iDMC internal
displacement
monitoring
centre

THEMATIC SERIES
UnSettlement: Urban displacement in the 21st century

This thematic series explores the scale, nature and dynamics
of internal displacement in towns and cities across the world

Research agenda and call for partners

FEBRUARY 2018

In the 21ˢᵗ century the world turned urban. As centres of cultural exchange, economic and social opportunity, cities have attracted migrants from rural areas throughout history. But it was only in 2007 that over half the world's population lived in urban areas. The rate of urbanization continues to grow, particularly in smaller and medium-sized cities of rapidly growing economies in Africa, Asia and Latin America. By 2050, the world's urban population is projected to reach 6.3 billion people.[1]

Cities have become hotspots of growth and prosperity, and clear development opportunities for many low and middle-income countries. They are, however, also places where the dynamics of global politics and economics crystallise in the form of poverty and inequality, and where marginalisation, criminal violence, conflict and disaster risk are concentrated. Urban centres have also become destinations for forcibly displaced people. This is not a new phenomenon, but the scale of displacement to, within and between towns and cities is not well understood. Nor is the extent to which cities provide safe haven for the people who flee there, or the degree to which the displaced are able to integrate and establish new urban lives.

To establish a global picture of urban internal displacement, questions need to be answered in at least four areas. How many people are displaced in urban areas? This needs assessing more comprehensively. What are the triggers and drivers that prompt and prolong urban displacement, and how do they play out against the backdrop of exponential urban growth in different countries? How does displacement shape urban landscapes, and what challenges and opportunities does it present in terms of service provision and urban systems? And how do urban processes, growth and demographic and economic change determine displacement risk and affect those displaced?

Each of these areas needs to be explored from two perspectives, that of the people displaced and that of the city.

IDPs and the city

The increasingly long-term and intractable nature of displacement, particularly for people in low and middle-income countries, means that camp settings are not a viable option. They offer only limited access to employment opportunities, education, healthcare and psychosocial support. Cities, by contrast, may present a way out of protracted displacement, particularly for internally displaced people (IDPs) who decide that returning to their place of origin is not an option either. The most important pull factor may be the prospect of employment, but cities also provide anonymity and a degree of safety and freedom that may not be afforded in rural or camp settings.[2] Access to informal labour markets and social networks are factors that also influence IDPs decisions to move to urban areas.

Once in the city, however, IDPs can join the ranks of the broader urban poor, living in similarly marginalised and precarious conditions. They can become part of urban communities and political systems defined by insecurity, vulnerability and informality. Evidence also shows that urban IDPs face challenges in accessing services and employment specific to their displacement, and may find themselves at risk of exploitation and extortion.[3] These factors impede their efforts to achieve durable solutions and increase their risk of becoming trapped in protracted, repeated or cyclical displacement.

There is little information on how such issues differ for urban and rural IDPs, but it is clear that people internally displaced by conflict, disasters and development projects are playing an important role in shaping the urban world. As large numbers of IDPs move to, within and between cities, their presence and contribution to local economies has the potential to change the fabric of urban communities and services.

The city and displacement

Migrants, refugees, IDPs and their hosts all suffer the negative impacts of unsustainable urban practices. Cities already struggling to provide public services and utilities such water, waste management and electricity are generally ill-equipped to absorb large influxes of people.[4] Displacement to urban areas contributes to the proliferation of informal settlements and puts pressure on land in peri-urban areas if there is limited affordable housing stock. The steady flow of migrants and displaced rural populations, including pastoralists, into Nairobi city has contributed significantly to the growth of Kibera, one of Kenya's largest informal settlements.[5]

Large population influxes also have the potential to disrupt social dynamics by increasing competition for jobs and resources, and generating suspicion and mistrust toward new arrivals when their reasons for moving to the city are called into question.[6] Poorly prepared, insufficiently funded and understaffed local governments face significant challenges in responding to urban IDPs' needs, particularly when the broader urban poor face similar vulnerabilities.[7]

On a more positive note, IDPs' arrival in urban areas can present socioeconomic opportunities if the institutional environment supports their integration. They create demand and bring skills, resources and other assets that benefit cities. In turn, cities tend to offer IDPs better access to goods, housing, services, skills and income opportunities that reduce their vulnerability and help them to become more self-reliant.[8] Such interaction is complex and difficult to capture in all its dimensions, but it is a phenomenon of growing importance in a rapidly urbanising world. Securing long-term resilience for all urban residents, including IDPs, and reducing the risk of future shocks is key to building sustainable cities and reducing forced displacement.

Sun rays hit the brand new floors inside a finished apartments in Daben City, Iraq, a housing estate with five buildings once filled with more then 7000 Yazidi IDPs in Zako. A few hundred were left in Daben City by March 2015, fearful when and where they will be moved to while still facing multiple dangers including the cold, falling from floors or staircases or being hit by debris. Photo © UNHCR/ Dominic Nahr, March 2015

Urban displacement risk

Urban systems play a role in generating displacement in a number of ways. Poorly or unplanned urban growth and substandard construction in hazard-prone areas increase disaster displacement risk. New displacement takes place regularly in densely populated informal settlements on floodplains, steep hillsides and coastlines exposed to cyclones in cities such as Lagos, Mumbai and Rio de Janeiro.[9] Climate change and the mismanagement of natural resources threaten to cause the collapse of entire urban systems, and with it mass displacement. An example of this is the city of Jakarta where whole areas are in danger of subsiding as a result of unsustainable water extraction and land use.[10]

Urban development and renewal can also force people out of previously affordable areas to the margins of a city, effectively driving them away from their communities, schools and jobs. While the process of displacement in these contexts can be very different, common outcomes of increased marginalisation, inequality and poverty are a global phenomenon that cuts across country income groups. Examples range from displacement in an increasing number of US cities such as Boston and Chicago to plans for "future cities" outside sub-Saharan capitals such as Kigali and Nairobi, and urban renewal projects in Mumbai and Bengaluru.[11]

War and criminal violence in cities also generate large-scale displacement. Around 50 million people are estimated to suffer the effects of urban conflict in the world today.[12] Millions of people have fled bombing and destruction in Syria's urban centres during seven years of civil war, while many others have been besieged in cities such as Aleppo and Homs. Sieges have also taken place elsewhere in the Middle East, including Mosul in Iraq and Taiz in Yemen.[13] Steadily increasing violence associated with gang activity and organised crime in Central America has triggered internal displacement in many cities, including San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa in Honduras, and San Salvador in El Salvador.[14]

New infrastructure projects in hazard-prone areas not only displace people during the construction phase in the form of evictions. They also increase disaster displacement risk. Examples include the construction of a new metro station on the Jamuna floodplain in central Delhi and the development of a special economic zone on Myanmar's coast.[15] Unsustainable increases in urban population density also heighten the risk of communal conflict and criminal violence, but the dynamics are not well understood.[16]

In some cases, these different dynamics interact and overlap, resulting in a complex mix of displacement drivers, triggers and impacts.

Toward a stronger evidence base

The complex and shifting dynamics of urban displacement are of growing interest to international policymakers, not least as part of work toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[17] Humanitarians, their counterparts in the development sector, researchers and policymakers have contributed to the discussion by highlighting the challenges of forced migration in cities.[18]

There is also growing recognition that humanitarian interventions in urban crises, disasters and complex emergencies have their limitations, and that greater collaboration with municipal authorities is needed in supporting existing urban systems.[19] The causes and effects of urban displacement on other stressors and crises, and the ways in which the phenomenon reshapes cities and contributes to urbanisation, need to be brought into the core of analysis on how to mitigate and effectively respond to it.

The need for better data and evidence on the scope and nature of urban internal displacement is also accepted.[20] There is no clear sense of its scale at the global level, and evidence to inform urban planning also tends to be lacking at the national

3

and local level. To make headway in reducing the current number of IDPs and the risk of new displacement, as called for in the UN secretary general's Agenda for Humanity, a robust evidence-base for the number of IDPs in urban areas is vital.[21]

Key themes and research questions

Urban displacement and displacement risk must be understood from two perspectives, that of IDPs and that of the cities they flee to. For the former, questions arise about what it means to be an IDP in an urban setting, their aspirations, challenges and opportunities. For the latter, the questions relate to capacity for service provision, governance and the administration of response, integration, urban planning and development.

Understanding the phenomenon from both perspectives requires quantitative and qualitative data. IDPs' experiences and cities' capacity to absorb and support them depend on the scale, nature and duration of displacement. We will undertake research in partnership with leading experts and institutions in urban science, humanitarian and development studies, and seeking contributions from researchers across the globe in three core areas that are interlinked, employing distinct methodologies and tools for each.

The data required

Anecdotal evidence suggests that internal displacement is becoming an increasingly urban phenomenon.[22] The notion that the majority of IDPs fleeing conflict live in cities is not, however, supported by the data currently available. Nor is the true global scale of urban internal displacement associated with conflict, violence, disasters and development projects properly understood.

Robust numbers are hard to come by. More than a million IDPs were thought to be living in Khartoum in 2008, but 10 years later the estimate has not been reliably updated.[23] Nor is Khartoum by any means an exception, because data on IDPs tends not to be disaggregated by location. Even when it is, it is not recorded consistently and there is no globally accepted definition of an urban area, which makes aggregation and comparisons between different cities and countries difficult.

Urban IDPs' relative invisibility adds an extra layer of complexity to capturing their number and changing socioeconomic conditions.[24] Not only do they mingle with the broader urban poor with whom they share similar needs and vulnerabilities, but they may prefer to remain under the radar of municipal and national authorities. Local governments may also refuse to acknowledge them or choose to underplay the scale of displacement in their jurisdictions.[25]

As a result, the following questions about the number and location of urban IDPs need to be answered if we are to begin to paint a global picture of the phenomenon:

- How many IDPs are there in specific urban areas at a certain point in time, such as the end of each year?
- What percentage of new displacements in a country happen in urban rather than rural areas?
- How many IDPs move from rural to urban areas?
- How many urban IDPs move within cities?
- How many urban IDPs move between cities?
- What size of cities do IDPs move to?

A set of broader questions about the dynamics and duration of urban displacement also need to be considered:

- What are the similarities and differences between IDPs' movements and those of refugees and economic migrants?
- How long does urban displacement last, and how does its duration compare with that in rural areas?
- Which indicators could act as proxies for assessing the drivers of displacement risk in cities, and are they specific to urban displacement?
- Which indicators could act as proxies for assessing social, environmental and economic impacts of urban displacement?
- Which data collection methods and metrics need to be employed to assess such dynamics and capture the scale and patterns of the phenomenon in ways that are comparable and interoperable?

CORE URBAN DISPLACEMENT RESEARCH AREAS

IDPs' Perspective
- Access to housing, employment, services and safety
- Assets and resources
- Social capital and integration
- Motivation for settlement or onward movement, intentions and aspirations

Urban displacement data: numbers, duration, location and severity

City's perspective
- Housing markets and municipal capacity
- Service provision capacity
- Labour market impacts
- Social and communal cohesion
- Motivation for response, risk reduction and development investment

Internally displaced and refugee children attend summer school in the urban area of Khabat, Iraq. Photo: NRC/Becky Bakr Abdulla, September 2016

Not all these questions can be answered in a purely quantitative manner or with meta-scale analyses. Some, such as those about the duration of displacement, will have to be approached through micro-studies and longitudinal research. Appropriate methodologies will need to be chosen for each, particularly for the more complex issues discussed below.

IDPs' perspective

Some of the specific challenges urban IDPs face have already been highlighted in the literature, but it is important to bear in mind that they are not a homogenous group.[26] They may have similar vulnerabilities, but their resources and economic situations vary considerably. Those with more access to remittances, earnings, savings and credit adapt more easily to their new environment and have a better chance of achieving durable solutions.

Some IDPs' spending patterns also differ from others and from those of their host communities. Their loss of assets and access to services as a result of their displacement, coupled with their economic and social conditions in their new environment, influences the way they prioritise their outgoings. This makes it important to identify IDPs' specific needs compared with those of their host communities, and to rise to the challenge of differentiating between IDPs and the broader urban poor, with whom they share similar vulnerabilities.

The following topics need to be considered when analysing urban internal displacement from IDPs' perspective:

- **Housing**: What type of accommodation do IDPs have? Do they have tenure security? Do they live in hazard-prone areas?
- **Employment**: How many income earners are there per household, and how do they participate in the labour market? Is their employment formal or informal, or are they self-employed? What kind of activities do they undertake, and in which sectors?
- **Assets and resources**: Do IDPs own assets, and are they productive and/or transferable? Do they receive remittances and other external transfers? Do they have formal or informal access to credit and other financial services?
- **Safety**: Do IDPs face threats such as crime, harassment or physical assault? What other risks or perceived risks do they face? Do they have access to healthcare, justice, police and local authorities?
- **Social integration**: Do IDPs have access to social networks and safety nets? What are their coping mechanisms? Do they participate in their communities? Do they suffer discrimination? [27]

Urban IDPs may suffer discrimination on the basis of their ethnic, religious or political affiliation, and they may not have access to the protection and assistance mechanisms available to their counterparts in camps. This can impede their efforts to adapt and integrate into urban communities and economies. It also helps to determine, along with the other factors mentioned above, whether IDPs settle in closed communities or disperse among their hosts. This in turn shapes how they interact with the people around them and with local authorities. It also influences the extent to which they are able to support each other and receive external assistance.

The following questions are also important in understanding urban displacement from IDPs' perspective:

- What attracts IDPs to cities?
- What pushes them from rural areas?
- What makes them want to stay in or leave particular urban areas?
- For those previously displaced, to what extent does the experience and its duration determine their motivation to stay in or leave cities?
- What are the main human security risks urban IDPs face in terms of issues such as food security, healthcare, shelter, land and tenure, protection and labour rights?
- To what extent does urban life mitigate or exacerbate their vulnerabilities?
- What opportunities do they feel cities give them to increase their self-reliance and end their displacement? How do these differ from opportunities in rural areas?

The city's perspective

Urban systems involve complex governance procedures and structures that provide a multitude of services, all of which are vital to a city's ability to host IDPs and enable their local integration. Evidence from all regions of the world shows that much displacement to urban areas should be considered permanent, and that the de facto goal of support for IDPs becomes local integration.

Urban housing, public infrastructure including roads, public transport, drainage systems and electricity supplies, private investment in utilities, the creation of green spaces and environmental management all play a role in helping to determine the resilience of cities and their residents, as do urban governance arrangements. That said, unsustainable practices, poor implementation and weak law enforcement of laws can erode resilience, drive displacement and ultimately undermine the aims of 2030 Agenda in terms of sustainable urban development.

There are no clear 'owners' of the urban agenda, in fact, as has been stated "urban is neither a cross-cutting theme nor a sector: it is a context, and, as such, is hard to place within bureaucracies."[28] This makes it difficult to identify who is responsible for managing influxes and outflows of IDPs, what drives urban displacement risk and who should be accountable for reducing it. The public and private sectors, national and local authorities, different types of migrants and citizens themselves interact to create urban spaces. This interaction may result in the uneven distribution of gains in the urban development process. Some will benefit while others are excluded and absorbing its negative impacts.

How IDPs are affected by such processes and how they shape them is poorly understood. This calls for greater insight into the political economy of urban settings and its relationship to urban internal displacement.

- How do displacement flows shape the development of cities, and what role does the latter play in determining displacement dynamics?
- How do urban planning and service provision across a range of sectors – including finance and banking, utilities, infrastructure, housing and land markets - and urban economies drive displacement or enable durable solutions?
- How do a city's governance arrangements, including the decentralisation of decision-making and financial resources, affect its ability to receive and integrate IDPs?
- What drives urban displacement risk in small and medium-sized cities? What are the scale and dynamics of future urban displacement?
- How do urban development projects influence displacement patterns and trends, and how does this affect IDPs' resilience?
- Do urban plans and policies include IDPs via participatory processes, and if so how?

The way forward

The complexity of urban displacement dynamics means that efforts to better understand and address the phenomenon require a range of approaches to data collection, research and analysis. Engagement across a range of disciplines, including urban planners, humanitarians, sociologists, economists and development and other sector specialists is also needed.

We are embarking on a programme of research that will involve partnerships with a wide range of experts and institutions. For this, we invite those interested to join our effort to help us answer the many questions raised in this paper.

The first phase of our research will focus on small and medium-sized cities in low and middle-income countries. Many are growing at exponential rates, and in contrast to capitals and mega-cities which are often too expensive and inaccessible, they are likely to become preferred destinations for poor IDPs and migrants.

Over the coming years, we will conduct case studies and qualitative research on such cities across the globe. We also aim to increase our coverage of all urban displacement by systematically monitoring new displacements and differentiating between rural and urban settings. We further seek parters for studies on large cities in hazard-prone regions with substantial development projects that generate displacement.

In 2019, we will consolidate findings from the first phase of research and present the agenda for the next set of research priorities in our Global Report on Internal Displacement, IDMC's flagship report internal displacement.

NOTES

1. UNDESA, World Urbanization Prospects, The 2014 Revision, highlights, available at https://goo.gl/RNZy2c

2. Landau, Loren B. Urban Refugees and IDPs. The Oxford Handbook of Refugees and Forced Migration Studies, p.139-149. 2014, available at https://goo.gl/17BKHY

3. See, for example: Crisp, Jeff., Morris, Tim., and Refstie, Hilde. Displacement in urban areas: new challenges, new partnerships. In: Disasters, Vol. 36, Issue s1, July 2012, p. S23–S42 available at https://goo.gl/VSsFNW; Joint IDP Profiling Service. Guidance for Profiling Urban Displacement Situations, Challenges and Solutions. 2014, available at https://goo.gl/nn98Ho; Sarkar, Aditya. Displacement and the City. 2017. Available at https://goo.gl/F2Rmcb

4. The Rockefeller Foundation. Global Migration: Resilient Cities at the Forefront - Strategic actions to adapt and transform our cities in an age of migration. 09 May 2017, available at https://goo.gl/6PmBZs

5. Rhabaran, Schadi and Herz, Manuel. Nairobi, Migration shaping the City. 15 December 2014, available at https://goo.gl/AzwKcb

6. SFS and ISIM. Access to Durable Solutions among IDPs in Iraq. April 2017, available at https://goo.gl/iauN6Y

7. The Rockefeller Foundation. Global Migration: Resilient Cities at the Forefront - Strategic actions to adapt and transform our cities in an age of migration. 09 May 2017, available at https://goo.gl/6PmBZs

8. IDMC, NRC, MIT and DRAN. Home sweet home: housing practices and tools that support durable solutions for urban IDPs. March 2015, available at https://goo.gl/D5UXEL

9. The World Bank. Informality and Disaster Vulnerability. Moving towards safer houses and stronger communities. Available at https://goo.gl/rDSnga; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Global Disaster Displacement Risk, a baseline for future work. 2015, available at https://goo.gl/gb7MH6 ; and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015, available at https://goo.gl/L5nCme

10. The New York Times, Jakarta Is Sinking So Fast, It Could End Up Underwater. December 21, 2017, available at https://goo.gl/WtJNFu

11. The Boston Globe. 'Mass displacement is a crisis': Building clearouts are becoming increasingly common in Boston. August 24, 2017, available at https://goo.gl/x2jTrN; Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University. Mapping Displacement Pressure in Chicago, December 19, 2017, available at https://goo.gl/apS8wh; Watson, Vanessa. African urban fantasies: dreams or nightmares? In: Environment and Urbanisation, 2014, Vol. 26(1): pp.215-231. Available at https://goo.gl/d7nyHd; City Metric. Africa's cities face unique risks. How can Governments manage them? January 2018, available at https://goo.gl/EkMBxM ; and Ghertner, Asher. India's urban revolution: geographies of displacement beyond gentrification, 2014, available at https://goo.gl/LWHjXk.

12. International Committee of the Red Cross. War in cities: what is at stake? 2017, available at https://goo.gl/T5wN7R

13. International Committee of the Red Cross. I saw my city die: A special report. 2017, available at https://goo.gl/OGLrm2 and The World Bank, Cities of Refuge in the Middle East: Bringing an Urban Lens to the Forced Displacement Challenge, September 14 2017, available at https://goo.gl/9i5ei7

14. International Crisis Group. Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America, April 2017, available at https://goo.gl/XzuA4M; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. New Humanitarian frontiers: Addressing criminal violence in Mexico and Central America. October 2015, available at https://goo.gl/zcLMd1; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Spotlight: El Salvador, Invisible displacement by criminal and gang violence, May 2017, available at https://goo.gl/VfpJFX; International Crisis Group, Easy Prey: Criminal Violence and Central American Migration. 28 July 2016, available at https://goo.gl/ZD2Bu7

15. Jain, Garima, 2014: The role of private sector for reducing disaster risk in large scale infrastructure and real estate development. Case of Delhi. International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, December 2016, available at https://goo.gl/rp5om1; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Two steps forward, one step back: Internal displacement and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. July 2017, available at https://goo.gl/2LUuGs.

16. Haysom, Simone, Sanctuary in the city? Urban displacement and vulnerability, June 2013, available at https://goo.gl/k7Vn9L and ALNAP, Urban Displacement and Peace Building: An Analysis of South African Social Cohesion Interventions, August 1 2012, available at https://goo.gl/tWkc4A.

17. IDMC. Leaving no one behind: internal displacement and the New Urban Agenda. October 2016, available at https://goo.gl/8ckJqb and IDMC, Two steps forward, one step back: Internal displacement and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. July 2017, available at https://goo.gl/kDMye5

18. The Rockefeller Foundation. Global Migration: Resilient Cities at the Forefront - Strategic actions to adapt and transform our cities in an age of migration. 09 May 2017, available at https://goo.gl/6PmBZs

19. Haysom, Simone, Sanctuary in the city? Urban displacement and vulnerability, June 2013, available at https://goo.gl/k7Vn9L and ALNAP, Urban Displacement and Peace Building: An Analysis of South African Social Cohesion Interventions, August 1 2012, available at https://goo.gl/tWkc4A; and Earle, Lucy. The Global Compact for Refugees. Bringing mayors to the table: Why and how. January 2018. Available at https://goo.gl/8AnhJJ

20. See, for example: International Committee of the Red Cross. War in cities: what is at stake? 2017, available at https://goo.gl/T5wN7R; and Earle, Lucy. 2016. Urban crises and the new urban agenda. In: Environment and Urbanization. Vol. 28, Issue 1, 2016. Available at https://goo.gl/ZXRE6n

21. United Nations. Agenda for Humanity, Annex to the Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit, 2016, available at https://goo.gl/Yn1xrX

22. See for example: Landinfo, Sudan: Internally Displaced Persons in Khartoum, November 2008, available at https://goo.gl/bS2FGi; IDMC, India country profile, 2018, available at https://goo.gl/BHVv8w; and James M Shultz, Natalia Muñoz García, Ángela Milena Gómez Ceballos, Luis Jorge Hernandez Florez, Ricardo Araya, Helen Verdeli, Zelde Espinel, Sandra Patricia Cipagauta Bolivar, Yuval Neria and the OSITA Outreach Team, Outreach to internally displaced persons in Bogotá, Colombia: challenges and potential solutions. October 31 2014, available at https://goo.gl/yuq31Z

23. Tufts University, Feinstein International Center, Norwegian Refugee Council and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Internal displacement to urban areas: the Tufts-IDMC profiling study, August 2008, available at https://goo.gl/M6F2R5

24. Davies, Anne and Karen Jacobson, Profiling IDPs in Urban Areas, in: Forced Migration Review, Vol 34, 2010: pp. 13-15. Available at https://goo.gl/9uPsuz

25. Crisp, Jeff., Morris, Tim., and Refstie, Hilde. Displacement in urban areas: new challenges, new partnerships. Pages S23–S42, 11 June 2012, available at https://goo.gl/VSsFNW

26. IDMC, NRC, MIT and DRAN. Home sweet home: housing practices and tools that support durable solutions for urban IDPs. March 2015, available at https://goo.gl/D5UXEL

27. Joint IDP Profiling Service. Guidance for Profiling Urban Displacement Situations, Challenges and Solutions. 2014, available at https://goo.gl/nn98Ho

28. Earle, Lucy. 2016. Urban crises and the new urban agenda. February 9, 2016, available at https://goo.gl/ZXRE6n