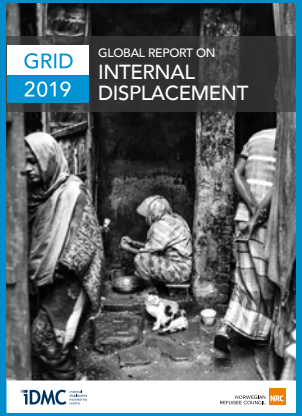

NOTE

This is an excerpt from IDMC's 2019 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID).

SPOTLIGHT

DATA TRIANGULATION

What is it, and why is it useful?

The main purpose of triangulating data is to increase its credibility and validity.[274] IDMC uses triangulation to validate datasets from various sources that describe the same phenomenon. Doing so becomes even more relevant given today's fast-moving news cycle, including the proliferation of "fake news", and the fact that anyone can present unverified information, potentially leading to significant discrepancies in what is reported and confusion about true displacement numbers. Around 70 per cent of the information on disasters recorded in IDMC's database in 2018 was collected for triangulation purposes.

The value of triangulation is demonstrated by IDMC's method of estimating displacement associated with disasters in Afghanistan. IOM and OCHA each work closely with local humanitarian organisations to produce two comprehensive datasets on disaster damage. OCHA recorded 235 disaster incidents in the first six months of 2018, and IOM 304 incidents. The datasets overlapped geographically. OCHA's covered 24 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, and IOM's covered 26. Twenty-three provinces were covered by both. The two datasets differ in the terminology they use to classify disaster events or damaged and destroyed housing, which highlights the need to synchronise and develop common definitions and metrics.

IDMC used the two datasets to analyse displacement triggered by floods in May 2018. Using OCHA's data on housing destruction as a proxy for the number of people displaced yielded a figure of 24,589. IOM's data on housing destruction produced an estimate of 12,090 people. Additional IOM data on affected people living with host families, in open spaces and informal settlements suggested that 44,884 people had been displaced. IDMC compared the data taking into account differences in definition and coverage, and the potential for double counting. It also triangulated the data with information from media sources to arrive at a final figure of 46,380 people displaced.

Triangulation is also useful in compiling the best estimates for new displacements associated with conflict. Ethiopia had the highest figure worldwide in 2018, and IDMC used data from 16 sources that reported internal displacement during the year. IOM's DTM reports were used as the basis for triangulation, and calculations were made using the sum of positive variations between reports at site level for the whole year. The DTM reports, which covered only nine out of eleven regions in the country, were published bi-monthly and people's movements were highly dynamic. This meant that relying only on DTM data risked missing a significant number of short-term or repeated displacements. Using only IOM DTM reports, IDMC calculated about 1.5 million new displacements.

To overcome this issue, IDMC used other sources including OCHA, national and regional government reports, The Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), other types of IOM DTM reports and assessments, and local and international media to produce a more comprehensive estimate. This method allowed to reach 2.9 million new displacements, which is almost twice the number based only on IOM DTM bi-monthly reports. In order to avoid double counting and errors, the dates, type of movement, triggers, contextual information, geographical and temporal coverage and access to IDPs were considered to determine which caseloads should be included or excluded from the calculation. This method ensured that a significant number of under-reported displacements were not left out, and at the same time minimised the risk of double counting.

Given the increasing amount of information, news and data available, such triangulation exercises will remain important and necessary tools in IDMC's monitoring.

274. O'Donoghue, Punch, "Qualitative Educational Research in Action: Doing and Reflecting", 2003.