

# OCHA on Message: Internal Displacement

## What is Internal Displacement?

When people are forced to flee or leave their homes but remain within their own country, they are known as internally displaced persons (IDPs). The key characteristics of internal displacement are its coercive or otherwise involuntary nature and the fact that the displaced people do not cross an international border. Internal displacement may be caused by armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters.

At the end of 2018, according to Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, there were an estimated 41.3 million IDPs worldwide due to conflict and violence. In addition, some 17.2 million people were newly internally displaced due to extreme weather events often linked to climate change in 144 countries and territories.

The majority of the world's IDPs do not live in camps but are taken in by host families, placing social and

financial burdens on host communities. Many IDPs find shelter in urban areas, where they live among the urban poor. These varied settlement patterns create challenges for determining the number of IDPs and their needs.

IDPs can be particularly vulnerable and may require short- and long-term assistance and protection. Many flee their homes without belongings or identity papers, often in circumstances of serious trauma and violence. For many IDPs, their displacement may last for years or even decades, with limited or no access to essential services, health care, education or sustainable livelihoods.

Unlike refugees, who have crossed an international border and are therefore no longer under the protection of their country of origin, IDPs rely on the national authorities of their country for protection and assistance. However, these authorities may be unwilling or unable to fulfil this

responsibility. In such circumstances, the United Nations and other international humanitarian organizations support and complement their efforts to assist IDPs and host communities.

IDPs are entitled to the full range of rights enjoyed by other citizens and habitual residents of their country. These rights are reflected in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Based on international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law by analogy, the Guiding Principles consolidate the legal standards relevant to IDPs and provide guidance to national and international actors on responding to their needs. The Guiding Principles address all phases of displacement, including protection against arbitrary displacement, protection and assistance during displacement, and in the realization of the durable solutions of return, resettlement and reintegration.

### Internally Displaced Persons

According to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, IDPs are “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.”

## What is OCHA's role?

In 1991, the United Nations General Assembly assigned a humanitarian leadership and coordination role to the Emergency Relief

Coordinator (ERC). The General Assembly made clear that this role extends to situations of internal displacement. The

ERC/Under-Secretary-General is the senior United Nations humanitarian official and the head of OCHA. In 1997, responsibility for the



overall coordination of the protection of and assistance to IDPs was formally assigned to the ERC and

has been repeatedly emphasized by the General Assembly. At the country level, the Humanitarian

Coordinator is responsible for leading the response to internal displacement and reports to the ERC.

## How does OCHA respond to internal displacement?

OCHA supports the ERC and HCs in meeting their responsibilities towards IDPs. This work cuts across all five core functions of OCHA:

**Field coordination:** OCHA ensures that the specific needs of IDPs and host communities are integrated into the humanitarian programme cycle, including in protracted situations, by promoting an improved collaboration between humanitarian and development actors in order to reduce vulnerabilities and support self-reliance. OCHA also ensures a coordinated approach to addressing constraints on humanitarian access, including to IDPs.

**Policy development:** OCHA ensures that displacement issues are

addressed in Secretary-General reports, and it seeks to further develop the normative framework by supporting the inclusion of IDP language and concepts in General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. OCHA provides guidance on IDPs to field offices and disseminates good practices. OCHA, together with the International Organization for Migration and the Office for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, also supports the establishment of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement.

**Advocacy:** The ERC and OCHA have a role in championing the rights of IDPs in conflict and disaster situations and with Member States and partners. This

includes briefing the UN Security Council, but also liaising with governments and parties to conflict and reminding them of their obligations and commitments to gain access and ensure that displacement-affected communities receive the protection and assistance they need.

**Information management:** OCHA works with partners to ensure that IDPs and their specific vulnerabilities are captured in improved data collection and analysis to better inform response.

**Humanitarian financing:** OCHA manages the Central Emergency Response Fund as well as country-based pooled funds, which are an important resource for responding to IDPs' emergency needs.

## What does OCHA say?

1. OCHA calls on all parties to conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law in order to prevent situations that lead to displacement and, when displacement does occur, to assume their responsibilities to protect and meet the basic needs of IDPs and other conflict-affected populations.

2. People who are displaced by natural hazards, including due to the adverse effects of climate change, can experience similar vulnerabilities as those displaced by violence.

However, disaster-induced displacement may present specific particularities that need to be taken into account. Human rights law provides a comprehensive international legal framework to guide the humanitarian response in disasters.

3. Durable solutions to displacement can be achieved in the following ways: IDPs could integrate locally, settle elsewhere in the country, or return home. They have the right to make a voluntary and informed decision and receive support, if necessary, to

carry out their choice in safety and dignity.

4. Without access to durable solutions, IDPs and host communities risk increased vulnerability and aid dependency. OCHA supports a new approach based on the achievement of collective outcomes agreed by Governments, humanitarian and development organizations, civil society and the private sector to progressively reduce IDP vulnerability and facilitate the path towards durable solutions.

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