

Leave no one behind – IDPs living on the margins of international protection

There are more than 65 million displaced people worldwide, of whom more than 43 million are classified as internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹ Currently, IDPs are overlooked in United Nations (UN) discussions and the focus of the UN Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration is on people who have crossed borders and are on the move. In the spirit of 'leave no one behind', Christian Aid wants to highlight the plight of these people and is calling for a fair deal for IDPs that is funded, ambitious, inclusive and rights-based.

Introduction

In 2016, due in part to the high numbers of refugees moving into Europe via Greece and Italy, the international community pushed for the UN to develop Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration. At the 2016 UN General Assembly, states pledged support to the development of two processes as a means of solving the global crisis.

The refugee situation in Europe has received extensive media and political attention in the past few years. The arrival of refugees and migrants has created a political crisis in Europe, causing a seismic shock to the EU. The political constraints aside, the situation in Europe also led to EU states putting pressure on the UN to make adaptations to existing conventions on refugees and develop legislation aimed at regularising and controlling migration. Unfortunately, the pressure on developing these Global Compacts has primarily come from Europe, North America and Australia, and has skewed the understanding of migrant and refugee flows.

Conflict, violence and disasters caused 31.1 million new internal displacements in 2016 – the equivalent of one person every second having to leave everything behind.²

Politicians in the global North and the international press have managed to reframe the understanding of refugees and migrants as a south-to-north phenomenon, yet the reality is very different. There is overwhelming evidence which demonstrates that the majority of global migration occurs within regions and continents, and the northward movement of people – while causing political challenges for northern countries – is very small in comparison. Most refugees are hosted in countries that border on their countries of origin. However, for numerous reasons, many globally displaced people do not cross country borders.² As the world focuses on displacement, the talks concentrate on refugees, but neglect people who are internally displaced. The UN, states, international agencies and civil society organisations recognise the plight of IDPs, yet addressing their needs has

been overlooked in the current amendments being made to the Global Compacts. In the spirit of 'leave no one behind', Christian Aid is starting to broaden its displacement focus on increasing awareness about IDPs.

Why IDPs matter

IDPs suffer the same types of abuses that force refugees to flee. For Christian Aid, while the global focus on displacement is on refugees, the almost total lack of focus on IDPs is unacceptable. It is important that IDPs are protected by binding international conventions that are based on the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

Who are IDPs?

The difference between refugees and IDPs is that refugees have managed to cross their national border in search of safety. IDPs have not crossed borders; instead they decide to seek security in other regions of their country. Displacement may be a few kilometres from their homes or hundreds of kilometres away. Often IDPs want to cross borders but are prohibited due to different forms of border control. IDPs move in groups, families or even as individuals. They suffer the same forms of insecurity that force refugees to leave their countries. From a protection standpoint, states are responsible for the protection of IDPs within their borders, but this rarely happens. Because of poor infrastructure (which is often responsible for causing displacement), states are failing millions of IDPs. International organisations are involved in providing support, but the extent is limited.

Where are IDPs?

There are IDPs in countries where Christian Aid works: Colombia, Haiti, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, South Sudan, Mali, Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, Afghanistan, Myanmar and the Philippines. IDPs are forced to move to safer areas of these countries, but often these safe areas are equally unstable and IDPs are forced to flee again.



In some cases, IDPs can be displaced for more than 20 years.³ IDPs can be found in various settings, including displacement camps. However, contrary to common belief, most IDPs live outside of camps, both in rural and urban environments. This situation makes calculating the actual number of IDPs in any country difficult. It is easy to calculate the number of IDPs living in UN-sponsored camps, but calculations on the numbers living elsewhere are based on a complicated and flawed form of data collection and analysis.

When people live outside of camps, it is hard to know who is an IDP. Rapid urbanisation has drawn people to cities in search of work and IDPs are part of this flow. Shortcomings in how states monitor IDPs mean that in fact migrants moving into cities are often actually IDPs.⁴ The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates that the actual number of IDPs globally is much higher than current figures.

What are the causes of displacement?

Historically, conflict is the main reason why people become IDPs, but this is not the only cause for displacement. Research also reveals that displaced people are not just affected by a single cause, but a series of overlapping drivers. While conventional conceptions identify displacement as a byproduct of conflict, there are other drivers. People can lose their homes to armed groups. Often villages are overrun and people flee, sometimes to avoid having their children taken as child soldiers. People move to avoid having to pay taxes to new authorities or because their land is taken to feed troops. Often, displacement is due to homes being too close to conflict, and insecure transport routes lead to an increase in market prices of essential goods, therefore people cannot afford to feed themselves. Displacement is also caused by land being expropriated by the government or because land is no longer arable due to climatic changes. Displacement can affect people from different economic backgrounds, but the majority of displaced people come from marginal backgrounds and evidence shows that inequality plays a significant part in driving IDPs from their homes.⁵

Understanding the lives of IDPs

Christian Aid is aware that developing clear categories of understanding IDPs is difficult. Binary concepts only ensure that a clear understanding of internal displacement is unachievable. To make sure that nobody is left behind, Christian Aid has adopted an approach that recognises that people are on the move for multiple reasons, that their movements can vary and they can go in many directions. We understand that people can be displaced multiple times and often for long periods of time. Some people move to camps, some move to cities and others remain in rural areas. Often, people will experience all these environments.

The notion that once peace returns, IDPs will return home is short-sighted at best. Christian Aid understands that people often aspire to go back, but that life events will prevent this. Individuals who have been displaced for extended periods of time will have established lives and had children, and the prospect of return may throw up more instability.

Moreover, it is important to note that IDPs have agency; they make decisions that impact on their lives,⁶ and those choices are often based on calculations about what is best for them and their families. Frequently, this life choice rests in the informal sector. Much is written about IDPs and camps, yet

there is little written about those who live outside camps.⁷ It is important to recognise the importance that social linkages play in providing security for IDPs.⁸ In some countries where Christian Aid works, the overwhelming majority of IDPs live with host families.⁹ These hosts take in IDPs and provide them with shelter and food. IDPs will trade their skills in return for support over short or extended periods of time. The relationships between hosts and IDPs can be tenuous, but we have also seen lasting friendship bonds develop. These host families receive no form of international aid.

More work needs to be done to recognise that it is not only IDPs who use agency to develop survival strategies, but also that communities operate similar methods to accommodate IDPs. Christian Aid's local partners understand these social linkages and regard them as key within greater integration and community resilience.

By the end of 2016 there were 40.3 million people living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence. This number has nearly doubled since 2000 and has increased sharply over the past five years.²

However, evidence shows that IDPs adopt different survival strategies depending on where they are based. Emerging research now points to the importance of social linkages as a key tool for IDPs. Rather than choosing to stay in camps, most IDPs decide to live in informal settings and understand that developing social ties is a key to ensuring access to accommodation and income generation; this becomes more apparent the longer someone has been displaced.

Towards a better focus on IDPs

Christian Aid is calling for a shift from the current global focus that is primarily on refugees towards one of recognising displacement in all its forms. We want states to take seriously their responsibilities towards protecting the rights of the displaced, which includes:

- All civilians displaced inside their own countries to be adequately protected.
- The UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement to be integrated into national laws and policies.
- Ensuring that IDP-focused pledges made by states at the World Humanitarian Summit are upheld.

Currently, the majority of the global IDP population does not live in camps, yet camps receive the majority of money spent by international non-governmental organisations on IDPs. Christian Aid recognises that local partners are best placed to deliver aid to IDPs as they understand the situation better and know where IDPs are living in local settings. They are also better placed to work with IDPs outside of camps. IDPs deserve the same rights and protection as all citizens, so the focus of support must include an understanding of the decisions that IDPs take in developing survival strategies. It is also important to understand the choices that IDPs make and the reasons why they make these decisions. Those providing support also need to understand the social linkages that IDPs form and actively engage and support informal structures, rather than implement parallel formal support structures. This focus will not only lead to improving the lives of IDPs, but also improve the socio-economic strength of the communities in which they live.

It is also important to develop a nuanced understanding of the constraints that different geographical limitations cause on displacement but equally important are the social, economic and political variables that are also an influence.

Ensuring that IDPs are at the heart of 'leave no one behind'

In countries where Christian Aid works, statistics demonstrate that new forms of internal displacement take place almost on an annual basis. This includes people who have already been displaced and are experiencing yet another upheaval.¹⁰ IDP situations remain unresolved, and countries experience fluctuating numbers of IDPs, which is related to the inability of states to deal with displacement as well as the causes, such as conflict and disasters. Where the drivers of displacement are not resolved, there will be periods when there is an increase in displacement, followed by an interval where numbers subside but do not decrease significantly.

Although IDPs vastly outnumber refugees, they receive only minimal focus from the international community. IDPs are viewed as a national issue, so many affected countries do not welcome international interference. Yet there needs to be international responsibility if states do not respond to displacement in their own countries. Therefore, solutions need to be sensitive to national agendas.

There is growing evidence of the relationship between IDPs and refugees. Logically, most refugees will be internally displaced and then cross borders. It is important for the international community to recognise this and focus its efforts on stemming the reasons why people are internally

displaced before they become refugees. Experts on internal displacement are calling on more development spending to be made on IDPs, as humanitarian responses are short-term and do not respond adequately to protracted displacement. The expenditure on development needs to be focused on looking at community-driven solutions to protracted displacement. These solutions need to be focused on IDPs but also the entire communities in which they are based to achieve durable solutions.

In 2000, 22 million people were displaced by conflict. This figure rose to 41 million in 2015.²

At a base level, the drivers of displacement are already recognised in the humanitarian and development fields; they are poverty, inequality, climate change and state fragility. Until resources are focused on overcoming these drivers, refugee movement will continue. There are solutions such as the Grand Bargain (World Humanitarian Summit) as well as the Sustainable Development Goals which can be used to establish measurement tools to monitor progress, yet they are not in place. However, following on from the 2016-18 UN Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration, the global community should pursue adopting legislation on IDPs based on OCHA's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

In future briefings Christian Aid will detail the need for this deal to be funded, ambitious, inclusive and fair.

Author: Fraser Murray
Refugee Policy and Advocacy Adviser

Colombia

The heart of Colombia's internal armed conflict has revolved around economic interests and land. A recent report by Christian Aid partner ABColombia states that as of May 2016, almost 7 million people had been internally forcibly displaced.¹¹

Colombia has recently emerged from an internal armed conflict, which began

more than 50 years ago and has left 8 million victims (people who have disappeared, been killed, injured, displaced or suffered sexual violence).

Colombia also has one of the highest numbers of internally displaced people in the world. The country also has a high level of organised crime, which to some extent becomes invisible and hard

to tackle because the internal armed conflict overshadows other problems.

The government reached a peace agreement with the largest insurgent group, FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), and in October 2016 it officially began peace talks with Colombia's second-largest insurgent group, Ejército de Liberación Nacional.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Since the end of Mobutu's rule, internal displacement has been a constant feature. The number of IDPs has recently risen with new unrest in the Kasai region of central DRC. In Kivu Province, eastern DRC, there are

around 1.7 million IDPs.

OCHA statistics outline that more than 73% of IDPs live outside of camps, yet more than 80% of aid for IDPs is directed into camps.

In DRC, it is important to focus on the phenomenon of host families. Most IDPs live with host families who provide accommodation and support, but receive no form of humanitarian or development assistance.

OCHA Guiding Principles

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement issued by the UN Secretary-General identify internationally recognised rights and guarantees for people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes

due to a number of factors, including natural disasters. Those who have been displaced from their homes but not crossed international borders are not refugees, but rather 'internally displaced persons'.

National authorities are primarily responsible for ensuring the human rights of IDPs; however, the guidelines are relevant to intergovernmental agencies, non-governmental agencies and local authorities as well.¹²

Further reading

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Endnotes

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- 9 'We're Here For an Indefinite Period': Prospects for local integration of internally displaced people in North Kivu, DRC, Aurore Mathieu, Oxfam, 2017, http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/were-here-for-an-indefinite-period-prospects-for-local-integration-of-internall-620262
- 10 See note 2.
- 11 *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, OCHA, 2004, https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/GuidingPrinciplesDispl.pdf
- 12 See note 2.

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We provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes.

**Christian Aid, 35 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7RL
020 7620 4444 christianaid.org.uk**