



# Steps taken by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre to understand the context for preparing its intersectional approach to data



The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) is a Champion of the Inclusive Data Charter (IDC), a global multi-stakeholder network launched in 2018. The IDC works to advance the availability and use of inclusive and disaggregated data so that governments and organizations better understand, address. It also monitors the needs of marginalized people and ensures no one is left behind.

Intersectional approaches to data ([see bit.ly/IDC-primer](#)) need to be founded on good knowledge of the context. This is because practitioners need to pay close attention to the historical, political, economic, and social forces in a particular place in order to both identify and address intersecting inequalities.

At the start of an intersectional approach to data, practitioners need to develop a preliminary understanding of who they intend to support and how intersecting inequalities shape their environment, along with how potential data practice may interact with these aspects.

Developing an understanding of the context will help practitioners to make informed choices about key issues to focus on, and how to design an appropriate intersectional approach to data in response.

This case study discusses the steps that IDMC takes to develop a good knowledge of the context when designing research on internal displacement. However, the tips and techniques presented can be applied in other contexts and used by practitioners engaging with data in project or program design.



## Key messages

Developing a good knowledge of the context facilitates better design of intersectional approaches to data, and involves five essential steps:

1. **Promote ongoing engagement with global, regional, or national trends and patterns that are likely to influence intersecting inequalities.**
2. **Analyze secondary data and review qualitative or ethnographic studies, to develop background knowledge. This also helps identify gaps in literature and potentially highlight individuals at greatest risk of marginalization or discrimination.**
3. **Interview key stakeholders, including people who have firsthand knowledge of the context, as well as those who are accountable towards the people you intend to support.**
4. **Develop a preliminary ‘context analysis’ by examining the information collected about the context through an intersectional lens. We suggest a few techniques to do this below.**
5. **Deepen your preliminary context analysis by thinking holistically to identify key issues, and to develop concrete suggestions to address intersectional inequality in follow-up research or activities.**

## Intersectional Approaches to Inclusive and Disaggregated Data series

Different aspects of a person’s identity – such as their ethnicities, gender, religion, disability, or sexual orientation – can influence the amount or type of discrimination or exclusion a person faces. ‘Intersecting inequalities’ refers to when aspects of a person’s identity overlap and worsen the discrimination or exclusion they experience. People who face intersecting inequalities are the most likely to be left behind by development.

The IDC is a global multi-stakeholder network that advances the availability and use of inclusive and disaggregated data so that governments and organizations better understand, address. It also monitors the needs of marginalized people and ensure no one is left behind. The Intersectional Approaches to Inclusive and Disaggregated Data Series contributes resources and practical insights to help practitioners in their work to resolve intersecting inequalities.

This case study should be read alongside other resources in the Series, which unpack intersectionality definitions, data processes and value chains, and other intersectionality concerns.

## The context of IDMC's work

Internal displacement refers to circumstances when a person or family is forced to leave their home, but still stay within the same country. By the end of 2020, 55 million people were living in internal displacement worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Research on internal displacement has shown great variation in impacts on internally displaced persons' (IDPs') and host communities' livelihoods, housing conditions, security, health and education (IDMC, 2018). In some cases, impacts may even be positive, although displacement mostly affects people's well-being and welfare negatively. Collecting context-specific information is essential when designing appropriate responses.

IDMC, established in 1998 as part of the Norwegian Refugee Council, works under the mandate of the United Nations General Assembly, to produce data and analysis on internal displacement. They yield internal displacement figures by country, develop interoperable data standards, publish country analysis and risk modelling tools, and are the official source for global monitoring of internal displacement.

A couple of years ago, IDMC started developing research programs and collecting primary data in specific displacement situations across the world, to generate a deeper understanding of how different groups of people experience displacement differently.

This evolution was prompted by the complex nature of internal displacement, which may result from causes such as disasters, climate change, conflicts, or violence. These lead to very different situations and affect the types of support affected people need to receive. As well as serving those who have been displaced, this work at local levels offers essential support for policymakers and aid providers in addressing internal displacement.

IDMC is developing its intersectional approach to data and analysis to ensure that the complexity of internal displacement and its effects on people is represented more accurately and that responses are more inclusive. This case study discusses the steps they take to prepare and design their primary research activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Data drawn from [www.internal-displacement.org/](http://www.internal-displacement.org/) on 12 April, 2021

## **Step 1: Promote ongoing engagement with global, regional, and/or national trends and patterns that are likely to influence intersectional inequality**

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IDMC engages in extensive monitoring of internal displacement, worldwide, to identify locations with high levels and the main causes. Its internal displacement figures are displayed on a map in near real-time, allowing practitioners to gain a sense of the magnitude and causes of displacement in a particular place. IDMC also uses iDetect, which is a tool that highlights displacement information in media articles, for IDMC's team of monitoring experts to review. They may also use other tools, such as satellite images, to occasionally feed into their monitoring.

### **Why is it important to monitor wider trends and patterns?**

The information discussed above is often displayed in aggregate, and is unsuitable for deeper intersectional analysis by itself. However, continuously monitoring trends can identify patterns that occur repeatedly over time (such as displacement due to annual floods) or detect issues in particular locations where people at risk of marginalization are known to reside. Monitoring patterns over time potentially clarifies how processes of marginalization may be reinforced or maintained (due to structural inequalities). However, the most excluded people remain completely invisible in this type of data. Monitoring tools, such as satellite images, are not well-suited to identifying the vulnerabilities people face in different contexts. To bridge this gap, other sources must complement this first step.

## **Step 2: Analyze secondary data, review related research, and examine the context of data practice**

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IDMC runs analyses on secondary data, such as national statistics datasets, open government data, or data published by multilateral or civil society organizations to identify displacement situations where more knowledge is needed. It plans to explore the information available about the severity of the impacts on affected people, and consider which groups may be at higher risk of displacement or of being marginalized in a host community. This process will also help IDMC to understand what data is available, and to ensure that the data it collects is not replicating existing sources.

Along with this, the team reviews related research on displacement that has been published in academic journals, reports published by organizations, or governments. If there are particular issues or groups of people at higher risk of displacement or marginalization, IDMC will focus literature searches on these aspects, and will review literature from a range of disciplines and sectors to do this.

### Step 3: Interview key stakeholders, including people that have lived experience or firsthand knowledge of the context

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In 2019, IDMC started researching the effects of internal displacement on educational outcomes in different countries. Before planning any research, IDMC interviews key stakeholders in-country to gain a sense of the issues they see as important and how intersectionality may factor in. This helps the team to get a sense of the groups of people affected by internal displacement. These people may be experiencing more severe – or different impacts – as well as where and for whom it would be useful to collect more detailed information. Identified groups, depending on the context, may include people who are disabled, younger or older, or from ethnolinguistic minority groups. It can also include women and girls, or members of LGBTIQ communities.

Interviews with in-country stakeholders – including humanitarian or development organizations and local or national government representatives – help ensure that the primary data collection covers useful information for IDMC’s interventions and that it includes the groups at higher risk of being impacted by displacement. IDMC can then tailor the primary data collection tool, including quantitative surveys or key informant interview guides, to the specific context being investigated.

Another technique that may be useful is stakeholder mapping. Stakeholder mapping involves working out who the main direct and indirect stakeholders of an initiative are. ‘Mapping’ them can simply be a brainstorming process, involving thinking about what interests and involvement those stakeholders should have in the initiative. However, political economy analysis and soft systems methodology introduced in Step 4 below include more detailed guidance on how to approach this task.

### Step 4: Develop a preliminary ‘context analysis’ by examining the information collected through an intersectional lens

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Intersectional approaches situate individual experience of inequality or discrimination in the context of wider structural racism, sexism, or other forms of societal oppression (Collins, 1997; Crenshaw, 1991). Without this background knowledge, it is difficult to gain a sense of the root cause(s) of intersectional issues, along with which ones are the most important to address, or how to do that. A richer picture of problems emerges by drawing together knowledge of trends, patterns, and issues (Steps 1 and 2), as well as more detailed knowledge of specifics (Step 3).

#### How do you bring these various sources of information together effectively to create a context analysis?

Several frameworks and approaches elaborate on the power and politics at play in a given context. **Table 1** outlines commonly used frameworks for intersectional research and practice.

Framework or approach	Matrix of domination	Inequality, gender, and sustainable development (IGSD) Approach	Political economy analysis	Soft systems analysis
<b>Description</b>	Involves organizing power arrangements into four interrelated domains of power: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal.	Focuses on identifying who is left behind from a multi-dimensional perspective, and on the ways in which marginalization and exclusion are experienced from a multi-sectoral perspective.	Investigates political and economic forces and processes, how power is distributed across actors, and how political choices are made.	Maps the actors, issues, and environment by considering the internal/ external dynamics and inter-relationships.
<b>How this framework or approach can be used to identify intersectional issues</b>  Based on a review of data available (both quantitative and qualitative)	Categorizing issues according to the domains of power – reflecting on how the issues inter-connect across domains.	Exploring differences in terms of identity, with a set of factors that should be considered (such as gender, wealth, location, disability, and ethnicity) across a range of outcomes (e.g. health, education, and access to clean water, employment).	Reflecting on the interests and incentives of dominant/ marginalized groups, rules of formal institutions, cultural norms, and values and ideologies, as well as how these differ.	Drawing a rich picture that centers on marginalized groups and how their experiences are influenced by processes, power, and relationships.
<b>Example resource</b>	Collins (1998)	Azcona & Bhatt (2020)	Whaites (2017)	Checkland and Poulter (2006)

**Table 1:** Commonly used frameworks for intersectional research and practice.

## Step 5: Deepen your preliminary 'context analysis' by thinking holistically

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IDMC's global monitoring activities may be seen as separate from its targeted research to explore differential impacts of displacement on livelihoods, health, security, and housing conditions at local levels; however, it is exactly this global experience that positions its team to pre-identify key intersectional issues that

may be relevant in different local contexts. Both perspectives are necessary to develop a good knowledge of the context in order to conduct an intersectional approach. Several lessons have been learned regarding how to think holistically through experience.

### Key lessons include:



#### Work collaboratively and facilitate cross-fertilization

The IDMC has a small team, who are accustomed to sharing with each other and working collaboratively across disciplines and different kinds of expertise. Their tendency to work in partnership with academics, UN agencies, governments, and NGOs has fostered innovation in their global monitoring tools and techniques. This pushes them to constantly update their skills and knowledge, and to share with each other throughout the process.



#### Ask open ended questions of your stakeholders and test your own assumptions

Being curious and open to new ways of seeing things, testing their own assumptions, and adopting a growth mindset has enabled the IDMC team to notice previously unseen intersectional issues. For example, a 2020 blog piece from IDMC examines how the team uncovered surprising findings in their research on the impacts of displacement on children's education in Somalia in 2019. Initially, the data showed that the rates

of school attendance had increased after displacement for some children. IDMC went back to the data, and looked through the analysis of the differences between boys and girls before and after displacement in Somalia. This uncovered new insights: mainly that attendance had increased for boys but decreased for girls. By testing their assumptions by going back and analyzing the data for these differences, the team has established a need to prioritize intersectional approaches in IDMC research.



#### Be open to new ways of seeing old things

Considering the context holistically can sometimes involve shifting perspectives. While IDMC primarily focuses on internally displaced people, its team also consider how displacement affects people in the host communities. Intersectionality emerges when certain sets of circumstances come together, leading to inequality and discrimination. If we think holistically about the actors, issues, and the environment, intersectional inequality may more easily come to light. Ultimately, IDMC researchers make a point of listening to the communities they intend to support with their research, and is open to hearing what they say.

## References

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