Internally Displaced Persons, the Sustainable Development Goals and Perspectives for Durable Solutions: A multi-stakeholder exchange (25 June 2020)

Summary

Introduction
On 25 June 2020, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and the co-chairs of the Groups of Friends of the High-Level Panel in New York and Geneva (Mali, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Norway) organized a multi-stakeholder discussion around “Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Perspectives for Durable Solutions”. As a first step towards submitting dedicated recommendations to the Panel, the meeting built on acknowledging that internal displacement impacts all the 17 SDGs, while advancement towards the SDGs can help reduce internal displacement and its negative consequences.\(^1\) Gathering over 90 participants, the meeting benefited from inputs from a variety of stakeholders, including seasoned diplomats, representatives from Member States, NGOs, the UN system, the World Bank as well as the Secretariat of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement.

Update from the Secretariat of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement:
In his opening remarks, Assistant Secretary-General Mr. George Okoth-Obbo, highlighted the richness of the 80 written submissions received, containing over 160 recommendations from key stakeholders, some looking at development aspects in line with central Panel objectives such as investigating the humanitarian-development link and preparing recommendations on how IDPs can be further embedded within the SDGs. The Panel has identified six thematic priorities, three of which have emerged as particularly central: political will, prevention, and integrated approaches to solutions. The other three (financing, the private sector, and data and evidence) are recognized as key enablers. All of this work is done in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, which has operational ramifications – e.g. the need to extend the Panel’s mandate in time – as well as an impact on the problematization of the issue itself.

Overview of the exchange
The meeting was structured around a set of short presentations before opening the floor for comments. Stakeholders highlighted key substantive areas to be considered, which are summarized below:

Former Ireland’s Permanent Representative to the UN and co-facilitator for two major negotiations relating to sustainable development, Amb. David Donoghue reflected on the lack of consensus among Member States regarding IDPs. While they received limited attention in the 2030 Agenda and the 2016 New York Declaration, both instruments allow for much higher profile to be given to IDP issues at national and international level. In particular, as a largely uncontested global agenda, the SDGs can be seen as a benign and neutral vehicle to achieve global consensus on preventing and solving internal displacement, especially building on the wealth of content across the goals and targets, which are relevant to IDPs as well as the core ‘leave no one behind’ principle. At global level, this could be further articulated through a High-Level meeting with an accompanying declaration. At national level, this would lead to further including IDPs within in-country planning and implementation platforms. Perhaps subject to specific instructions from the UN Secretary General or the creation of a high-profile position within the UN system, Resident Coordinators could more systematically engage on this topic in their countries of accreditation. Governments (including donors) could then be further incentivized to reflect explicitly IDP needs in voluntary national reviews. The High-Level Political Forum on sustainable Development could give a further push in this direction, for example deciding to include IDP concerns as a thematic cross-cutting issue.

At the start of the Decade of Action towards delivering the SDGs, the pandemic may dramatically reverse development gains, escalating the risks faced by IDPs of being left behind. In this context, Mr. George

\(^1\) See the concept note for this meeting.
Conway, Deputy Director of the UNDP2 Crisis Bureau, called for a new paradigm promoting integrated approaches to internal displacement, leveraging the full extent of UN capabilities to support national authorities. This new paradigm should focus on scaling-up sustainable solutions to achieve transformative change and entail cooperation across the Nexus spectrum. It should enhance prevention and work in support of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, towards common objectives and nationally defined plans, and encourage the needed political will to drive real solutions. Complex and protracted problems require integrated solutions that cannot be found through fragmented, siloed or sectoral-specific approaches, but can be promoted through policy frameworks and institutional structures such as Somalia’s National Development Plan and National Durable Solutions Secretariat. As protracted displacement needs to be addressed fundamentally as a human rights issue, such structures can also help strengthen local governance, community engagement and the involvement of IDPs in local development planning, while also addressing social cohesion, access to services, access to justice, land and property rights. As the designated UN technical lead on socio-economic recovery from COVID-19, UNDP is working with UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams to promote integrated, efforts towards recovering better. Mr. Conway also stressed the need to ensure socio-economic data and analysis on displaced persons and host communities feed into COVID-19 impact assessments and in preparations of national recovery strategies and plans. In this context, the collective ambition must be to push beyond simple recovery, to build longer-term resilience to shocks and usher in necessary transformations to put the world on an accelerated track to achieving the SDGs. IDPs should be fully part of that trajectory and a key aspect will be to build new social contracts, closing gaps in trust between citizens and the State. A commitment to poverty eradication must particularly turn into efforts to consistently deal with protracted displacement, from real developmental angles.

Ms. Natalia Baal3, Senior Strategy and Policy Officer at the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement focused on existing challenges and opportunities to improve the data landscape. Currently, most available data on internal displacement is collected for humanitarian purposes and therefore focuses primarily on the magnitude of displacement, the location of IDPs and information about their immediate needs. Moreover, many contexts where data is produced are very challenging for political and operational reasons, which leads to significant data quality limitations. In general, with notable exceptions, much of the available data on internal displacement is not suited to the information needs of development processes which can be a hindrance to greater inclusion of IDPs in development efforts. Data is rarely aligned with international standards, often disconnected from development planning processes and not integrated in national statistical systems. However, the clear and growing consensus around the critical need for enhanced development engagement to address internal displacement, opens several opportunities for investment in improving the quality and availability of data needed for this purpose, i.e. data on the socio-economic well-being of IDPs and how this compares to that of host communities. The commitment to ‘leave no one behind’ is also important as the SDGs framework recognizes the need for data to increase the ability of countries to be inclusive of vulnerable groups in their planning, implementation, and monitoring systems. Investments in socio-economic micro-data can and should also build on progress made by the UN Statistical Commission to develop International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS), recently endorsed in March 2020. There is a clear opportunity now, not only to help implement these, in coordination with government departments and international organizations as relevant, but also to refine the recommended proposals for statistical measurements of vulnerability and progress towards solutions. The Joint Data Center aims to contribute to improved socio-economic data on IDP situations that can be used to inform policy and design of development programs and support implementation and refinement of the IRIS, including through capacity building and financial and technical investments to better capture internal displacement in national household surveys.

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2 See: Advancing Human Development Approaches in Addressing Internal Displacement: UNDP Written Submission for the UN High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, June 2020
3 For further details and links to documents, please consult the PPT accompanying this presentation as well as the Submission from the WRG-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement for the consideration of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, May 2020.
Dr. Ulrika Blom, Uganda Country Director for the Norwegian Refugee Council, also argued that the SDGs framework can be a more neutral vehicle for comprehensive and coordinated response to internal displacement. It can facilitate principled humanitarian response, while supporting long-term solutions. The success of this approach, however, lies in addressing four major parameters: 1) Comprehensive programming often has limited impact because plans are underfunded. This results in prioritizing the most pressing needs over long-term considerations and durable solutions programs. Flexible, multi-year funding can, however, help adapt to the changing environment and ensure a coordinated response throughout the displacement cycle. 2) The coordination mechanism for comprehensive response is not optimal, particularly because development programming does not have a given coordination body that fits well with the humanitarian coordination set-up. Moreover, the need for principled humanitarian response is, at times, difficult to align with government programs. 3) The community must be at the center, consulted, have power, autonomy, and funding. Understanding possible solutions within the community context is fundamental for comprehensive approaches to transcend protracted situations. 4) As outlined in NRC’s submission to the High-Level Panel, without understanding house, land, and property rights and without the capacity to solve related issues, protracted displacement challenges will remain. Including protection of housing, land and property resources and the right to restitution in peace agreements can ensure long-lasting outcomes for displaced populations. This translates into analyzing relevant legal frameworks, documenting and estimating the level of destruction. The Panel should consider those parameters when reflecting on how to catalyze and support effective solutions. Finally, Dr. Blom encouraged the Panel to consider cases such as Uganda, which is not currently facing an internal displacement crisis but can offer important lessons from the past.

Open exchange:
During the exchange, Norway and other participants suggested that the Panel could be instrumental in the realization of IDP inclusion in the development agenda, provided fundamental questions could be addressed, especially: How can data help in this regard? Where do we need a political momentum for change? Do we need new financial instruments? How to achieve better coordination between UN agencies, the World Bank and other humanitarian and development actors? Drawing on its own experience and triple Nexus approach, Ethiopia stressed the need to assist the Panel in learning from existing experience of including internal displacement into national developments plans as well as in local planning, which often overlooks IDPs. Sweden, Mr. Okoth-Obbo and others identified reflections around the IDP definition (including who is an IDP and who should no longer be labelled as such) as crucial – though sensitive – aspects for the Panel’s work on the SDGs and durable solutions. As highlighted by Ms. Baal of the Joint Data Center, the desire to start clarifying definitional aspects and how these relate to solutions and are reflected in available data, provided much momentum to the development of the International Recommendations on IDP Statistics. Currently institutions, countries and regions translate the IDP definition very differently in practice and, from a data perspective, the IRIS provide the best place to start building a more coherent picture. A major achievement of the High-Level Panel could be to act as a catalyst in the shift towards using common definitions and developing comparative socio-economic data on internal displacement.

Recognizing that this may not be the panacea to breaking silos, many participants considered that the UN Resident Coordinators strengthened role had generated opportunities for a more cohesive approach among country teams in addressing nationally defined common priorities and outcomes. Mr. Conway of UNDP highlighted that, in contexts like Somalia, this has already helped addressing the fragmentation issue, agencies meaningfully coming together to collaborate under joint programming frameworks, common strategies, and engaging more consistently with national and local governments. Similarly, much more effective interaction is emerging between civil society-led consortiums such as the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) and the UN system, with convergence on strategic approach, advocacy, and concrete support to governments. There are examples of overcoming siloed approaches within government-led frameworks, which the High-Level Panel may consider, including on how to reinforce political will. Another suggestion towards more cohesive multi-stakeholder partnerships across the triple Nexus drew on InterAction’s recommendations to the Panel, focused on the idea of initiating country-level roadmaps, with
dedicated funding, to reduce internal displacement. Underpinning the recommendations is the notion that creative outcome-oriented strategies could be transformed into interlocking sets of commitments in the form of a Compact. There might be a rare opportunity to look at approaches already piloted in refugee contexts and from which lessons can be learned and applied to strengthen the long-term resilience of displaced people and host communities, especially through a range of innovative combinations of legal, administrative, trade, policy, and country financing mechanisms.

**Conclusion:**

In closing the meeting, Mr. Okoth-Obbo thanked participants for their contributions and Norway for drawing attention on the need to secure an extension for the Panel’s work. He also highlighted the Secretariat’s efforts to ensure that the Panel’s final report would be informed by a degree of consultation with IDPs, affected communities, national and local authorities. Going forward, Mr. Okoth-Obbo particularly stressed the importance of the notion of developing transformative approaches. ICVA thanked participants and highlighted that inputs from this meeting would now feed into developing concrete recommendations to be shared with the Panel in the following weeks.

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**About the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement:**

The High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement was established by the UN Secretary-General to find concrete solutions to internal displacement. The Panel works to increase global attention on internal displacement, while developing concrete recommendations for Member States, the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders. It builds on ongoing efforts within the humanitarian, development and peace communities. The Panel’s report is expected to identify innovative and concrete recommendations to better prevent, respond, and achieve solutions to internal displacement.

To know more about the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement:

- Consult the Panel’s website: [https://www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/](https://www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/)
- Follow the Panel on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/ldps_Panel](https://twitter.com/ldps_Panel)

**About the Groups of Friends of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement**

Gathering Member States and co-chaired by Mali, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Norway, the purpose of the Geneva- and New York-based Groups of Friends is to provide a platform for interaction between the High-Level Panel and Permanent Missions. The Groups also ensure information sharing, consultations and organize briefings on issues related not only to the Panel but also on internal displacement in general. The Groups do not aim to negotiate common positions among the attending States. One strength of the Groups of Friends is to invite all Permanent Missions to meetings, thus providing an open and transparent channel for interaction with States.

**About ICVA**

ICVA is a global network of NGOs whose mission is to make humanitarian action more principled and effective by working collectively and independently to influence policy and practice. Established in 1962 by a small coalition of refugee and migration NGOs, ICVA has grown into a diverse network of over 100 NGO members operating in 160 countries at global, regional, national and local levels. ICVA helps its members understand, engage and influence the humanitarian sector with a focus on Forced migration; Humanitarian coordination; Humanitarian financing; and Cross-cutting issues.

To know more about ICVA’s work on the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement:

- Consult our webpage: [https://www.icvanetwork.org/high-level-panel-internal-displacement](https://www.icvanetwork.org/high-level-panel-internal-displacement)
- Follow us on twitter: [https://twitter.com/ICVA_Displaced](https://twitter.com/ICVA_Displaced)
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