically and with solid evidence. In Tonga and the Solomon Islands, for example, the governments are working with international partners to develop comprehensive displacement risk assessments for multiple climate change scenarios, planning to then use this evidence to implement national and local development plans.

More recently, the Government of Ethiopia has begun working with partners to enhance systems and develop methodologies to assess the risk of displacement caused by droughts. In addition to supporting existing early warning systems and humanitarian responses to displacement, the analysis will also project

into the future to allow the government and its partners to assess how investments in sectors like livelihood diversification and education can reduce displacement and its impacts over the longer term.

3. Using these systems to develop national reporting frameworks

An integrated system for data collection and analysis can also be the basis for States to monitor **progress more systematically against their national development priorities**, to show what they are achieving and to make the case for continued political commitment and investment. This must be done not just by measuring the scale of internal displacement in their countries, but also by:

- Tracking the investments made in the form of existing and new policies and capacities (national strategies, institutional and financial resources);
- Monitoring the contextual factors (socio-economic, environmental and political) that drive internal displacement, and how these change or evolve over time;
- Regularly evaluating the severity, duration and impact of displacement over time.

Developing such national accounting frameworks for internal displacement that are aligned with broader development goals and indicators, such as those captured globally in the SDGs or under the Sendai Framework, would present a strong basis for budgeting, fundraising and reporting to donors and investors, as well as countries' citizens and stakeholders.

At the global level, **IDMC has developed such a framework in the form of the Internal Displacement Index.**³ The IDI is a composite measure that brings together indicators of national governments' capacity to address internal displacement, of the contextual drivers that may lead to future crises or may enable solutions to displacement, and of the impacts of current crises. It provides the first global overview and systematic measure of progress made in addressing and reducing internal displacement and is the basis for more tailored and in-depth country-level frameworks and assessments. It is a tool that can serve as the much-needed evidence base for any future global accountability framework.

At the national level, Georgia pioneered in 2019 the development of a country-specific assessment tool in collaboration with IDMC and a range of national stakeholders, including sectoral departments, ministries and civil society. The tool includes indicators that are relevant to the specific displacement situation in the country and allows the country to get a baseline of its own efforts in supporting IDPs and preventing internal displacement, while also monitoring progress over time. Those involved have already recognised the potential that this tool and the resulting information has in advocating for more investment and in fundraising for both prevention and response.

³ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/201903%20Methodological%20index%20report.pdf>

What data and evidence are needed to respond, report and track progress

When it comes to understanding, owning and responding to an emerging global challenge, States' current responses to the Covid-19 pandemic are illustrative.⁴ In order to take stock of Covid-19 and evaluate their progress responding to it, nearly every State has attempted to measure:

- the scale and magnitude of the crisis (the number of people infected);
- its evolution over time (number of people infected and cured per day);
- its impacts on people (number of fatalities and hospitalisations) and economies (unemployment);
- the characteristics of those affected (sex and age of people infected and killed by the disease);
- its geography (hotspots and spread of infections);
- risk scenarios (projected number of people infected and killed);
- what's needed to respond (masks, ventilators) and to measure progress (number of infections or fatalities avoided, reducing the number of new infections per day, number of people who have been cured and have antibodies).

All this data helps States take stock of the pandemic, track it over time, and compare where they are relative to one another or to a previous point in time. This data is also needed for decision-makers to weigh the trade-offs between different measures to limit the spread of the virus, and to evaluate when and how to lift them in order to offset their impacts on the rest of society. This has been illustrated countless times over the past weeks as decision-makers indicated that they couldn't allow "the cure to be worse than the problem."

Without exacerbating existing protection risks or creating new ones for people fleeing disasters, conflict, violence or persecution, **comparable data and metrics are needed for States to account for internal displacement.** This includes information about:

- the total number of internally displaced people by location and over time;
- the number of new displacements and the number of events or instances of displacement, disaggregated by cause of displacement;
- demographic profiles, characteristics and needs of those displaced;
- where people have been displaced from and where they have been displaced to;
- the success of return, relocation and local integration processes as they evolve over time;
- the duration of displacement;
- levels of severity of displacement and differentiated impacts on different groups of people;
- the risk of future displacement and whether it is increasing or decreasing;
- the immediate and long-term impacts across different sectors (e.g. health, education, housing);
- the costs and benefits of different responses and investments across different timeframes.

⁴ We are not drawing a comparison between internally displaced people and a disease; rather we are looking at how States have approached this novel crisis.

A roadmap to strengthen national and global reporting and accountability

1. Support the development of national accounting systems

The modalities of systems to account for internal displacement should be decided at the country level and build on what already exists, according to the given context. That said, certain guiding principles should be considered when designing these systems. First, a country-level system should be conceived of as a **long-term, multi-stakeholder initiative**. Governments should have ownership of the system and identify a dedicated agency or focal point in the lead, working with a range of national and international-level partners (government, civil society and UN) as part of a national IDP data working group.

Depending on the context, countries should either set up **dedicated national IDP data systems**, or ‘plug’ IDP data modules into existing national data systems and develop integrated platforms that would allow them to monitor and account for a range of concerns, beyond displacement, relevant to humanitarian assistance and development planning. Receiving, analysing and sharing interoperable data should be done through a **centralised database** using a common data dictionary, and a common set of standards and metrics. For example, these systems would include data on IDPs disaggregated by sex, age and disabilities, data on housing damage and destruction caused by natural hazards and on the indicators related to the economic impacts of displacement. This would allow the systems to speak to one another and to support reporting on the Sendai Framework and the SDGs. Given the maturity of these other reporting systems, the displacement databases could build upon them and be implemented by leveraging the capacities of international and local actors.

Furthermore, data collection and analysis should be extended to **partners with specialised expertise** in data collection methods and data disaggregation, such as national statistical offices, specific UN agencies, academia and public/private sector organisations. These partnerships would contribute to increasing quality and consistency and could serve to leverage available new technologies in modelling or satellite imagery analysis to fill data gaps, particularly in inaccessible or hard-to-reach areas.

It is imperative that the monitoring system be **maintained over time and continuously improved**. This means multi-year workplans and objectives supported by multiple donors who need to be involved in the initiative from the start. Priority should be given to **building national capacity** to manage, use and maintain the system. This should include budgeting for formal training, exchanges of experience, and peer-to-peer learning. Countries should be given opportunities, through regional and international fora, to learn from one another and share good practices.

Complementary to investing in national-level capacity and accountability, regional and global mechanisms would be required to sustain follow-up processes and official reporting. This could take the form of a global reporting system, as exists for example the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, self-assessments coupled with peer review mechanisms, such as practiced by the OECD for DAC performance, or a dedicated forum within the UN General Assembly.

2. Leverage existing systems for data collection and reporting

At present, no country has implemented a system to comprehensively account for each of the dimensions of internal displacement described above. However, many systems that have been implemented for other purposes can be adapted, enhanced or extended to achieve this objective.⁵ **What is needed is not**

⁵ In 2019, IDMC reviewed more than 20 different types of systems and took stock of the strengths and limitations of each. A short description of the main systems, and their relative strengths and weaknesses are included as an Annex. For more information, see IDMC, 2019. [Disaster displacement: A global review 2008–2019](#).

necessarily the development of a completely new system but rather a concerted effort to leverage and join up these existing tools.

Even global reporting systems that do not include a specific indicator on the number of IDPs or new displacements can be leveraged when they contain indicators that serve as proxies for internal displacement. For example, the SDG indicator database indicates that 111 States have reported at least once on “Direct economic loss in the housing sector attributed to disasters (current United States dollars)”.⁶ In the context of Sendai framework on disaster risk reduction a number of countries have also begun reporting on the “Number of people whose destroyed dwellings were attributed to disasters.”⁷ In addition to these global systems, others may exist at the subnational level to inform national development and planning processes.

The Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics (EGRIS) has issued recommendations for producing official statistics on several metrics related to internal displacement.⁸ These recommendations, which were endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2020, should be implemented robustly, and States should leverage the expertise of their national statistics offices when designing national accounting systems.

However, national statistics alone will not be sufficient when it comes to the requirements of both humanitarian and development actors for data on internal displacement. Therefore, a number of existing processes and mechanisms need to be leveraged in addition, including the Humanitarian Needs Overviews, Post-Disaster Needs Assessments, IDP profiling and many more (See Annex for more detail and the advantages and disadvantages of each mechanism).

3. Establish a global partnership for sharing good practice and encouraging progress

This next decade has the potential to become an important chapter in global efforts to reduce and resolve internal displacement. What is needed now is a more thorough and global analysis of how countries and communities have managed to resolve these crises and what windows of opportunity enabled progress. There is growing interest in understanding how to navigate the structural challenges and opportunities inherent in addressing internal displacement, but countries looking for lessons from peers in their efforts to do so currently have no trusted source or repository they can draw on.

Indeed, **there has to date been no systematic global assessment of what drives progress toward lasting solutions.** Examples of good practice have been assembled, but a framework is needed for a comprehensive review of the processes involved in achieving solutions and the factors that contribute to success. For such learning to take place, a global partnership is needed to systematically collect, evaluate and share practices and experience, and facilitate peer-to-peer learning and support. Such an undertaking should cover a range of operational and political practices, from the collection and analysis of data and common standards for planning and reporting, to coordination and partnership, integrated policy development and the monitoring of progress.

Exchange and cooperation among states that are dealing with internal displacement is essential. What constitutes good practice and success cannot be defined externally. Countries are looking for spaces for dialogue and open peer-to-peer exchanges at the regional and international level, and they are eager to make use of existing mechanisms. **The High-Level Panel has a unique opportunity to open up such dialogue and put in place a lasting process for open exchange and learning that can act as a catalyst for accelerated investment globally and nationally.**

⁶ UN Statistics Division (UNSD), 2020. [Global SDG Indicators Database](#). Indicator 1.5.2 and 11.5.2. (Data accessed and analysed by IDMC on 05 May 2020.)

⁷ UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), 2020. [Sendai Framework Monitor](#). Indicator B-4. (Data accessed and analysed by IDMC on 05 May 2020.)

⁸ EGRIS, 2020. [International Recommendations on IDP Statistics](#). UN Statistical Commission. March 2020.

Annex: Summary of existing tools and systems

While none of the systems or tools below were designed with the specific purpose of comprehensive data collection and reporting on internal displacement, each could contribute to a broader national and international system for accounting and monitoring progress addressing internal displacement. This table is not an exhaustive list of every system, method and tool currently in use. Rather it summarises the different approaches and tools of each that exist, illustrated with some examples, and explains they can contribute as well as some of their limitations.

Systems and tools	How they can contribute	Considerations
International self-reporting mechanisms	The SDG indicator database indicates that 111 States have reported at least once on “Direct economic loss in the housing sector attributed to disasters (current United States dollars)”. ⁹ In the context of Sendai framework on disaster risk reduction a number of countries have also begun reporting on the “Number of people whose destroyed dwellings were attributed to disasters.” ¹⁰ In addition to these global systems, others may exist at the subnational level to inform national development and planning processes.	At present there is no global reporting system for internal displacement. Instead, there is a UN General Assembly resolution, adopted every other year, encouraging States to share data on internal displacement with IDMC. ¹¹
National statistics	National statistics on internal displacement would serve a critical role for measuring States’ progress addressing internal displacement. Statistics are useful for planning, budgeting and tracking the long-term impacts of internal displacement on IDPs as well as national economies. Because statistics are produced by governments themselves, officials can readily use statistics in their decision-making.	Annual statistics would help assess the impacts of displacement over longer time frames, but they are not produced often enough, or quickly enough, to support humanitarian responses. For example, data published once per year will not identify IDPs’ needs and vulnerabilities in a timely manner. These statistics are therefore of limited use in terms of preparing for or responding to internal displacement. National statistics also do not account for displacement risk or projected changes in risk over time. Such information about future displacement risk is critical for development planning as well as disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation (see box on the Pacific). Another concern with regard to national statistics concerns the degree to which they are aggregated. China, for example, publishes official year-end estimates of the number of people displaced by disasters over the course of a year; these

⁹ UN Statistics Division (UNSD), 2020. [Global SDG Indicators Database](#). Indicator 1.5.2 and 11.5.2. (Data accessed and analysed by IDMC on 05 May 2020.)

¹⁰ UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), 2020. [Sendai Framework Monitor](#). Indicator B-4. (Data accessed and analysed by IDMC on 05 May 2020.)

¹¹ The most recent resolution, [Protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons](#) (A/RES/74/160), was adopted in December 2019.

		figures do not specify how many displacements corresponded to each specific event. In addition to making it challenging to independently verify the figures, this kind of aggregation limits the usefulness of the data for other purposes.
National IDP databases and registries	National IDP databases and registries are a good way to account for anyone who has ever been displaced, and such tools have been put to good use by the Government of Colombia, which combines data on displacement with a number of other indicators in order to get a clear picture how people who have been displaced have fared over time. National databases can be an effective way of tracking the provision of government assistance and entitlements to displaced people.	Updating and maintaining data in national databases is time-consuming and can be costly. Therefore, national databases and registries should be used in a targeted manner, such as to capture the evolution of needs of displaced over a long period of time and measuring their progress towards durable solutions.
National disaster loss databases	National disaster loss databases and disaster loss accounting systems contain key information related to disaster displacement, such as the number of damaged and destroyed homes. In the absence of observational data on the number of IDPs over time, this information is useful for estimating the duration of displacement following disasters and for calibrating disaster displacement risk models. Where they have been used, these disaster-loss accounting systems capture information on far more events and situations of disaster displacement than are captured by humanitarian data collection systems. Indonesia's database alone contains information on more than 20,000 events, most of which are small-scale disasters. Another advantage of these disaster accounting systems is that they are already aligned with reporting on the Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction so they require no additional data collection.	Not all States are using these systems or keeping them up to date. They record data on only some dimension of internal displacement, and they have not been used or suited to capture the impacts of conflict.
Situation reports, humanitarian needs overviews (HNOs) and multi-sector needs assessments (MSNAs)	Commonly issued during displacement crises, these products often contain information about the number of IDPs, usually disaggregated by sex, age, location and shelter or type of accommodation. As such, they provide timely information needed to coordinate and resource humanitarian responses to displacement and to track them as they unfold. IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix, for example, has been deployed in 72 countries to provide frequent snapshots to inform international humanitarian responses.	Products like situation reports, HNOs and MSNAs usually cover only large humanitarian crises, particularly those that elicit an international humanitarian response, and they therefore do not cover most situations of displacement. Situation reports usually have limited geographical coverage are often limited to the emergency phase of a crisis; follow-up information is uncommon and usually ad hoc. This is due to the fact that they are intended to support responses and plans rather than to provide a comprehensive

	REACH has accounted for IDPs in its multi-sector needs assessments in several countries to help give a holistic picture of an entire humanitarian crisis.	accounting of internal displacement. In a number of countries, these tools have been extended to account for the number and wellbeing of IDPs who have returned to their homes or places of origin. Some of these tools can be costly to implement and keep up to date, depending on the geographical scope of coverage, how frequently they are updated and the amount of data collected.
Humanitarian alerts and incident reporting systems	Humanitarian alerts and incident reporting systems are a good way to identify new displacements as well as returns and other significant changes on the ground.	There is little to no follow-up data collection – or the data collection that follows is not joined back up to these specific incidents and events.
Profiling	Profiling, including the collection of household-level and microdata, is another key source of information on the characteristics of IDPs, including their sex, age, needs and intentions. Many of the tools used in IDP profiling, such as targeted surveys, can be adapted to answer specific questions about ongoing situations of displacement. Facebook, for example, has undertaken surveys of displaced people during and after a number of disasters in order to obtain timely information about the IDPs, about their needs and intentions and to identify factors that prevented them from returning to their homes.	As with any survey, profiling data gives a snapshot of a given situation at a specific point in time. Thus, that information can become quickly out of date or misrepresentative if the situation has evolved since the data was collected. Depending on the survey methodology used in a profiling exercise, they can be time consuming and therefore costly to keep up to date, particularly in dynamic contexts. There is an inherent trade-off between the granularity of the data and the frequency it can be collected.
Risk assessments	Disaster displacement risk assessments indicate how many homes and dwellings are likely to be damaged or destroyed by natural hazards in the future. Using IPCC scenarios, they can be modified to explore changes in displacement risk due to the impacts of climate change and socio-economic and demographic factors. Measuring changes in displacement risk can indicate whether States are making progress addressing the drivers of internal displacement. They can also be adapted to measure the risk of potential impacts of displacement, such as its duration or severity.	At present, most risk assessments consider displacement due to direct impact of hazards on people’s homes and they do not capture indirect impacts such as displacement resulting from the loss of livelihoods or other assets. Furthermore, models that estimate the risk of displacement caused by conflict and violence remain limited, and they raise ethical questions about their potential misuse.