



METHODOLOGICAL PAPER

MONITORING METHODOLOGY

For cross-border displacement associated with conflict

JANUARY 2020

This strategy describes the approach IDMC has developed to monitoring cross-border displacement associated with conflict, and addresses some of the main challenges inherent in the exercise. We have begun to employ it in collaboration with partners including the International Organization for Migration's displacement tracking matrix (IOM DTM), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and REACH.

We committed to developing a more systematic approach to understanding the entire displacement continuum in 2017 by expanding our monitoring and research efforts to analyse the relationship between internal, cross-border and return movements. Several questions need to be answered if governments, policymakers, humanitarian and development agencies and others are to understand the triggers and drivers of people's movements within and across borders, their motivations and their living conditions in places of displacement and return.

WHY DO WE NEED TO MONITOR CROSS-BORDER DISPLACEMENT?

The relationship between internal displacement and the movements of refugees and migrants is not well understood, but three assumptions can be made. Many if not most refugees are internally displaced before they cross an international border, even if only for a short period or in transit; IDPs are prime candidates to become refugees or migrants; and refugees who go back prematurely to conditions in their country of origin that are not conducive to durable and dignified return are at risk of further displacement.¹

There is significant anecdotal evidence to support these hypotheses, but not enough data to determine how many of the people who cross borders were previously IDPs, or how many returning refugees and migrants go back to a life of internal displacement and its associated vulnerabilities.² Nor is there sufficient understanding of the processes that lead from internal to cross-border movements, or the vulnerabilities that contribute to protracted displacement or onward movement when people return to their countries of origin.

This represents a major knowledge gap. An evidence base that provides better quantitative and qualitative understanding of the entire displacement continuum, from people's initial flight to onward movements across borders and return processes is vital at this juncture. It would allow governments, policy-makers and responders on the ground to better meet displaced people's immediate protection and assistance needs at their points of departure, transit and arrival.

This in turn has the potential to strengthen systematic approaches to governments' and agencies' preparedness and responses, and to address the long-term political and development challenges brought about by protracted and unresolved internal displacement.

THE DISPLACEMENT CONTINUUM

To better understand the relationship between internal and cross-border displacement, we have created a diagram to illustrate how IDPs become refugees and vice-versa, and how both IDPs and refugees are able to bring their displacement to a sustainable end (see figure 1).

At the centre of the model is the total number of IDPs in a country, which is influenced by various population movements and demographic changes, or flows. In an ideal scenario the model would be populated with empirical data on all its different components, but in reality most of the data is scarce. The following components are vital if cross-border movements and returns are to be properly understood:

- **Cross-border flight:** the number of IDPs who leave their country of origin in search of safety, livelihoods, services and/or humanitarian assistance. Once they have crossed the border, they are no longer accounted for as IDPs and are included instead in statistics on refugees, asylum seekers or migrants in the host country.
- **Sustainable returns:** the number of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants who return from abroad to their country of origin and have been able to successfully re-establish their lives free of social and economic and other vulnerabilities linked to their displacement. To be accounted for in this category and as a member of the general population again, their return must have been dignified, voluntary and informed, and to a place where they are able to live in conditions laid out in the [IASC framework](#) on durable solutions for IDPs.
- **Cross-border returns to displacement:** the number of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants who continue to face vulnerabilities associated with their displacement once back in their country of origin. Their return may have been voluntary, coerced or forced. Returnees in this category, who are accounted for as IDPs, include those living in camps, collective shelters, other camp-like settings, damaged homes or areas with few if any public services, employment opportunities or livelihoods.
- **Cross-border returns into vulnerable situations:** the number of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants whose return to their country of origin is partly sustainable. They are not living as IDPs, but nor have they been able to achieve durable solutions in line with the IASC framework. They may, for example, have resolved their housing situation and have access to services but still suffer other vulnerabilities associated with their displacement, such as loss of livelihoods.

FIGURE 1: Data model showing the relationship between cross-border and internal displacement

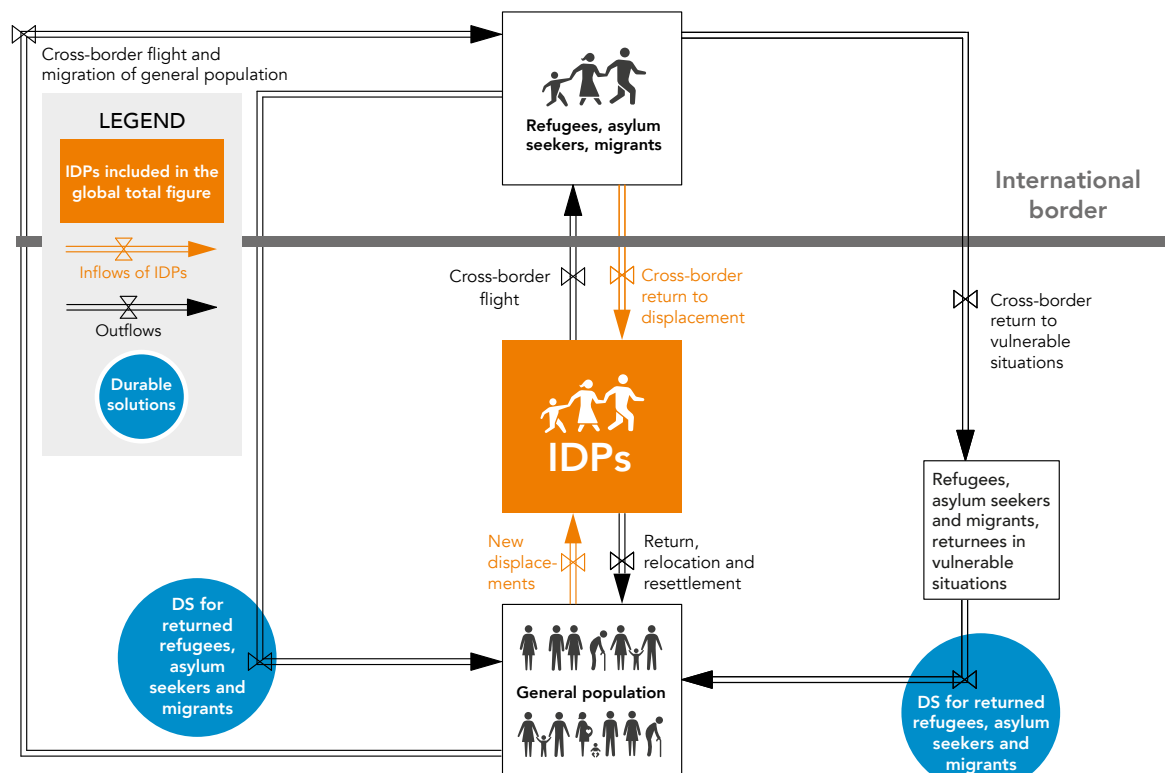
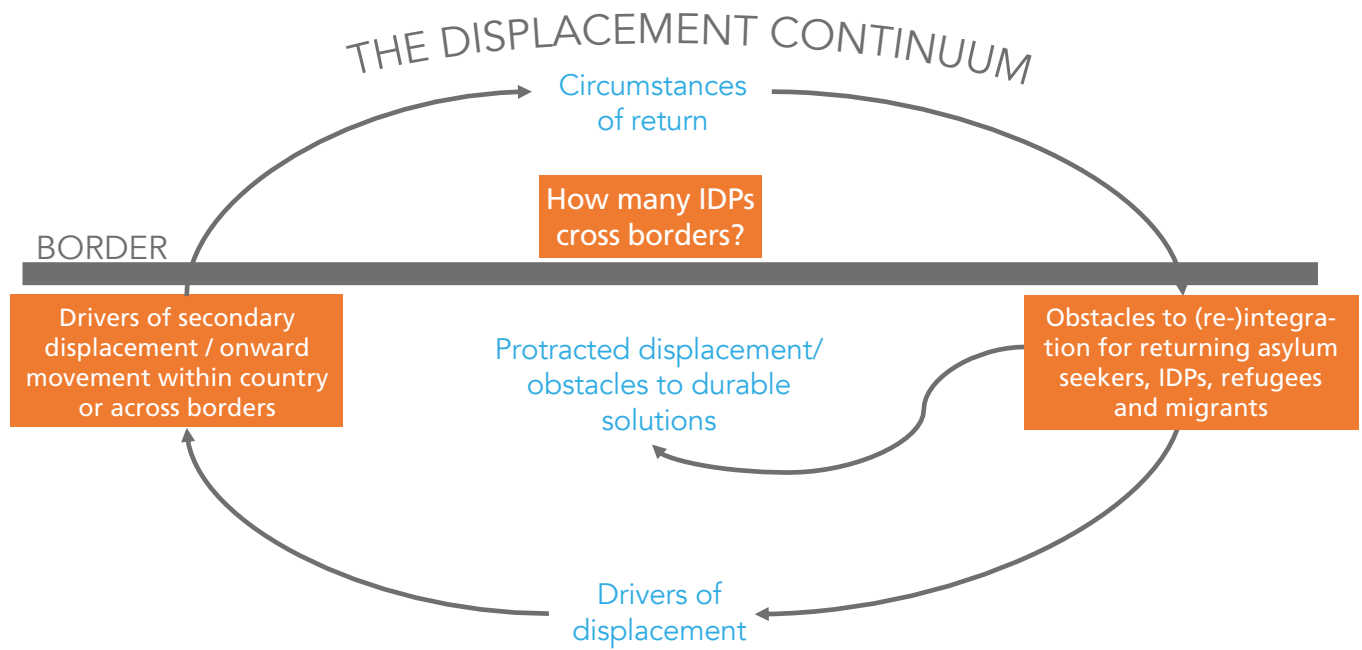


FIGURE 2: Key questions to be answered



To categorise the population movements depicted in the diagram, empirical data in three main areas is required: the number of IDPs who leave their country of origin; what drives them to do so; and the living conditions that returnees face once back in their country (see figure 2).

I HOW MANY IDPS CROSS INTERNATIONAL BORDERS?

We need to get better at capturing quantitative data on internal and cross-border movements. The first step toward creating a comprehensive dataset is to adopt a common model that defines and accounts for all of the relevant flows and stocks. The latter refer to the number of people in a given category at a specific point in time. Only by adopting a common data model will we be able to consistently determine how many IDPs eventually leave their countries, how many refugees and migrants become IDPs when they return and where and when these phenomena occur.

Adopting a joined-up approach to data collection will also help to identify how many people might have been unaccounted for either before or after crossing an international border. If datasets on IDPs, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are to be aligned and interoperable, data also needs to be collected using agreed definitions, standards and methods that are systematically applied.

Data requirements

Partners such as governments, UNHCR and IOM may need to expand their current assessments with questions to determine whether a refugee is a former IDP and vice-versa. The idea is to include the answers in shared interoperable datasets that would allow for further analysis of the phenomenon, including patterns and trends of onward and cross-border movement, whether some types of crisis trigger more cross-border movement than others, and the point at which IDPs leave their country of origin.

I DRIVERS OF SECONDARY MOVEMENTS WITHIN OR ACROSS BORDERS

We need more qualitative data and clarity on the combination of factors that encourage or impede IDPs' onward and cross-border flight. Available evidence suggests that the push and pull factors behind IDPs' flight from areas affected by conflict are similar to those reported by refugees. Understanding how and when people make the decision to flee abroad and which issues weigh heaviest on those decisions is a prerequisite for national and international responders to prioritise resources and offer the right type of support when and where it is needed.

Data requirements

We need more quantitative and qualitative information on these factors, including when and where people move in response to threats to their physical safety and security, and how they seek and find protection in their own country. For those who leave, we also need data on the relative importance of considerations that influence their motivation and ability to do so, including their proximity to an open border, and social and economic issues such as livelihood, employment and education opportunities.

I OBSTACLES TO REINTEGRATION FOR RETURNING REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

We need a better understanding of the circumstances in which people return to their countries of origin, whether they go back voluntarily or under external pressure, and the associated risk of their returning to a life of internal displacement. We need insights into the proportion of people who return to their home areas or find themselves living in camps, and those who eventually conclude they have no choice but to go back to their country of refuge or move on to a third country.

Data requirements

We need empirical data which will allow us to answer the following questions: was return voluntary, coerced or, in the case of deportation, forced? Do returnees go back to their homes or areas of origin and if not, why not? What are the main opportunities for returnees to integrate sustainably in their chosen place of settlement, and what obstacles do they face in doing so?

Returnees' trajectories will have to be monitored over time, not just at drop-off but much further into their settlement and reintegration process. This means gathering data on all of the benchmarks set out in the IASC framework systematically, comprehensively and longitudinally, and in ways that are collaborative and interoperable. This might, for example, include data disaggregated to provide information about property conditions for returnees who go back to their former homes.

SCANT EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE CONFIRMS ASSUMPTIONS

Our data on internal displacement associated with conflict points to a correlation between internal and cross-border movements. Many of the countries that produce the most refugees are also home to the highest numbers of IDPs.

Evidence from across the world suggests that many returnees become internally displaced once back in their countries of origin. Large-scale returns were mirrored by a considerable

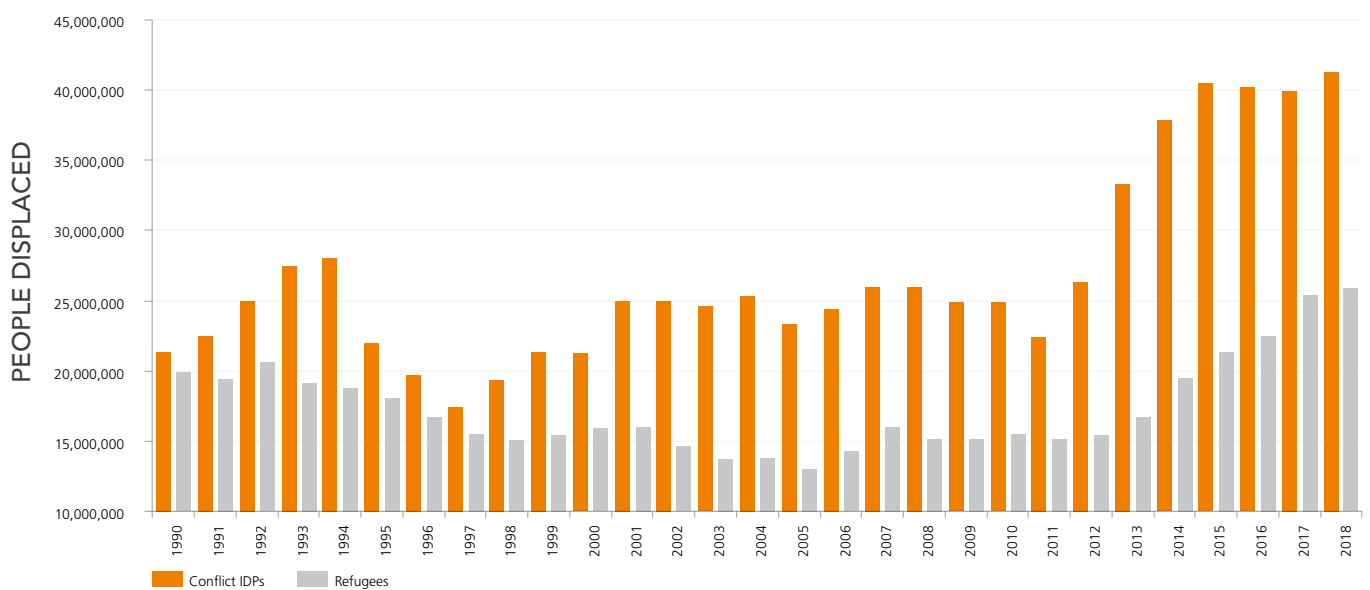
increase in the number of IDPs in 46 per cent of cases between 2000 and 2016. Of the 15 largest return events since the 1990s, around a third were followed by renewed fighting within a few years, either because the conflicts concerned had not been properly resolved before people returned or their arrival derailed a fragile recovery.³

Our surveys of refugees and returnees in Colombia and Iraq show that more than three-quarters of those in the former and more than half in the latter had been internally displaced before leaving the country, many of them more than once. Fewer than a quarter of returnees in Colombia and fewer than half in Iraq were living in their places of origin.⁴

In the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Sudan, porous borders and a lack of regional coordination have fuelled circular cross-border displacement, in which people moving back and forth between countries when they are unable to find safety.⁵ The four countries between them were hosting 7.7 million IDPs uprooted by conflict and violence as of the end of 2018, accounting for more than a fifth of the global total.⁶ About 1.2 million refugees from the four countries were living in one of the others as of June 2019.⁷

Global figures for refugees and IDPs also correlate. When internal displacement increases, so does the number of refugees and vice-versa (see figure 3). This implies that the same crises are responsible for producing both IDPs and refugees. The evidence, however, is only anecdotal. More research and empirical data is needed to confirm these assumptions.

FIGURE 3: The total numbers of IDPs and refugees between 1990 and 2018



PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

We propose a three-tiered approach to monitoring cross-border displacement associated with conflict. The objective is to move toward improved data and more advanced analyses, leading to a better understanding of the relationship between internal and cross-border displacement and how to address it (see figure 4).

Level 1: The collection of limited amounts of quantitative data on cross-border and return movements. This is complemented by qualitative research, mostly in the form of contextual analysis and personal narratives, on what drives people to flee their country, what their motivations for return are and how it comes about. The analysis helps to determine whether the qualitative data aligns with our data model.

The first level of monitoring produces initial quantitative estimates for cross-border returns into displacement supported by limited verification.

Level 2: The collection and analysis of further quantitative data, enhanced by additional empirical information on why people flee abroad, why they return and the conditions they live in.

The second level of monitoring produces:

- displacement estimates validated with more empirical data
- improved understanding of how factors combine to cause people to flee abroad and return, based on more quantitative and qualitative empirical data analysis

Level 3: Interoperable estimates of internal and cross-border displacement exist and are supported by a robust contextual and empirical analysis of data collected on the ground. Key displacement flows in the model are populated.

The third level of monitoring produces:

- verified displacement estimates
- more thorough understanding of the complex and inter-related processes that trigger displacement, cross-border flight and returns
- the potential to forecast cross-border displacement and returns based on the analysis of past trends

FIGURE 4: Three-tiered approach to monitoring

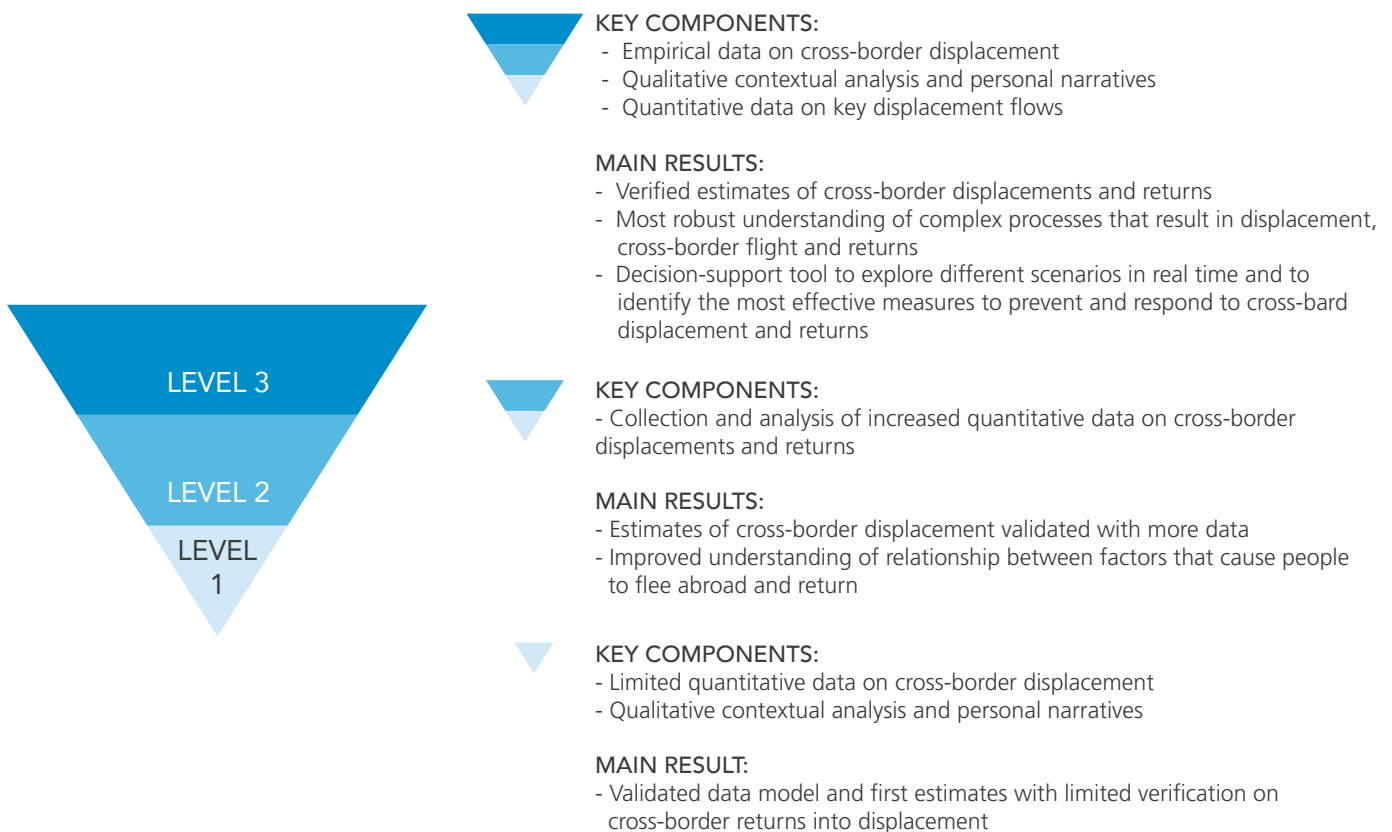
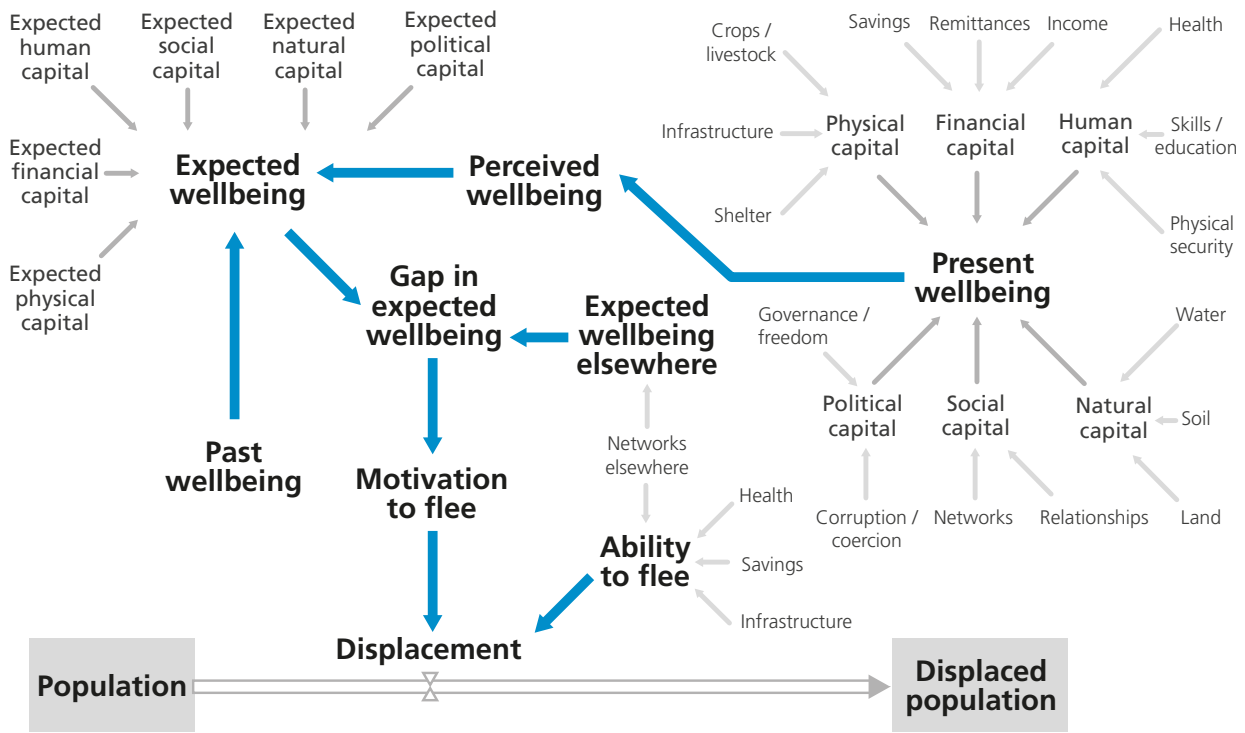


FIGURE 5: Interconnectivity of systems



To answer the questions laid out above, it is necessary to understand the different factors that influence cross-border movements. The model suggests that people’s movements, be they internal or cross-border, are based on their motivation and ability to successfully undertake them, which in turn are influenced by other factors related to their wellbeing and expected wellbeing (see figure 5).

This leads us to propose using the following diagram as a basis for questionnaires, which should provide insight into people’s motivations and expectations when fleeing across borders and returning from abroad. The analysis of their true situation on return would also allow us to determine whether it met their expectations or not, and to identify similar situations with which to forecast future movements and improve preparedness and responses.

NEXT STEPS

We have only obtained a very limited amount of data so far on cross-border displacement and returns and how they relate to internal displacement. We have been able to report on returns to internal displacement of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Afghanistan, CAR, Ethiopia and Somalia. We have also been able to account for small numbers of former

IDPs from Iraq, Syria, Yemen who eventually fled their countries, but this has only been on an ad hoc basis and not in a systematic or timely enough way to include in our global figures.

The next steps include engaging with more partners, both those who collect data on displacement and those who can support contextual analyses. The aim of this ongoing collaboration is to refine the analytical framework, agree the key questions to answer and then build and resource the analysis in a sustainable way to support humanitarian needs assessments, response plans and national development strategies.

NOTES

- 1 IDMC, [Global Report on Internal Displacement \(GRID 2017\)](#), 2017.
- 2 IDMC, [Nowhere to return to: Iraqis’ search for durable solutions continues](#), November 2018; IDMC, [Stuck in the middle: Seeking durable solutions in post-peace agreement Colombia](#), March 2019
- 3 World Bank, [Forcibly Displaced: Toward a development approach supporting refugees, the internally displaced and their hosts](#), 2016, p.xxix.
- 4 IDMC, [Nowhere to return to: Iraqis’ search for durable solutions continues](#), November 2018; IDMC, [Stuck in the middle: Seeking durable solutions in post-peace agreement Colombia](#), March 2019
- 5 IDMC, [Global Report on Internal Displacement \(GRID 2017\)](#), 2017.
- 6 IDMC, [The Global Internal Displacement Database \(GIDD\)](#)
- 7 UNHCR, [Operational Portal: Refugee situations](#)

Cover photo: People cross the Sahela border between Syria and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. When the border reopened in August 2013, more than 33,000 refugees crossed in just five days. Credit: NRC/Christian Jepsen, September 2013

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