

A Global View on Responses to Internal Displacement: Where to Go From Here?

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SEPTEMBER 2024



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About Refugees International

Refugees International advocates for lifesaving assistance and protection for displaced people and promotes solutions to displacement crises around the world. We do not accept any government or UN funding, ensuring the independence and credibility of our work.

About this Brief

From 2022 to 2024, Refugees International carried out a series of case study reports and events on internal displacement with generous support from the Bosch Stiftung. The work has focused on the Horn of Africa, East Africa, and the Sahel, and considered the rights of IDPs in varying conditions – both protracted and emerging crises; conflict and climate-related displacement; and with a range of government responses.

Featured Image: A woman and her infant daughter stand outside their shelter in an IDP camp in Rotriak, South Sudan, on November 29, 2023. Photo by Luke Dray/Getty Images.

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Executive Summary

Internally displaced people (IDPs) comprise the bulk of the world's forcibly displaced population, and the bulk of global humanitarian needs. Yet for years, aid and development actors have responded in ad hoc ways to internal displacement. Compared to other displaced populations, there is far less engagement, interest, investment, and coordination around internal displacement. The recent Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) [Review](#) of the response to internal displacement found that responses were too slow, not well-coordinated, and lacked meaningful engagement with IDPs.

More broadly, the response to IDP situations is representative of shortcomings in the wider aid landscape. Austerity dominates; there is inadequate funding – inefficiently deployed – for virtually every emergency, and donor budgets are failing to keep pace with needs. Meanwhile, aid groups often face far greater security and political obstacles when accessing IDPs versus refugees. And the nature of IDP needs is evolving rapidly as climate increasingly drives displacement – but humanitarian structures have been slow to adapt.

The world needs an ambitious, forward-looking agenda on internal displacement. For the last five years, the global IDP agenda has been set by the efforts of the 2019 UN High-Level Panel on internal displacement. While this panel did laudable work, it also located much of its reform agenda outside the humanitarian sector – calling on diplomats and peacebuilders to more effectively prevent the conflicts that spur new displacement; calling for concerted environmental action to mitigate climate displacement; and calling on governments and development actors to recognize internal displacement as a development challenge, not just a humanitarian one. While there has been some progress, these changes have been slow to materialize, and are mostly beyond the influence of the humanitarian system.

But there remain extensive challenges within the humanitarian architecture as well. This report argues that while recent initiatives in the global IDP agenda largely externalized the solutions outside of the humanitarian system, the next internal displacement agenda must also look within that system at the structures and practices that prevent a more effective, coordinated, and people-centered humanitarian response to internal displacement. Based on research conducted with support from the Bosch Stiftung, this report provides recommendations to humanitarians through the lens of several trends and priorities:

- Participation and meaningful engagement with IDP populations;
- Climate-related internal displacement;
- Rising urbanization among IDP populations; and
- Strengthening responsibility and financing for IDPs.

Over the course of two years, Refugees International’s research and advocacy on IDP situations has found that aid groups need to reaffirm a commitment to internal displacement, and adjust leadership, resources, structure, and coordination within the humanitarian sector around IDP protection and solutions. Aid actors are right to call on other sectors to do more: further engagement with peace and security actors, donors, and development and financing actors is critical to finding durable solutions. And they are right to continually emphasize that ultimate responsibility for protecting, assisting, and achieving solutions lies with states. However, the humanitarian system must also look in the mirror, revisit its wobbly commitment to IDP response, recommit to IDP protection, and pursue more ambitious internal reforms.

Context: Background and Tracing Progress of the IDP Agenda

Internally displaced people represent the highest numbers of forcibly displaced people in the world. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) [estimates](#) that there were 75.9 million people living in internal displacement in 2023. This marks an increase from the previous year, which had an estimated 71.1 million people living in internal displacement. Trendlines demonstrate that IDP numbers will [continue to increase, even as the humanitarian system of response continues to be inadequate](#). IDPs are present in nearly every current humanitarian emergency, including Gaza, Haiti, Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, Syria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition to bearing some of the worst conditions in headline crises, millions of other IDPs also languish in protracted situations, in many cases with little access to rights and limited assistance. Among all populations in crisis, IDPs [suffer](#) higher mortality and worse health outcomes, and face a range of rights denials in the hands of governments that are often unable or unwilling to protect their rights.



Data reveals consistent, and in some cases sharp, increases in internal displacement in recent years – all at a time when humanitarian funding is shrinking, states are shirking responsibilities, and migrants (including IDPs and refugees) are pointed to as political scapegoats. Source: The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center.

Recent decades have yielded some notable gains at the global systemic level. This includes tools for better coordination and accountability. For example, the 2005 adoption of the [cluster approach](#) did improve predictability and accountability among humanitarian actors responding to IDP situations. There are also global, regional, and state-level frameworks that map out what a proper response looks like, including the [1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#), the [IASC Framework on Durable Solutions](#), and the [2009 Kampala Convention](#). These tools offer guidance to help governments assist and protect their IDP populations during all stages of displacement. Likewise, the international community, including the UN and NGOs, has made recent efforts: the [High Level Panel on Internal Displacement](#); the creation of the time-limited position of the [Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement](#); the [Secretary-General's Action Agenda](#); and the [IASC independent review of the humanitarian response to internal displacement](#). However, these efforts have offered a drop in the bucket of what needs to be done. In most cases, IDPs are still experiencing a range of protection concerns and rights violations, and responses continue to reflect outdated thinking around IDP response.

As Refugees International [wrote](#) several years ago, gains have been made in relation to protracted internal displacement, durable solutions and the use of the cluster approach. These efforts have galvanized energy around the issues, brought new actors to the table (including development and financing institutions), and put the spotlight on key issues like shelter and gender-based violence. The Special Adviser's focus on solutions also widened engagement on longer-term needs and the participation of IDPs in finding solutions. These efforts provide guidance on how to better implement the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and regional frameworks like the Kampala Convention. This has also driven greater recognition among aid actors and donors that [peace/security actors](#) need to coordinate closely with humanitarian efforts.

Timeline of Internal Displacement Policy



Source: [Internal Displacement Monitoring Center](#).

Where to Go from Here?

A range of actions should be taken by the aid community to improve the response to IDP situations, to improve IDP protection, and to further pursue solutions. While a national government is ultimately responsible for any population – including IDPs – on its territory, and others, such as development actors, financing institutions, and peace and security actors, must increase their work on IDP issues, a new agenda on internal displacement must also address trends and issues within the humanitarian system.

Recentering Power Among IDP Leaders and Organizations, and Creating More Pathways for Meaningful Engagement with IDP Populations

A clear theme that must be central to all efforts, across all stakeholders, and any project or response undertaken, must be meaningful engagement and participation with IDP leaders and IDP-led organizations. This should occur from the earliest stages of protection and emergency response, through the longer-term development programming phases and solutions-oriented activities. IDPs themselves are best-placed to make decisions around their protection needs, and no solution will succeed without their leadership and buy-in. Any actor engaging on IDP issues must prioritize this, and avoid tokenistic engagement. This takes resources, effort, and reframing the way things have been done for decades. Some lessons from the refugee participation movement can also be applied.¹

Moreover, participation is not an end, but a means to better solutions. It must take place from the outset, with diverse IDP groups and leaders – including women-led organizations (WLOs) – offering input, guidance, and direction on activities, projects, and solutions as early as possible. There is no denying that this requires funding. Donors must recognize the value in participation and meaningful engagement, and support this work in its funding approaches. Where possible, funding should go directly to local organizations. The Office of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs (SR) has also increased work on IDP leadership and engagement, and should be provided with additional resources to spotlight this agenda, and to make it a robust part of the UN's way of working. In partnership with NGOs and civil society groups, UN agencies and the SR could also convene a regional or global dialogue where IDP leaders and groups can set the agenda for IDP responses and solutions.

¹ See, for example, [R-SEAT, Refugee Congress](#), or literature, such as James Milner, Mustafa Alio, Rez Gardi, Meaningful Refugee Participation: An Emerging Norm in the Global Refugee Regime, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Volume 41, Issue 4, December 2022, Pages 565–593, <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdac007>.

There is no one size fits all to IDP participation and inclusion models. Indeed, in some cases, it can be dangerous for IDPs – perhaps still at risk of persecution or living in precarious conditions – to speak out. Unlike refugees, they may not be recognized or have support from international actors. Some may need support from international organizations to build their models of advocacy.

Ultimately, protection efforts, and aid and development responses will be more effective with robust IDP involvement, and more importantly, there is a greater likelihood of solutions being achieved when IDPs are at the center of decision-making around which solutions make sense for their own lives.

Global Case Studies: Mechanisms for IDP Engagement

The following case studies were highlighted by the office of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement.

Colombia – Boards for Effective Participation of Victims of Armed Conflict

In Colombia, “Victims Participation Boards” have been created as effective spaces for dialogue by the government of Colombia’s Victims Unit, which leads the response to internal displacement in the country. The Boards exist at territorial, district, and national levels, and have been institutionalized in the Law on Victims and Land Restitution, Law 1448 of 2011, and in the related Protocol on the Effective Participation of Victims. The aim of the Board is to influence the development of public policy for victims of conflict through engagement with government, including people who have been forcibly displaced within the country. The Boards have successfully advocated for participation of children, youth, and racially diverse communities, and are engaged in the development of local development plans integrating solutions to internal displacement.

Today there are 1,094 municipal Boards and 33 district level committees who convene in one National Board. At least half of the seats on each Board must be occupied by women to ensure gender parity.

Ukraine – Councils on Internally Displaced People (IDP Councils)

IDP Councils are advisory bodies to local authorities in Ukraine, comprising IDP and civil society representatives, and host community members. The Councils advocate for the rights and interests of IDPs in local governance and support effective integration within local communities. The establishment of representative bodies from the community (hromada) level allows consideration of needs specific to each location, and informs the development of policies and strategies relevant to IDPs in local administration.

With the support of Charity Foundation Stabilization Support Services, three Coordination Councils were first piloted in Luhansk region and at the city level in Zaporizhzhia, Kramatorsk, and Kharkiv in 2019. Since then, the creation of IDP Councils has only expanded, culminating in Model Regulations for their establishment, approved by a Cabinet of Ministers Resolution in August 2023. The Regulations recommend the establishment of Councils at local (Ramada) and regional (Oblast) level, with regional councils featuring representatives from different Ramadas. In November 2023, the first All-Ukrainian Forum of IDP Councils took place in Kyiv to facilitate dialogues between IDP representatives, government, civil society, and international organizations. Today, there are over 1,000 IDP councils in Ukraine.

Libya – The Steering Committee of Murzuq

Murzuq is a district in Libya hosting an estimated 65,000 to 70,000 residents, many of whom have been recently displaced. Some 40,000 to 45,000 people from Murzuq are displaced across the east, west, and south of Libya. The Roadmap toward Peace and Reconciliation for Murzuq was concluded in 2022, and established a Steering Committee representing different groups affected by the conflict in the district, with the primary role of securing safe return and access to services for internally displaced people from Murzuq.

The Steering Committee currently has seven members, representing the two main ethnic groups in the municipality. The Committee is embedded in the local authority, collaborating with municipal authorities in a range of sectors including housing, economic, and planning services and is built around the four pillars of the Roadmap: rehabilitation of infrastructure; economic recovery; capacity building; and peacebuilding and reconciliation. Activities have included conducting needs assessments in consultation with communities and displaced people. The Steering Committee has been working with partners, including UNDP and USAID, to develop a plan for inclusive local development, to create conditions conducive to the return of IDPs to Murzuq.

Authorities from the eastern and western parts of Libya – both the government of National Stability and the Libyan National Army – have recognized the Steering Committee as a legitimate interlocutor, and the government of National Unity has provided the Steering Committee with an operational budget. This official status and resources have enabled the Committee's effective engagement with local, national, and international actors to support solutions for internally displaced people.

Building Out Responses to Disaster and Climate-related Internal Displacement

Climate change and its effects know no borders, and internal displacement driven by a changing climate is growing. Extreme weather events, droughts, and sea-level rise are forcing millions from their homes: IDMC [estimates](#) some 26.4 million people were displaced by disasters in 2023 alone. In many of these situations (such as Ethiopia, Somalia, and Mozambique), climate-related internal displacement overlapped with conflict-related displacement. Moreover, it is well-documented that climate-related drivers can [exacerbate](#) or even [cause conflict](#). Yet most IDP-related work and funding centers only on conflict-driven internal displacement.

Much more needs to be done to address climate-related internal displacement, and the international aid and development community needs additional tools to do so. Refugees International has [emphasized](#) that the [Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, intended](#) to provide support to communities in developing countries suffering from disastrous weather events and other harms caused by climate change, should ensure active participation by displaced communities. Most displaced people, especially women, have limited access to political processes, including climate adaptation and international financing mechanisms. To mitigate this, Refugees International has argued that the Board of the Fund [should](#) implement a range of new avenues to include civil society and displaced people in their decision-making processes by fostering ongoing consultations with affected communities and establishing direct access to funding for these communities.

In addition, future responses to disaster-induced and climate-related internal displacement should emphasize meaningful participation and engagement with displaced people, making a concerted effort to include marginalized groups within displaced populations. Refugees International's [research](#) on National Adaptation Plans finds that displaced people, including IDPs and refugees, are rarely consulted in planning processes. Indeed, according to Refugees International and the Center for Global Development (CGD), there are:

“...at least [2.2 million IDPs](#) displaced by climate shocks who are in states whose NAPs do not have policies to assist them....Pakistan, for example, had [over a million climate-displaced IDPs](#) at the end of 2022, but its NAP contains no concrete policies to support them. Ethiopia and Kenya, similarly, had over a million climate-displaced IDPs between them, also without concrete policies.”

These groups, among the most vulnerable to negative impacts of climate change, must be included in NAPs if they are to be effective.

South Sudan, home to some 2.3 million IDPs, sets a strong [example](#), as its [NAP](#) anticipates and plans for future climate-related displacement. It also commits to ensuring that refugees, IDPs, and other groups can participate in adaptation planning.

Granted, carrying out such a plan and ensuring that participation continues – for IDPs and other displaced groups – will be a challenge in a context like South Sudan, where conflict and climate-related drivers persist, funding is low, and the government has limited capacity. Yet such a plan is an important first step, and one that the international community should support in implementation and encourage in other contexts.

Recognizing the Increasingly Urban Nature of Internal Displacement Means Responding Differently

The humanitarian sector has yet to adapt to the reality that internal displacement – like most forms of displacement – is an increasingly [urban phenomenon](#). This is particularly pronounced with climate-related internal displacement, but also common in conflict situations. While many IDP situations are still characterized by settlements and, in some cases, dire camp-like settings in rural locations, many IDPs now flee to towns and [cities](#).

Displacement marked by urbanization is not inherently good or bad; rather, it requires different tools, responses, and solutions. The UN Refugee Agency’s (UNHCR) [analysis](#) on refugees moving to cities applies to IDPs, as well: “Unlike a camp, cities allow refugees to live autonomously, make money and build a better future. But they also present dangers. Refugees may be vulnerable to exploitation....and can be forced to compete with the poorest local workers for the worst jobs.” Furthermore, internally displaced women who move to urban areas often find that while there are usually more opportunities, they are also at even more risk of exploitation given the different cultural context found in cities and the lack of their traditional community structures. Moving to urban areas may also mean greater freedom of movement and access to the labor market – rights and freedoms that are often restricted in IDP camps and settlements. Camps and settlements may leave IDPs isolated and vulnerable to [attacks](#), as well.

In Somalia, Refugees International [found](#) internal displacement was part of wider urbanization trends across the country and the region, linked to both climate and conflict-related drivers. Somalia has one of the highest urbanization levels in Africa: by 2026, it is estimated that its urban population will overtake its rural population. This will inevitably reshape its future economy, and must reshape how aid and development are carried out in Somalia.

However, Somalia’s long history of conflict and weak governance often translates to [inadequate services](#) to support IDPs upon arrival in urban areas. In addition, very few social safety nets exist. As Refugees International has [previously reported](#):

“Unlike other countries with large IDP populations clustered in just a handful of settlements across the country, Somalia has more than 2,400 IDP sites, some 85 percent of which are informal settlements on private land in urban areas. This comes with additional risks for IDPs. Indeed, due to the poorly developed and implemented land tenure system, IDPs living on private land are subject to [forced evictions](#) with limited judicial recourse.”

In response, new approaches, such as [area-based approaches](#), should be considered in Somalia and other countries with large IDP populations. As explained in a [2020 report](#) from the Center for Global Development, these types of approaches:

“...treat needs holistically within a defined community or geography; provide aid that is explicitly multisector and multidisciplinary; and design and implement assistance through participatory engagement with affected communities and leaders. Integrating these elements of area-based logic into the humanitarian coordination architecture would better align humanitarian action around the expressed needs and aspirations of crisis-affected people.”

In the case of Somalia and other IDP situations with strong urbanization trends, aid actors could thus use ABA to merge displacement-specific responses with broader activities to alleviate chronic poverty, ultimately working toward solutions that place an emphasis on livelihoods.

Refugees International’s IDP research in Ethiopia’s northern region of Tigray also demonstrated how shelter challenges can consume IDP populations in urban areas. Tigray’s most-populous city, Mekelle, and its surrounding areas hosted nearly [1 million](#) IDPs since the conflict began in 2020 and in its aftermath. The war took the lives of [hundreds of thousands of people and displaced nearly 3 million people](#). Many IDPs were unable to find shelter with family or friends; nor could they afford to pay for their own housing. Settlements erected by the international community on the outskirts of town were few and far between. Thus many took refuge in local schools. According to Refugees International’s [report](#):

“Classrooms are dirty, tattered and crowded, with little privacy and even less sanitation. Most continue to lack access to food, hygiene items, clean water, and other basic services. Moreover, the schools have not been used for learning in years, meaning children have now missed years of schooling and will struggle to catch up.”

Considering [urbanization](#) in the context of IDP aid response and protection also requires a prioritization of livelihood and self-reliance programming. Surprisingly out of step with reality, the aid system continues to be stuck in a “... ‘[back to basics](#)’ [narrative](#)” that defaults to camp-like settings, and neglects the needs of IDPs in urban areas. As Sturridge [writes](#):

“While this arguably reflects humanitarians’ primary mandate to protect lives in the short term on an increasingly slim budget, it downplays IDPs’ preferences for livelihoods support as an interim solution to protracted displacement. In the words of the [Independent review](#), ‘IDPs want: jobs, education, safety. IDPs get: hygiene kits and food handouts.’”

Strengthening Responsibility and Financing for IDPs

Across IDP situations, a clear gap in protection and solutions related to how all actors – from states to aid actors – view responsibility and ownership of IDP issues. Granted, this challenge has been discussed for years.² Yet it remains foundational to improving IDP protection, and some specific steps can be taken by the aid community, donors, and states with IDP populations to initiate improvement.

State Responsibility and the Kampala Convention

States with IDP populations must take responsibility for IDP populations, acknowledging the humanitarian and long-term development needs of IDP populations. Among African states, [domestication](#) of the [Kampala Convention](#) will further enhance IDP rights during displacement, codifying their treatment in national law.³ The Kampala Convention is the first legally binding regional instrument to provide a framework for IDP response, regardless of its cause. Any time states work to incorporate human rights norms into domestic law, rights frameworks are strengthened. The Convention provides specific guidance on prevention and preparedness, and offers clarity on [how existing legal obligations should be interpreted and implemented](#). In some cases, ratifying and domesticating the Convention can also help [“...authorities attract technical and/or financial support from international actors and donors for the different aspects of the implementation process.”](#)

Refugees International case studies on [Chad](#) and [Burkina Faso](#), for example, demonstrate how states must also work with subnational actors to ensure the laws and policies are passed and implemented at the local level. In Chad, authorities operationalized the Kampala Convention in a new law in 2022, which codified the measures and responsibilities laid out by the Convention. Niger also adopted an IDP law on protection and assistance, and other states – notably the [Central African Republic, Liberia, Mali, and South Sudan](#) – are also working to bring the Convention into domestic law. The [ICRC notes](#) that Chad, Nigeria, Somalia, and Sudan have also worked on building out national policies and plans for IDPs.

States should also invite international actors, including the UN, to help oversee the implementation of norms and principles outlined in the [Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#). And donors should push states with IDP populations to provide assistance, protect rights, and work toward solutions.

2 See, for example, Cohen, Roberta. “Developing an International System for Internally Displaced Persons.” *International Studies Perspectives* 7, no. 2 (2006): 87–101. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44218434>. See also Kälin, Walter, *Internal Displacement and the Law* (Oxford, 2023; online edn, Oxford Academic, 22 June 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192899316.001.0001>, accessed September 5, 2024.

3 See Kälin, Walter (ed). *Incorporating the Guiding Principles into Domestic Law: Issues and Challenges*, Washington, D.C. The American Society of International Law, (2010).

This could be via “carrots and sticks,” including diplomatic pressure, and [linking IDP issues](#) to other economic or security objectives, and convening dialogues, meetings, and policy-oriented fora on internal displacement. Donors could also encourage bilateral exchanges between states, whereby a state with progressive IDP policies could coach another state on how this can be achieved. UNHCR has had success with similar models in the [asylum capacity building \(ACD\) space](#), where “mentor” states can help guide other states on good practices.

The Limits of State Responsibility

While states should always be in the lead on IDP protection, assistance, and solutions, the sad reality is that conflict or persecution involving the state are often major drivers of internal displacement. In many cases, IDPs are made up of marginalized groups that are not provided the same rights and protections as other groups. Governments in places like Syria, Sudan, or Myanmar cannot be relied upon to take sincere ownership of IDP support, and greater international leadership, ownership, and coordination is indispensable. Instead, however, responsibility for IDP situations often vacillates between ad hoc approaches where aid actors pass the buck or simply do the best they can, to territorial approaches with competition between agencies. The result is ongoing gaps in protection and assistance for IDPs.

Coordination models like the cluster approach were designed to improve predictability and accountability. Even as the cluster approach is effective at tasking providers of last resort, many clusters are falling through the cracks, and many emergency and protracted situations are still receiving ad hoc responses. As the [IASC review](#) notes, “While clusters have improved on what went before, coordination needs updating to be more flexible, area-based, less rigidly bureaucratic and more accountable.”

The aid community, led by the UN, should thus drive improvements to the cluster approach, which focus on greater accountability and leadership among cluster leads. Clusters that have been inherently weak in execution, such as the early recovery cluster, should be strengthened to work in both emergency and protracted situations. This could include incorporating more financing and development actors sooner, with the aim of working toward solutions from the onset of displacement.

The UN should also engage human rights actors, and in particular should provide greater funds to the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (SR). This role fills a critical space in IDP protection and accountability, and needs greater resources to shine a light on IDP concerns. In addition, as the Special Adviser’s work comes to a close, other UN actors must carry on solutions-oriented work. It is especially important for the Special Rapporteur to have additional resources to foster greater accountability and dialogue, and to encourage greater participation and meaningful engagement with IDP leaders and organizations in the pursuit of solutions.

Financing and Leadership from Donor States

Humanitarian financing is [declining](#) from pandemic-era highs. As of June 2024, only [18 percent](#) of global humanitarian assistance needs had been met. Given that IDPs make up the [bulk of displaced people](#) in humanitarian crises, and given the wavering commitment to their protection on the part of aid actors, IDPs are undoubtedly paying a high price.

As the aid community revisits its own funding shortfalls across the board, international finance institutions (IFIs) in particular should do more. The World Bank already has models for doing so: the recent [sub-window](#) for refugees provides an example of how financing could also work for IDPs. Such [tools](#) provide funding incentives for low-income countries to include displaced people in poverty reduction efforts and other development efforts. The Bank and other donors could work with IDP leaders and organizations to emphasize livelihoods and solutions, particularly in protracted IDP situations.

Powerful donor states like the United States also lack coherent IDP response efforts. USAID, for example, has not updated its [policy](#) in years, and does not have a systematic way of working on internal displacement. It should revise and update its IDP policies to take into account both climate- and conflict-related drivers, as well as policies that reflect the urban dimensions of internal displacement. Revising the policy should also be accompanied by shifting resources toward internal displacement situations. Given that many IDP situations are in countries where the United States has clear foreign policy objectives, investing in IDP protection efforts should be part of wider country strategies.

Recommendations

The international community is at an important moment. The renewed attention on IDPs and solutions must be sustained, especially as the need continues to grow. While each IDP situation is unique and there is no one-size-fits-all approach, there are some recommendations that can carry the next global IDP agenda forward.

Participation

Power imbalances and a lack of meaningful engagement with displaced populations still dominate responses – a trend that is true across aid work more broadly, but particularly pronounced in the internal displacement space. IDPs generally lack the opportunity to design and implement the very programs and activities that are part of responses and solutions to their displacement. Greater inclusion of and leadership by IDPs of different identities (including women, LGBTQI+ IDPs, ethnic minorities, IDPs with disabilities, and others) will improve responses.

- States with IDP populations must work with diverse IDP leaders to formulate solutions as early as possible in a displacement crisis. With support from the UN and NGOs, build IDP Councils or other platforms for engagement at subnational and national levels, so IDP expertise, needs, and interests are built into national plans.
- In partnership with NGOs and IDP-led organizations, the UN – led by the Special Rapporteur – should sponsor a locally centered global dialogue on internal displacement, where diverse IDP leaders can exchange ideas on solutions and responses to their displacement, and take the lead in design and implementation of responses.

Climate

IDP responses are overwhelmingly crafted with conflict-driven displacement in mind, despite the fact that growing numbers of IDPs have been forced to move due to disasters and climate-related situations. This means that response efforts in disaster- and climate-related internal displacement may not be capturing the right actors and resources for a set of solutions that might look very different than conflict-driven internal displacement.

- The UN should support coherence across the UN system to coordinate planning and financing for disaster-related and climate-induced displacement by relevant agencies. This can be coordinated through the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage and its [Task Force on Displacement](#), which provide avenues for minimizing the adverse effects of climate change.

- National Adaptation Plans should [consult](#) with IDPs and account for displacement risks and human mobility in their development. Any [planned relocation](#) should be conducted in a community-driven, human rights-based manner with appropriate government support. Climate-displaced communities should have direct access to financing to support their recovery and be actively engaged in [decision-making processes](#) of the Board of the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage and other bodies.

Urbanization

Humanitarian response is still predominantly premised on rural, camp-like settings, which neglects the reality of increasingly urban IDP populations. This thinking can impede progress on key issues such as livelihoods and housing.

- States, the UN, and NGOs should [consider area-based approaches \(ABAs\)](#), which align better with a settlement-centric approach to resilience. ABAs tend to incorporate local governments and development agencies to produce more holistic responses that account for urban poverty and the reality that in many cases, IDPs have fled to urban areas and are unlikely to return.
- In all settings, aid actors should push for opportunities to enhance women's leadership roles (as Refugees International recommended in its Somalia IDP report). Urban settings present specific opportunities for this, as women and children make up large portions of urban IDP populations.
- Aid actors should draw on differentiated assistance and protection strategies – particularly in relation to shelter and housing – that account for variance in needs among the population. Many long-term IDPs share the same needs as the urban poor and may have different needs than new arrivals.

Strengthening Responsibility and Financing for IDPs

The UN, donors, and states with IDP populations need to revisit responsibility for and ownership of IDP issues and maintain momentum on IDP issues.

- States with IDP populations must take responsibility for IDP populations, acknowledging the humanitarian and long-term development needs of IDP populations. Among African states, [domesticate](#) the [Kampala Convention](#), and work with subnational actors to ensure the laws and policies are passed and implemented at the local level (see Refugees International case studies on [Chad](#) and [Burkina Faso](#), for example).
- States should further include the UN in oversight of the implementation of norms and principles outlined in the [Guiding Principles on Internal](#)

[Displacement](#). Donors should push states with IDP populations to provide assistance, protect rights, and work toward solutions. This could be via diplomatic pressure, as well as convening dialogues, meetings, and policy-oriented fora on internal displacement.

- Donor states like the United States should revise and update IDP policies to take into account both climate- and conflict-related drivers, as well as policies that reflect the urban dimensions of internal displacement. USAID should update its [policy](#) and offer greater clarity, leadership, and further explanation on how it factors IDP populations into wider humanitarian response efforts. Revising the policy should also be accompanied by shifting resources toward internal displacement situations, demonstrating leadership in crisis and protracted settings.
- The UN should provide greater resources to human rights actors, including the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (SR), to foster greater accountability and dialogue. Given her reporting role, and in light of the completion of the Special Adviser’s term, the SR is particularly well-suited to hold actors accountable for the human rights of IDPs. The SR is also well-placed to push for increased participation of IDPs in policy-related conversations with governments and other stakeholders.
- International finance institutions (IFIs) should work with IDP leaders and groups at the outset of displacement to incorporate IDP issues into their bilateral relationships and financing arrangements with host countries. The World Bank should even consider creating a [sub-window](#) for IDPs, in the same way it created one for refugees.

Conclusion: A Moment of Reckoning

A wider reckoning around IDP response is needed among humanitarian actors. IDPs represent the highest numbers of forcibly displaced people, and are at the forefront of today's humanitarian crises. The international community – international NGOs, the UN, states, donors, civil society, and displaced groups, as well – needs to take new measures to change how IDPs are viewed, and the protection and solutions approaches that are proposed.

Refugees International's regional and thematic work on internal displacement underscores the need to focus on protection and solutions that fit reality: many IDP situations are increasingly urban, and models of camps and settlements – though familiar to the aid community – do not necessarily fit the protection and solutions needed for today's IDPs. In addition, responses to disaster-induced and climate-related internal displacement need to include IDP leaders and civil society in more robust ways, including through ongoing consultations and additional engagement opportunities. More broadly, the aid community needs to recenter power in the direction of IDP leaders and organizations, creating more pathways for meaningful engagement with IDP populations from the earliest outset of protection and emergency response, through the longer-term development programming phases and solutions-oriented activities. Displaced people are best-placed to design and implement programs relating to their protection and solutions. There should also be a global dialogue pushing for more IDP leader participation in policy conversations.

In addition, a wider reckoning among institutional responses, particularly within the UN, need to reflect the needs of the burgeoning IDP population. Other UN actors must carry on the work of the outgoing Special Adviser, and more resources should be given to the Special Rapporteur, and IDPs given a more prominent place in international dialogue. Aid actors and the UN in particular should revisit their commitment to IDPs, cultivating a sense of ownership and dedication that is matched by resources and investments. Engagement with development, financing, and peace and security actors should continue to be a priority for those responding to internal displacement, but the aid community must also look inward to consider how it can make IDP responses more predictable and less ad hoc.

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