Concept Note: Urban Displacement

Toward a stronger evidence base

BACKGROUND

In the 21st century the world turned urban. In 2007 and for the first time, more people were recorded to be living in urban than in rural areas. This trend has been growing and is expected to continue growing, especially in low and middle-income countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. By 2050, the world's urban population is projected to reach 6.3 billion people.[1]

While cities can be hotspots of growth and prosperity, where development gains can benefit millions in low and middle-income countries, cities can also become places where the dynamics of global and national politics and economics crystallise in the form of poverty and inequality, and where marginalisation, criminal violence, conflict and disaster risk concentrate. 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. The interplay of risks in urban areas is complex, and when they materialize in the form of urban crises, cities work as an amplifier, challenging the current approaches to humanitarian response.[2] All of the above has been highlighted by the Global Alliance on Urban Crises, which proposes new approaches to this growing challenge.[3]

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. In this sense, both cities and the internally displaced people (IDPs) that move there are at the centre of the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in an urbanizing world. This calls for a stronger evidence base on urban internal displacement.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is often quoted that between 60 to 80 percent of the internally displaced people live in urban areas compared to rural or camp settings.[4] However, there is no data at a global level to support such statements. Moreover, that figure refers to the stock –number of IDPs in urban areas at a certain point in time–, but the urban displacement flows, including the number of new displacements and returns to and from urban areas has not been captured at a global scale. Additional to such data gaps that do not allow to provide the full scale of urban displacement, more qualitative evidence is needed. While case studies contain some evidence about the conditions of IDPs in cities and how urban systems adapt to host them, this is an aspect that needs further research. This includes urban dynamics such planning and infrastructure, local governance, and the socioeconomic aspects of IDPs and host communities. There is a need for more in-depth analysis to understand how city development plays a role in the dynamics of adaptation and integration of IDPs in urban areas.

To establish a global picture of urban internal displacement, questions need to be answered in at least four areas:

- **Data**: How many people are displaced in urban areas? Where do they usually settle?[5]
- **Drivers and triggers of urban displacement**: What are the drivers and triggers that prompt and prolong urban displacement, and how do they play out against the backdrop of exponential urban growth in different countries?
- **IDPs and the city**: How does displacement shape urban landscapes, and what challenges and opportunities does it present in terms of service provision and urban systems?
- **Cities and displacement**: How do urban processes, growth and demographic and economic change determine displacement risk and affect those displaced?

[1] UNDESA, *World Urbanization Prospects, The 2014 Revision, highlights*. Available at https://goo.gl/RNZy2c

[2] European Commission Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). *The Urban Amplifier: Adapting to Urban Specificities. Report on Humanitarian Action in Urban Crises*. 2018. Available at: https://goo.gl/ez5ks6

[3] Global Alliance on Urban Crises. *Forced displacement in urban areas: what needs to be done*. Available at: https://goo.gl/F5XaFm. For more information on the Global Alliance on Urban Crises, see: https://goo.gl/t6s5Zc and the Urban Crises Charter: https://goo.gl/ZHtCvr

[4] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *Urban Refugees*. 2017. Available at: https://goo.gl/Fsepzr. See also Sarkar, Aditya. *Displacement and the City*. World Peace Foundation, March 2017. Available at: https://goo.gl/CcfXfC

[5] While providing a global picture of the phenomenon of urban displacement is challenging, city case studies and new data methods could provide new insight on the phenomenon.

All of the above 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.[6] 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 specific to their displacement, such as accessing services and employment, and may find themselves at risk of exploitation and extortion.[7] These factors impede their efforts to achieve durable solutions and increase their risk of becoming trapped in protracted, repeated or cyclical displacement. What unique aspects of IDPs' urban experience truly matter for their integration and how do those aspects differ from other urban groups needs more understanding.

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

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. The importance of local level governance in this process is key. That said, unsustainable practices, poor implementation and weak law enforcement can erode resilience, drive displacement and ultimately undermine the aims of the 2030 Agenda in terms of sustainable urban development.

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 as water, waste management and electricity are generally ill-equipped to absorb large influxes of people.[8] 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.

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.[9] 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.[10]

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

[6] 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

[7] 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

[8] 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

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

[10] 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

reduce their vulnerability and help them to become more self-reliant.[11] 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.

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. Climate change and the mismanagement of natural resources threaten to cause the collapse of entire urban systems, and with it mass displacement.

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.

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.

IDMC'S RESEARCH AGENDA ON URBAN DISPLACEMENT

We are embarking on a programme of research that will involve partnerships with a wide range of experts and institutions. As an active member of the working group on forced displacement in urban areas of the Global Alliance on Urban Crises, IDMC is committed to strengthening the evidence-base on the scale and dynamics of urban internal displacement, its risk and impacts.[14] The first phase of our research will focus on small and medium-sized cities in low and middle-income countries.

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 partners 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 (GRID), IDMC's flagship report internal displacement. In order to provide a stronger evidence base, IDMC will open a call for papers on urban displacement in mid-2018. Inputs from the selected papers will be discussed in the 2019 version of the GRID and will be published as background papers in the GRID 2019 landing page.

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[11] 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

[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] Global Alliance on Urban Crises. *Forced displacement in urban areas: what needs to be done*. Available at: https://goo.gl/F5XaFm