Children and youth in internal displacement

Displaced futures: Children and young people’s experiences of internal displacement

Alexis Reynaud – IMPACT Initiatives

Introduction

A record 48 million people were living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence in 59 countries and territories as of 31 December 2020. This figure is the highest ever recorded. In addition, at least 7 million people were internally displaced by disasters across 104 countries and territories. It means there were 55 million internally displaced people across the world at the end of 20201.

Amongst these 55 million internally displaced, more than 23 million were under the age of 182. These children, uprooted in their own countries, are not only the most vulnerable to the dangers that lead to such displacements, but also the most exposed to the risks related to displacement. All spheres of their lives are usually affected: when displacement does not break families apart and forces children to move on their own or live with limited support from families and communities, it poses challenges to accessing essential services such as safe shelter, water and sanitation, and health care or psychological support. It also often disrupts education by delaying or entirely interrupting children’s learning, depriving them of the opportunity to reach their full potential. Finally, it multiplies protection and safety risks3. Recruitment to armed forces, abuse and violence, forced labour, adoption in irregular conditions and discrimination within the hosting communities are some of the numerous protection risks faced by displaced children4.

Building on its experience conducting Multi-Sector Needs Assessments (MSNAs) across different contexts since 2016, IMPACT Initiatives’ REACH, under the mandate of the Humanitarian Country Team within each given response, and in collaboration with Inter-Sector Coordination Groups (ISCG) and Assessment Working Groups (AWG), co-facilitated this exercise in 17 humanitarian crises in 2021. Using semi-standardised tools for data collection and analysis across different crises, MSNAs aim to inform and update humanitarian actors’ understanding of the needs of crisis-affected populations in different contexts, while also providing trends analysis where possible about households’ self-reported vulnerabilities, their most pressing needs and the severity of these needs, within each sector and from a cross-sectoral perspective. A key objective of MSNAs is also to understand how needs vary between different population groups, especially Internally Displaced Populations (IDPs), non-displaced population and returnees, when possible. Based on findings from the 2021 REACH MSNAs, this document aims to provide a cross-crises perspective about the impact of displacement on children across the globe.

MSNA analyses are based on recognized global frameworks and tools developed by humanitarian actors and technical experts. These tools include the Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) and the new Joint Inter-Sector Analysis Framework (JIAF). MSNA frameworks and analysis plans are carefully designed in coordination with all relevant sector and inter-sector stakeholders at the country level, ensuring that stakeholders are able to provide feedback and inputs to contextualize the MSNA methodology to the local contexts. The MSNAs capture information required for sector-specific and inter-sectoral analysis, including data requirements for robust and documented People in Need (PiN) calculations as well as severity analyses. Finally, by collecting and analysing household level data through one consolidated tool, MSNAs facilitate inter-sectoral analysis by identifying co-occurrence of sectoral needs across territories and population groups, which allows for example to compare severity of needs in sector such as education and protection, between displaced and non-displaced populations. It is important to note that while these MSNAs are intended to be as comprehensive as possible for crisis-wide analysis, both the level of coverage as well as depth of information collected is affected by various contextual factors, specifically i. maintaining an acceptable length of the questionnaire (with MSNAs being primarily a tool for household-level analysis) and ii. having reliable secondary data to be able to locate different population groups on the ground.

Access to education

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1 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global Report on Internal Displacement. 2021. Available at link
2 Ibid
3 UNICEF, “Lost at home - The risks and challenges for internally displaced children and the urgent actions needed to protect them”. May 2020. Available at link
Conflict and disaster can place great stress on already inadequate education systems and infrastructure, in many cases making them unable to provide even basic education for displaced children. Schools may also be occupied for other uses, such as temporary shelters, and teachers may not be available, adequately paid or trained to teach children and youth who have lived through traumatic events. This is particularly true for conflict-affected areas. For instance, available data from 2021 REACH MSNAs showed that internally displaced children had, in overall, more limited access to any form of education, compared to non-displaced children in most of the assessed crises. In Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)\(^5\), IDP households were more likely to have extreme or very extreme education needs (19\%) compared to returnee (7\%) and non-displaced (3\%) households. These needs were mainly due to severe barriers to education reported such as attacks on schools, as well as school dropouts in the previous school year due to conflict. In Afghanistan, school attendance rates were found to be generally low for majority of displaced and non-displaced households; 61\% of IDP households were found to have less than half of their children aged 6 to 17 attending formal schooling at least 4 days a week prior to Covid-19 outbreak (54\% for the non-displaced households)\(^6\). In this country, the access to education for children is also tightly linked to the security situation, with 22\% of assessed IDP households (HHs) reporting that at least one child felt unsafe traveling to, or being at school (compared to 16\% of non-displaced HHs).

In the Sahel, where a surge in violent attacks across the region in 2021 displaced nearly 500,000 people\(^7\), displaced children enrolment rates in school show great gaps compared to non-displaced ones. In Burkina Faso, where the total number of IDPs rose to more than 1.5 million by the end of 2021\(^8\), only 30\% of households with children aged 6 to 17 reported that they were enrolled in formal schooling (compared to 57\% for non-displaced HHs). This is also reflected in findings on school attendance rates, with only 38\% of households reportedly having children aged 6 to 17 that attended formal schooling on a regular basis (compared to 56\% for non-displaced HHs).

In Niger, where the number of IDPs in the regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua alone increased 53\% in the last 12 months\(^9\), 75\% of households reported having at least one child not attending school, against 57\% for non-displaced households. Some other findings confirm the long term impact of these challenges to access education for IDP children, with only 52\% of IDP households reporting at least one literate adult member (74\% for non-displaced). Overall, 67\% of IDP households were found to have an unmet need in education during the 2021 MSNA in Niger, while it was the case for 56\% of non-displaced population\(^10\). In neighbouring Mali, where more than 400,000 people have been displaced inside the country in 2021 - a 30\% increase from the previous year\(^1\)- attendance rates appear to be concerning but rather similar for IDPs and non-displaced, with 83\% of IDP households reported having at least one child not attending school (84\% non-displaced). Similarly, 89\% of IDP households with school-age children (3-17 years) reporting that not all of their children were enrolled in school for the school year 2020-2021 (85\% for non-displaced).

In other humanitarian contexts that are now going through a post-emergency phase, such as Iraq, the overall access to education for IDP children does not seem to improved either. For instance, the proportion of households with at least one school aged child not attending school regularly (at least 4 days a week) while schools were open went from 24\% for IDPs in camps and 26\% for IDP out of camps in 2020, to 35\% for both population groups respectively in 2021. According to 2021 MSNA data, 32\% of IDPs out of camps reported the costs of education to be the main barrier to education, while this was reported only by 18\% of IDPs living in camps. While schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 50\% households of both IDP groups with at least one school aged child reported not accessing distance education regularly (at least 4 days a week), with main barriers cited being schools that were not offering alternatives and because they lacked household resources to facilitate alternatives.

**Case study - Access to education for displaced children in the Central African Republic (CAR)**

CAR 2021 MSNA education data show gaps in term of school enrolment between IDP living in sites and IDP living within the host-communities, with 53\% of IDP in site reporting having at least one school-age children not enrolled in formal school for the 2020-2021 school year, while this proportion is 45\% for IDP living in host-communities, and 41\% for non-displaced. The attendance rates, although being significantly concerning, appear to be similar for all populations: 9\% only of IDP in site households reported their school-age children attended school regularly (at least 4 days per week) in the 2020-2021 school year when schools were open (9\% IDP living in host-communities, 8\% non-displaced).

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5 Please note that the 2021 MSNA in DRC was only conducted in the Tanganyika province. The province is home to a total of 331,500 internally displaced persons (OCHA, “Factsheet: Internally displaced persons and returnees”. September 2021)
6 A total of 9,880 HH components were used as a sample to conduct the MSNA assessment in Afghanistan, of which 6,061 were IDPs, 475 cross border (CB) Returnees and 3,444 host community members.
7 UNHCR, “Decade of Sahel conflict leaves 2.5 million people displaced”, 14 January 2022
8 Ibid
10 An unmet need is characterized by indicators on access to primary and secondary schools, enrolment of children in the household and household-reported barriers to accessing education.
11 UNHCR, “Decade of Sahel conflict leaves 2.5 million people displaced”. 14 January 2022
In 2022, the humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) entered its 10th year. With regard to the education system, provision of services remains limited: repeated attacks on educational infrastructure, coupled with a timid redeployment of teachers to their schools of assignment due to security and logistical constraints, do not allow for an improvement of the situation. As a result, according to the humanitarian needs overview 2022, 1.4 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance in the field of education in this country (100,000 more than in 2021)\(^\text{12}\).

To better understand the education needs and barriers beyond the single issue of schools’ functionality, REACH, in collaboration with the Education Cluster, conducted a qualitative analysis in February 2020 involving both displaced population and host communities. 26 focus groups (FGs) were held in the towns of Alindao and Zèmeo, composed of parents and teachers, but also children aged between 6 and 12\(^\text{13}\). In these two localities, 25% of students were from displaced communities\(^\text{14}\).

The main finding of the assessment was that the hypothesis that population displacement would put additional pressure on local education infrastructure over time does not seem to be borne out by the results. In fact, for the town of Alindao as for the town of Zèmeo, the main barriers to access to education mentioned were: the lack of school infrastructure, the general insecurity of the area, the lack of financial means of households, the food insecurity of families and the low quality of education. As for internally displaced respondents more specifically, parents from both localities reported that they had "lost everything" during their displacement, including the few school materials their children had. Displaced respondents in Zèmeo reported they felt that they had been "robbed of everything" and had not been able to rebuild because of the insecurity and lack of access to income-generating activities. At the time of the data collection, even after years of living in their new locality, their precarious situation did not allow them to buy the school supplies needed to their children to attend school in good conditions.

- Displaced children's views on school

In FGDs conducted with children from displaced households, school was seen as a place of learning and "enlightenment", providing knowledge and also a form of "wisdom", a "means of training, obtaining diplomas and having a job". It was also seen as a place of "protection", as mentioned specifically by the girls. Protection issues came up throughout the discussions with children from displaced households. For example, the first image used to facilitate talks was of children on their way to school, with notebooks and school bags. In that case, both girls and boys referred to "children carrying luggage and fleeing war". Furthermore, when girls were asked what might make the children in the pictures sad, they mentioned the fact that the children had "lost their parents", that their "mum (had) died in the war" or that there were "dead people lying on the ground". The boys, in the same way, mentioned "violence" and "war" as possible explanations. To be noted that interviewed teachers drew particular attention during the FGs to the fact that displaced children "don't have much fun and don't talk enough". In this country, quantitative findings from 2021 MSNA seemed to confirm that displacements had a strong effect on children mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, with 51% of IDP in site HHs and 37% of IDP living in host communities with at least one child aged 5 years or older reporting that their children have showed symptoms of a mental disorder (35% for non-displaced HHS)\(^\text{15}\).

**Protection concerns**

Forced displacements, by interrupting or limiting children's access to education, have a critical impact on their long-term development, in a sense that it considerably reduces their chance of future development. But in addition to facing multidimensional disruption of their lives by leaving their home, as showed in the previous section, displaced children are also at an increased risk of being exposed to short term insecurity, psychological distress and protection challenges\(^\text{16}\).

The loss of assets and income that often accompany flight from home can force families to turn themselves towards coping strategies that negatively affect children. Findings from 2021 MSNA household surveys in Afghanistan indicate that 51% of the assessed displaced households fell in the ‘emergency’ category of Livelihood Coping Strategy Index (LCSI), compared to 44% of non-displaced households. Among those relying on coping strategies, about 5% of displaced households reported marrying their daughters earlier than intended, while a further 1% had already exhausted their use of this strategy within the year.

\(^{12}\) OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022. December 2021
\(^{13}\) These two sub-prefectures were identified, on the basis of an extensive review of existing secondary data, as they were deemed to be benchmarks for internal displacement patterns in the country. The distinction between the two localities was made in order to test the hypothesis that a large influx of population into an area is associated with additional pressure on households and community infrastructure, including educational institutions.
\(^{14}\) REACH, “Mapping of the schools in CAR”. March 2020. Available at Link
\(^{15}\) In the past 3 months, at least one child in the household (5 years or older) suffered from mental disorder symptoms for at least 15 days.
\(^{16}\) Better Care Network, “Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement”. October 2020
In Burkina Faso, there also appears to be a link between separation of children from households and prevalence of early marriage. Indeed, 82% of households reported having one child separated from the household (compared to 68% for non-displaced HHs). Among those, 42% of IDP cited child marriage as the main reason (32% for non-displaced HHs). In Central African Republic (CAR), 14% of IDP households living in sites reported that at least one child under 18 was married (compared to 10% for IDP living with host families and 6% for non-displaced). More detailed data in CAR about reasons for children being separated from their household highlight further concerning protection risks for displaced children. Among the 18% of IDP households residing in sites that reported having at least one child not residing in the households (14% for IDP living with host families; 15% for non-displaced), the main reasons were that the child got married and therefore left home (57%, 54%, 46% respectively), and the child left home to look for work/to work (13% for all three groups). A very small number of households (1-2%) also reported reasons like kidnapping or abduction, children getting lost during displacement, or children leaving home to join the army or an armed group.

Finally, the 2021 MSNAs also found child labour to be a concern among displaced children across different crises. In Burkina Faso, among IDP households with at least one child, 34% reported one child worked17 (39% for non-displaced HHs). In this country, displacement seemed to have a significant psychological effect on children, as 23% IDP HHs reported that their children have been affected by changes in feelings/behaviour (7% for non-displaced HHs)18.

Although not as prevalent as in Burkina Faso, child labour also appears to be a concern in other countries like Colombia and Iraq. In Colombia, 5% of assessed IDP households reported having at least one child under the age of 18 working outside of home (in the last 6 months prior to data collection). Similarly, in Iraq, 8% of IDP households both in camps and out of camps reported having at least one person under 18 working. Most common types of work reported for these children in Iraq were family work like sewing and farming (most commonly reported by IDPs in camp), structured work like serving in shops and restaurants (most commonly reported by IDPs out of camp as well as returnees), and non-structured work like selling water in the markets (reported by all three groups).

Conclusion

The findings above confirm that having robust age and sex disaggregated data, especially in contexts of internal displacement, is extremely key for a comprehensive humanitarian needs analysis among crisis-affected communities. Indeed, internal displacement is not only an indication of direct impact of a crisis but can also become an underlying factor driving specific needs and vulnerabilities among displaced populations. Furthermore, as some of the findings above show, the type and severity of humanitarian needs can vary based on diverse displacement experiences (e.g. internally displaced and returnees) as well as demographics and other individual characteristics (e.g. age and sex) of the displaced population. As such, ensuring the availability of disaggregated data is quite important to enable effective and targeted humanitarian responses that reach those most in need.

However, quite a few challenges persist in trying to fill key data gaps when it comes to disaggregated data in contexts of internal displacement. Based on IMPACT’s field experiences across many different crisis contexts over the years, two key recurring challenges (and potential solutions) are summarised below:

1. There are logistical constraints of locating specific population groups that tend to be “hidden” through displacement (e.g. children and youth, IDPs out of camps, returnees, etc.), which makes random sampling and the generation of representative disaggregated data quite challenging.
   a. However, this challenge can be overcome by i. conducting in-depth scoping exercise and/ or secondary data review to gather localised information of the population of interest prior to the research; ii. identifying displaced youth and children through a secondary medium e.g. randomly sampling households / shelter of residence / schools first, and then randomly selecting a respondent within that; iii. using non-probability sampling techniques (e.g. quota-based purposive sampling) to have “good enough” indicative findings; and iv. conducting in-depth qualitative research through focus group discussions and community key informant interviews instead of large-scale household surveys to understand in more detail the specific experiences of sub-groups within the internally displaced population (as demonstrated through the CAR Case Study above).

2. There are ethical considerations that limit the extent of collecting data about vulnerable IDPs, especially minors. Some possible solutions to overcome this include:
   a. Collecting the required information indirectly through adult care-givers, especially when this concerns general situation about children’s needs and access to basic services;

17 In the 30 days prior to data collection.
18 In the 6 months prior to data collection.
b. If direct data collection from minors is needed to capture their perceptions, inputs and experiences on certain issues, working closely with child protection actors in each context to ensure i. data collection teams are appropriately trained on how to approach children, what to ask/ not ask, how to identify potential signs of distress, relevant referral channels to follow, etc.; ii. data collection tools are appropriate for conversations with minors (e.g. questions are simple, participatory, etc.) and iii. all required protocols (e.g. seeking informed consent from the care-giver) are followed prior to starting data collection.

Finally, one of IMPACT’s key lessons learned from primary data collection experiences in the past has been that by taking a few key steps when it comes to large-scale, household-level quantitative research (e.g. the REACH MSNAs) can go a long way in filling basic information gaps on the needs of different sub-groups of crisis-affected populations. Specifically, the analysis presented in this paper across different crises was possible to a large extent because: i. where relevant and feasible, all REACH MSNA samples are stratified at minimum between IDPs and non-displaced populations; ii. all REACH MSNA household survey tools included a section to capture demographics and basic information of all household members (e.g. sex, age, school enrolment status, livelihood engagement, etc.); and iii. majority of REACH MSNA household survey tools included a set of about 8-10 core globally standardised “good practice” indicators, with questions asked in the exact same way across different contexts.