

Where Do Internally Displaced People Live and What Does that Mean for Their Economic Integration?

Cindy Huang and Jimmy Graham

There are over 68.5 million forcibly displaced people in the world, including about 40 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who have moved because of conflict, including political, communal, and criminal violence.ⁱ There are millions more IDPs who have been displaced by other drivers, including disasters, economic instability, and development projects such as infrastructure construction. These IDPs, 99 percent of whom are in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), face severe economic challenges as a result of displacement.¹ To help them overcome these challenges, policymakers should focus on helping IDPs achieve greater self-reliance. The best approach to doing so will depend in large part upon the context—particularly the extent to which IDP populations are based in urban or rural areas.ⁱⁱ

Our analysis shows that about half of IDPs in LMICs are in urban areas, that the composition varies significantly across countries, and that there is a substantial lack of IDP location data.

Based on these findings, partners should:

- help IDPs capitalize on the relatively large number of economic opportunities available in urban areas
- create sustainable growth opportunities in rural areas and/or consider incentivizing IDPs' voluntary relocation to urban areas
- invest in collecting more data to help make strategic decisions

To explore these findings, we created an interactive map that shows the known locations of IDPs relative to various types of urban areas, demographic information, reasons for displacement for each IDP location, and the estimated amount of missing data in each country. This map is available at cgdev.org/idps, alongside a policy note on which this brief is based.ⁱⁱⁱ The policy note also outlines our methodology and elaborates on the findings and recommendations in this brief.

PARTNERS SHOULD FOCUS ON HELPING IDPs ACHIEVE GREATER SELF-RELIANCE

IDPs face severe economic challenges. Displacement can lead to a loss of assets, isolation from markets, labor

i In this brief, all displacement figures refer to these three types of conflict displacement.

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iii The Policy Note and interactive map can be found here: <https://www.cgdev.org/idps>

market discrimination, difficulty accessing formal labor markets due to legal barriers such as documentation requirements, and the loss of social networks and support systems.² These and other challenges are compounded by the fact that many IDP situations last for many years or even decades.³ As a result, IDPs tend to experience lower incomes and reduced outcomes in terms of consumption, health, education, security, housing, labor conditions, and social wellbeing.⁴ And the challenges are compounded even further for internally displaced women and girls, for whom it can be more difficult to re-establish themselves after being separated from their communities and families.⁵ Furthermore, displacement tends to occur more often in countries with worse socioeconomic outcomes and, within these countries, populations in more marginalized areas are often more severely affected by displacement.⁶ Thus, those who are displaced tend to face greater economic difficulties to begin with and displacement only compounds these difficulties.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) commitment to leave no one behind, there is a growing recognition of the need to support forcibly displaced people in LMICs in overcoming these economic difficulties.⁷ In particular, there is an emerging acceptance that, in contrast to camp-based models of support, IDPs and refugees should be allowed to seek greater self-reliance through local economic integration (i.e., through accessing decent work and increased incomes in the labor market). Likewise, there has been an increasing number of programs designed to help them do so.⁸ However, most of the focus to date has been on refugees. Moving forward, more should be done to support IDPs as well. There are many more IDPs than refugees in the world, and although as citizens they face fewer legal barriers to work, they nevertheless face serious economic challenges. Furthermore, with sound policies and support systems in place, greater economic integration can bring benefits not only to IDPs, but also to host communities. Cheltenham Institute conclude that the gaps are larger than the evidence.

PROGRAM AND POLICY CHOICES WILL DEPEND ON WHERE IDPs ARE BASED

Some of the greatest opportunities for expanding IDPs' economic integration are in urban areas (particularly

larger urban areas), where economic activity clusters.⁹ There is strong evidence for the association between the size of urban areas and economic activity and productivity. For example, 681 of the world's cities with at least 500,000 people account for 24 percent of the global population and 60 percent of global economic output.¹⁰ In addition, a large body of research finds that there are major economic gains associated with moving to urban areas.¹¹ And although cities in LMICs often have high unemployment, they nonetheless tend to provide the most substantial opportunities for economic integration: urban productivity relative to national productivity is especially high in LMICs, and cities in developing countries represent some of the world's fastest-growing economies.¹²

However, there is no guarantee that IDPs in urban areas will be able to successfully integrate into labor markets. Given the many challenges mentioned above, it may be difficult for many forcibly displaced people to integrate even when they are located near job opportunities. Furthermore, urban areas bring their own challenges. For example, rent, transportation, food, and other items can be unaffordable for people who have already lost much of their wealth during displacement. Urban IDPs may also have less access to services than their counterparts in camps, greater security challenges, and less secure housing tenure. As a result, while urban areas provide more opportunities, IDPs may need support in accessing them—implying the need for policies and programs that fill that role.¹³ Moreover, because there are often high rates of urban unemployment in LMICs, these policies and programs can be developed to support both vulnerable hosts and IDPs. The IKEA-Jordan River Foundation partnership, which created new economic opportunities for hosts as well as displaced populations, provides one example of how this can be done.¹⁴

Of course, IDPs may find opportunities in and have skills more applicable to rural contexts, but overall these opportunities tend to be fewer. Thus, while urban-focused approaches are more likely to be able to build upon existing economic opportunities, strategies to support rural IDPs may require larger investments to build markets and drive inclusive growth. Another possible strategy to supporting rural IDPs may be facilitating their relocation to urban areas. Therefore, given the need for different approaches across contexts, understanding the

TABLE 1. TOTAL NUMBERS OF IDPs IN URBAN AREAS BASED ON LOCATION DATA AVAILABLE FOR 9.3 MILLION IDPs IN 17 COUNTRIES

	IDPs with data for urban analysis	IDPs in any urban areas ⁱⁱⁱ	IDPs in urban clusters ^{iv}	IDPs in urban centers ^v	IDPs in major urban areas ^{vi}	IDPs in largest urban areas ^{vii}
Total number	9,273,931	4,387,834	4,190,937	2,593,674	1,438,992	262,724
Working-age^{viii}	3,969,046	1,956,890	1,870,183	1,157,763	654,147	118,786
Working-age females	2,045,714	1,008,614	963,924	596,731	337,159	61,224

urban-rural composition of IDP populations is an important first step towards determining how best to implement programs and policies that support improved livelihoods and self-reliance.

ABOUT HALF OF IDPs ARE IN URBAN AREAS

To better understand the extent to which IDPs are in urban or rural areas, we analyzed data on the existing known locations of conflict-displaced IDPs in all LMICs and visualized their locations in an interactive map. The data cover 17 countries and 9.3 million conflict-displaced IDPs.^{iv} The sample is not representative, so it does not allow us to estimate the total number of urban IDPs in the world, but it does allow us to create a lower bound.

We find that about 4.4 million conflict-displaced IDPs are in urban areas, and nearly 1.5 million of them are in major urban areas with populations over 300,000 (see table 1).^v It is also common for at least half of the IDP population in a given country to be urban. In addition, almost half are of working-age and half are female.

iv We focus on conflict-displaced IDPs mainly because displacement from conflict tends to be especially protracted, such that the need for improving economic integration for conflict-displaced IDPs at their place of destination may be greatest. Crawford, Cosgrave, Haysom, and Walicki, *Protracted displacement: uncertain paths to self-reliance in exile*.

v Data sources include DTM, UNHCR, JRC and the EU, and UNDESA. A detailed discussion of the data and methodology can be found in the policy note version of this brief.

vi Includes the single largest city for each country.

We also find that these urban populations are dispersed across various countries. Ten countries have at least 50,000 IDPs in urban areas and 10 have at least 10,000 in major cities. Some countries have very large urban populations: Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Iraq each have over 500,000 IDPs in urban areas and at least 100,000 in major urban areas. On the other hand, other countries, such as Niger and Chad, contain mainly rural IDPs. Thus, there is a great deal of variation in urban-rural composition across countries. And this variation is not simply linked to differences in national rates of urbanization – IDP urbanization rates do not necessarily follow national trends). In contexts where IDPs are disproportionately rural, there may be especially strong opportunities to facilitate their urbanization.

The analysis also highlights the paucity of data on the locations of IDPs within countries. As table 1 shows, there are only about 9.3 million IDPs with location data that allow us to determine whether they are in urban or rural locations—and there were roughly 40 million conflict-displaced IDPs in the world as of December 2017.¹⁵ Furthermore, these 9.3 million IDPs are from only 17

vii Includes urban clusters, urban centers, major urban areas, largest areas, and locations given an “urban” classification by data collectors.

viii Areas with a density of at least 300 inhabitants per km² and a minimum population of 5,000 inhabitants.

ix Areas with a density of at least 1,500 inhabitants per km² or a density of built-up greater than 50 percent, and a minimum of 50,000 inhabitants.

x Cities with at least 300,000 people.

countries, though at least 50 countries have at least 1,000 IDPs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings have three key implications for partners working to help IDPs achieve self-reliance.

1. Partners should help IDPs capitalize on the large number of economic opportunities available in urban areas.

This may entail providing support that focuses on enabling greater self-reliance instead of simply survival. Currently, there is a bias toward supporting rural IDPs and providing survival-focused support.¹⁶ Given the high degree of urbanization among IDPs, the economic opportunities in urban areas, the protracted and cyclical nature of displacement, and IDPs' need for support in overcoming economic challenges, a paradigm shift is needed.

Support that helps IDPs thrive in urban areas can take many forms and emanate from a variety of actors. For example, humanitarian organizations can do more to reach non-camp urban IDPs with basic services, which can be a foundation for progress towards economic integration. NGOs can help IDPs gain decent employment, through interventions such as vocational trainings or job-matching programs.¹⁷ Private sector actors can complement these investments in employability and skills by directly hiring IDPs and supplying from or investing in IDP-owned businesses.¹⁸ Donors can also invest in the broader development agenda by, for example, supporting effective urban planning and increased investments in urban infrastructure and service provision. Furthermore, governments can lower policy barriers, such as requiring legal permission to reside and work in certain areas of countries (as in Iraq).¹⁹ Finally, these approaches should respond to gender dynamics. Our analysis shows that about half of all working-age IDPs are women. Thus, understanding how to specifically support women in integrating economically in urban areas will be key to achieving broad self-reliance among IDPs.

Efforts to support IDP economic integration should also incorporate host communities. Often, urban IDPs reside alongside other vulnerable populations. Thus, development-focused approaches to self-reliance—including

job trainings, investments in businesses, improved infrastructure, and so on—should also include members of the host community.

2. Partners should create sustainable growth opportunities in rural areas and/or consider incentivizing IDPs' voluntary relocation to urban areas.

The creation of new opportunities could involve leveraging the economies that grow out of IDP camps—particularly in contexts where governments allow such economies to develop and flourish. These camps sometimes have tens of thousands of residents and may therefore present substantial market opportunities, as with the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya.²⁰ To capitalize on these opportunities, governments and donors can invest in developing infrastructure, development banks can encourage private sector investment by offsetting risk, and NGOs can help develop IDP and host businesses and employability. This could lead to sustainable growth in a way that benefits camp residents as well as surrounding host communities.

In addition, if there is a skills mismatch between rural IDPs and job opportunities, subsidizing or incentivizing some IDPs' voluntary relocation to urban areas could be considered. Relocation schemes could take various forms. Most fundamentally, they could involve monetary subsidies to facilitate relocation. In addition, they could include bringing relocated IDPs into the framework of support being offered to other urban IDPs. They could also target vulnerable hosts as well as IDPs,²¹ thus creating broad-based benefits. Well-designed relocation schemes can lead to economic benefits for hosts as well as IDPs. This is particularly true if individuals are incentivized to relocate to places where, according to labor needs and skillsets, they are able to make the greatest economic contribution and earn the highest incomes.

Crucially, following the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Framework on Durable Solutions, these kind of relocation schemes should be entirely voluntary.²² They should also prioritize IDPs' safety and wellbeing and should be collaborative, consultation-driven processes that account for the needs of IDPs themselves and coordinate with the appropriate government ministries.²³

3. Partners should invest in collecting more data to help make strategic decisions.

In countries where there is not enough data to understand the location and urban-rural composition of the IDP population, it is difficult to make strategic decisions about how to allocate aid, design and focus programming, and create policies that most effectively support IDPs in achieving self-reliance.

There are many reasons for this paucity of data, including a lack of political will to invest in data collection, low statistical capacity among some countries, the fact that many IDPs do not want to be identified (often as a means of protecting themselves), difficulty accessing areas with IDPs due to security concerns, and others. Furthermore, the task of data collection is especially difficult for urban IDPs because they typically make up a small proportion of the urban areas they inhabit and are widely dispersed among other populations, among other reasons.²⁴

Increasing investment in data collection will require greater political will from national governments, civil society, and international institutions. In part, progress can be made by creating frameworks for action and accountability at the global level. For example, frameworks like the SDGs have achieved broad international buy-in for certain goals, but refugees and IDPs have not been elevated sufficiently as key populations within these goals.²⁵ Political will can be generated by arguing the importance—for the good of host communities as well as IDPs—of addressing internal displacement. More research about the broad societal economic impacts of displacement—particularly urban displacement—will be key for bringing attention to the issue.²⁶

With greater funding, more resources can be allocated to organizations that are already conducting or supporting data collection, such as the Joint IDP Profiling Service, the Displacement Tracking Matrix, many national statistics offices, and other experts. Furthermore, greater focus can be placed on innovative technological approaches to generating estimates (which can be more cost-effective), such as those that rely on aerial imaging, social media analysis, call records, or the analysis of online reports. Humanitarian organizations can also work with national and local governments to build profiling capacity.²⁷

Regardless of the technique, protecting IDPs and respecting their safety concerns should always be a top priority. And because of these concerns, it will not be

feasible, or even desirable, to collect such data in all situations. Data collection should be driven by the needs in a given situation, pursued as a collaborative process among relevant partners to ensure that it will be used effectively, and undertaken only after carefully considering the privacy and security concerns of IDPs.²⁸

Endnotes

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CINDY HUANG is a senior policy fellow at the Center for Global Development.

JIMMY GRAHAM is a research assistant at the Center for Global Development.

CONTACT:

Cindy Huang, Senior Policy Fellow,
chuang@cgdev.org