

# Sustaining an essential dataset

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The global baseline  
on internal displacement





# Sustaining an essential dataset: the global baseline on internal displacement

## Introduction: The importance of data in understanding displacement

To ensure IDPs are able to overcome their vulnerabilities, and to prevent new, repeated and protracted displacement, governments need robust data on the scale, scope and impacts of the phenomenon. They need to understand all of its stages and dimensions, regardless of where people are on its trajectory. Before displacement happens, this includes their level of risk based on their exposure and vulnerability to different hazards, and the cost/benefit of investments to prevent rather than respond to it. While it happens, it includes knowing where, at what scale, the dynamics, who is affected and their characteristics. After it has happened, it includes the longer-term effects and the direct and indirect costs involved.

Much progress has been made over the past two decades in improving the availability, quality and global coverage of data on internal displacement, and the number and diversity of providers has increased significantly. Governments increasingly recognise the need for timely and reliable data to inform their policies and operational responses, and are playing ever greater role in collecting and analysing it.

More still needs to be done, however, to generate actionable data on IDPs' location and demographics, and the patterns and duration of their displacement. Information on its spatial distribution, for example whether IDPs are concentrated in urban centres or dispersed across rural areas, would help to better target aid, services and infrastructure investments. In most urban displacement settings, this type of information is vital because support has to be provided outside camps via channels determined by existing infrastructure and service delivery.

Some IDPs become displaced several times, and others make pendular movements between their places of origin and refuge. People tend to become more vulnerable economically, socially and psychologically with each new move-

ment, so knowing how many times people have been forced to flee helps to plan and prioritise support accordingly.

Governments, regional bodies and international agencies have contributed greatly to painting a more comprehensive picture of displacement, which has been instrumental in raising awareness and accountability. Several initiatives have also been launched to develop common standards for measuring and monitoring the phenomenon. These include the Expert Group on Refugee, IDP and Statelessness Statistics (EGRISS), which has been active since 2016, and the Data for Solutions to Internal Displacement initiative established by the UN secretary general's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

The International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS) developed by EGRISS and adopted in 2020 are intended to improve the production, quality, coordination and dissemination of data on IDPs. One of their main targets are national statistical offices. Since the publication of IRIS, dozens of countries have joined the group and received training and guidance on how to improve and harmonise statistics on IDPs.<sup>2</sup>

Data collection initiatives continue to be fragmented, however, with varying standards, methodologies and definitions, persistent overlaps and insufficient coordination. Establishing a standardised and objective global baseline is a challenge as a result, because it requires thorough triangulation and validation of a wide range of sources to produce the most accurate and useful estimates.

Thanks to our worldwide coverage and consistent verification of data, IDMC is in a unique position to set and update this baseline. We produce data in collaboration with a wide range of partners, but verification, validation and reporting does not require third-party endorsement, which makes the process neutral and independent. Data accuracy and reliability, rigorous processes and adherence to global standards and comparability make the estimates presented in IDMC's Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID)

sound and transparent in terms of the sources and methodologies used, and the rationale behind prioritising one source over another.<sup>3</sup>

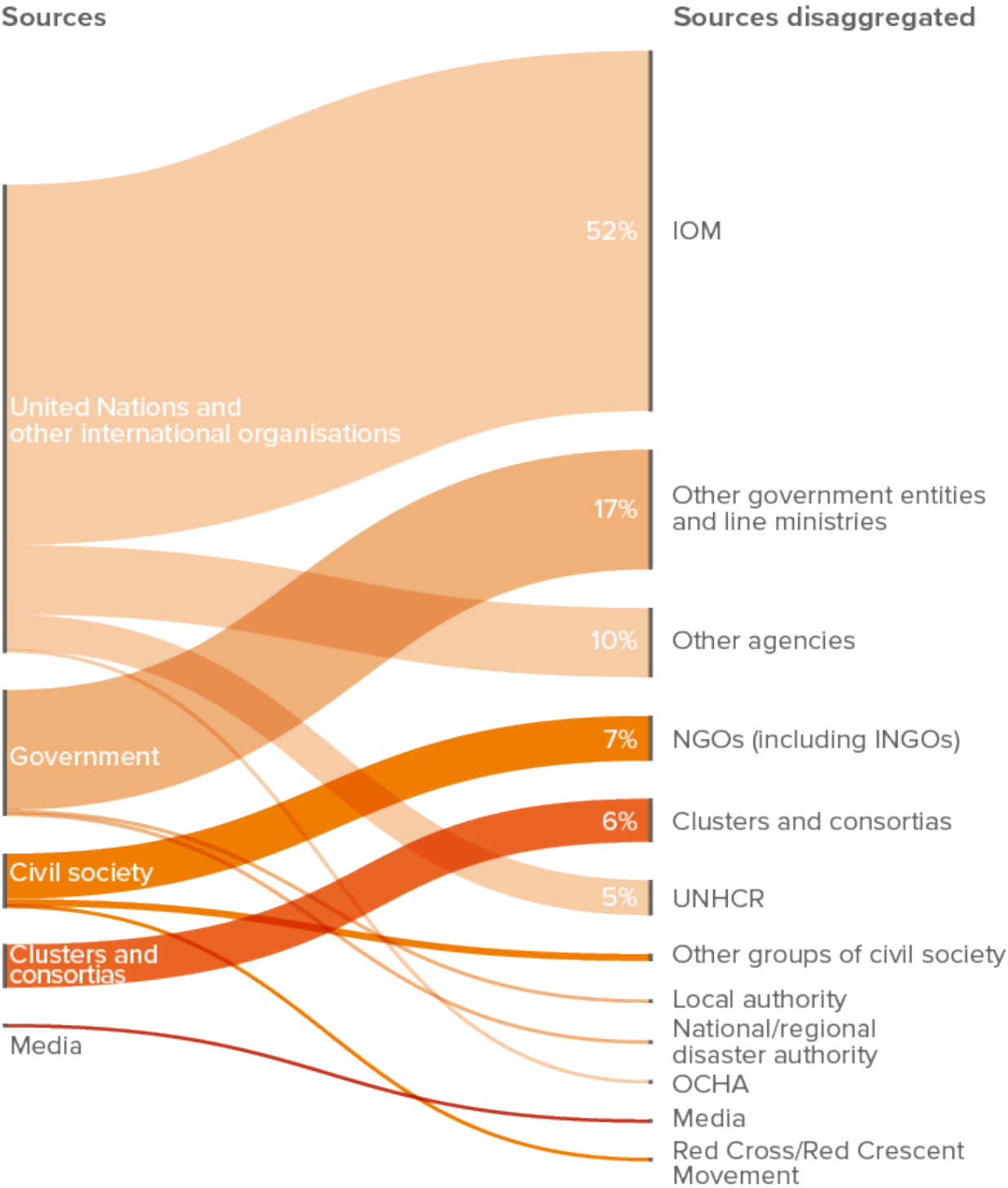
This is fundamental because it creates trust in the data, drives accountability and allows progress in addressing displacement to be assessed comparatively from the national to the global level.

## Building on the best available data

To establish this independent baseline, we rely on a large network of national, regional and global partners who collect and share data. Our role is to triangulate, validate, analyse, harmonise and aggregate it at the global level. To produce our final estimates, we assess the methodology and reliability of each source thoroughly, engage with the data providers to ensure we have interpreted their information correctly, and adapt the data to comply with our global methodology and standards for disaggregation and temporal and geographical comparability. Such an approach allows us to review all of the available data and select the most accurate and comprehensive assessments.

We distinguish between data sources and publishers because in many cases the data is collected by local authorities and civil society organisations but published by large international organisations or media, and it is important to recognise the work of the national stakeholders. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), for example, collects the data jointly with local authorities in many countries to produce its displacement tracking matrix (DTM). The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) collaborates closely with local authorities in many countries when producing data for ad hoc reports that also cover displacement dynamics.

Our global internal displacement database (GIDD) provides data disaggregated by year, event and trigger, with records going back to 2008. The data published in GIDD is temporally and geographically comparable and includes all detected displacement events without threshold. The datasets, which are publicly available free of charge, are accompanied by thorough analyses that explain the methodology and caveats behind each figure. The data allows users to understand which countries and areas are most affected by displacement, what the main triggers are, and where triggers overlap to fuel cycles of displacement and vulnerability. It also serves to understand patterns and trends and identify outlier events.



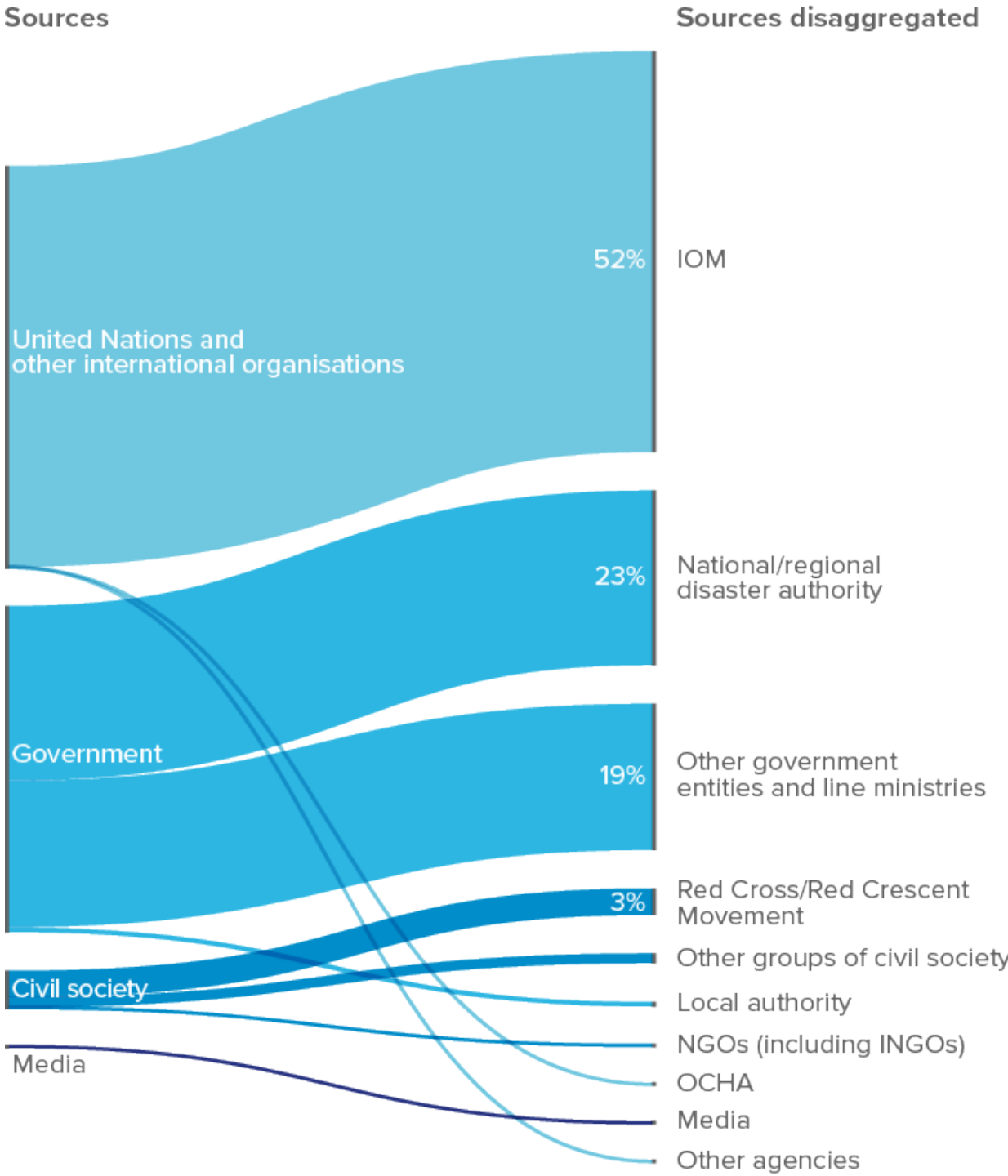
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Sources of IDMC's estimates for IDPs by conflict and violence

### Governments

Governments play a vital role in collecting displacement data. They account for around 43 per cent of our data for disasters and 18 per cent for conflict and violence. Many have improved processes for doing so within their national disaster management agencies, and a growing number

include displacement-related indicators as part of their emergency response and damage and loss accounting systems. The Philippines sets an excellent example of such government-led monitoring of disaster displacement, and Mali for conflict displacement (see spotlights).



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Sources of IDMC's estimates for IDPs by disasters

Colombia is also noteworthy for its monitoring of displacement linked to conflict and violence. The country's Victims Unit conducts assessments every six months for two years after IDPs' registration, which allow the government to better understand how they are overcoming their

plight and how policies and initiatives are helping them to do so. It should be hailed as an example of government-led durable solutions monitoring.

# Spotlight – The Philippines

## Measuring the length of displacement

The Philippines is one of the countries most affected by disaster displacement globally. When a disaster strikes, the Disaster Response Operations Management, Information and Communication Division (DROMIC) starts to issue frequent reports that provide disaggregated information on displacement, including IDPs’ location, sex, age and vulnerabilities. It follows up on the situation until most if not all people have been able to return home.

DROMIC collects information on three specific displacement indicators in its reports: cumulative displacements in evacuation centres and outside, including pre-emptive evacuations; the number of IDPs, also referred to as stocks, in evacuation centres and outside; and the number of destroyed homes. Its efforts to monitor disaster displacement systematically over space and time are significant and aligned with the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction.

The establishment of clear guidelines and a structured reporting framework in 2019 has ensured that the displacement data reported is of the highest quality, requiring minimal corrections and limiting inconsistencies. Stock figures, which are reported at regular intervals, can be used to run time-series analyses to understand displacement and return trends over time, from which the length of displacement can be inferred. Such information is key for longer-term support and solutions.

DROMIC’s displacement data has also helped the government to plan for future events needs. After the destruction wrought by typhoon Haiyan in 2013, it informed better preparatory action before typhoon Rai in 2021, a similarly devastating storm. It took more than a year for many IDPs to go back to their homes after Haiyan, but the pace of returns after Rai was much faster. A rehabilitation and recovery plan for Western Visayas, the region where most displacements were reported after both storms, was instrumental to a swift response based on displacement data collected in a timely and efficient way.<sup>4</sup>

### UN agencies

UN agencies such as IOM, OCHA and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) play a vital role in collecting displacement data. Their work is particularly significant in countries dealing with large humanitarian crises, where data to inform needs assessments and operational priorities is essential. IOM’s DTM alone produces about 50 per cent of all figures referring to the number of people displaced by conflict and violence globally.

UN agencies collaborate to produce comprehensive and harmonised national datasets in many of the countries where they are present. A good example can be found in Syria, where OCHA coordinates the collection and joint analysis of data through an IDP taskforce that includes IOM, UNHCR, the camp coordination and camp management cluster and national and international NGOs.<sup>8</sup> They meet weekly to harmonise and review their data and methodologies and produce a monthly dataset of the number of movements and the number of IDPs in the country. Thanks to their work, it is possible to establish a national baseline on the scale of internal displacement in one of the world’s most affected countries.

### Civil society

Civil society organisations, including Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, collect internal displacement data and are sometimes the only provider of such information in a country. Their monitoring is especially key for small-scale disasters and incidents of violence. Data provided by the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement allowed us to triangulate and validate estimates for 38 countries in 2024.

In Central and South America we collaborate closely with 3iSolutions, which conducts surveys to estimate the number of movements and people living in displacement as a result of disasters, conflict and violence across several countries, including Colombia and Ecuador. To report displacement triggered by violence in Brazil we use data from the Pastoral Commission of the Land, which is the only agency in the country that monitors the phenomenon.

In rare cases, data comes from IDPs themselves. Urdu-speaking Biharis in Bangladesh collected and re-

# Spotlight – Mali

## Transferring displacement data expertise to the government

Mali’s government and IOM signed an agreement in 2014 to hand over ownership of the collection, validation and publication of conflict displacement data to the National Directorate of Social Development (DNDS). IOM had launched its DTM programme in the country in close collaboration with the government in 2012 in response to conflict that displaced hundreds of thousands of people. It was designed to provide up-to-date information on movements of IDPs and returnees, and the needs of other people affected by the conflict. The DTM team was made up of 120 members drawn from IOM, DNDS and the General Directorate of Civil Protection, who were deployed in all regions of the country.<sup>5</sup>

The DTM assessments included the registration of IDPs, location assessments for IDPs and returnees, return intention surveys and needs assessments in return areas. Monitoring points were also set up in Bamako, Gao, Mop-

ported data across 112 displacement camps through the Council of Minorities, which helped us to bridge an important data gap on their situation.

We also review media articles to fill gaps if no other sources are available, but their use requires careful review and their data needs to be corroborated with additional information.

Despite the involvement of all these partners in collection and analysis, much of the data gleaned still comes with caveats, the result of lack of access to certain areas because of ongoing disasters or insecurity, out-of-date information and the absence of disaggregation at the temporal, geographic or demographic level. These are persistent gaps which need to be filled. Each partner also uses different approaches to monitoring because the purposes of their data collection vary from statistical to programmatic and response planning. This means we need to do further analysis to be able to aggregate their data.

ti and Timbuktu to track IDPs’ movements and identify the most vulnerable people. The handover of the programme consisted of transferring the data collection process and analysis to DNDS, along with DTM equipment.<sup>6</sup>

IOM continues to provide technical and financial support, including the training of local staff, to ensure the continued application of DTM data while increasing the scope of its analysis, geographical coverage and reporting frequency. Through DTM’s multi-sectoral location assessments, DNDS’s capacity to quantify the presence and needs of people affected by conflict across Mali continues to be strengthened.<sup>7</sup>

## Comparable data for global progress monitoring

Globally aggregated, validated and harmonised data is essential to inform policies and action to prevent, respond to and resolve displacement. By applying global standards and methodologies, we can make an evidence-based case that the phenomenon has a global footprint. The fact that the dataset is updated annually using the same methodology makes it temporally comparable, which means we are able to measure global progress with regularity.

### Aggregation and harmonisation

Despite standards such as IRIS, methodologies and data quality vary significantly between regions and countries, and sometimes within countries. This means that very different datasets often need to be analysed and combined to produce country-level figures that would not be possible if we relied on one data source alone. In Nigeria, for example, IOM DTM covers north-eastern, north-central and north-western regions for disasters and conflict. We



complement its data with information for other regions from sources including the national and state emergency management agencies, local authorities and international NGOs.

Similarly, information from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) forms the basis of our monitoring of disaster displacement in the US, but FEMA only covers events that lead to a federal response. We capture data on smaller-scale disasters by monitoring other sources, including local authorities and media. Based on FEMA's data alone we would have estimated 6.9 million disaster displacements in 2024, but by complementing its data with information from other sources we arrived at a figure of 11 million.

Further challenges arise from the fact that not all of the data we analyse reports directly on displacement. Many disaster management agencies in Latin America, for example, report on proxies such as destroyed housing. We use such data, along with information on average household size, to estimate displacement based on the assumption that when someone loses their home, they can be considered displaced. To come up with the most accurate estimates for countries such as Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Guatemala, we combine this data with information on evacuations or people in official shelters.

In other cases we only receive information about evacuation orders without any population figures for the areas concerned. Pre-emptive evacuations constitute displacement, and we use demographic data from national censuses to estimate its scale. Such information is, for example, the main data source for disaster displacement in Greece, where it was used for more than 100 events in 2024. Government partners in a number of countries have confirmed that this is the best method of estimating displacement in the absence of other data.

As well as working on country-level analysis and harmonisation, we collaborate closely with IOM and UNHCR to align our datasets at the global level, understand the differences and explain them to our external audiences. The global datasets that we and UNHCR produce align for more countries each year as a result. The figure currently stands at around half. We also work with UNHCR to produce estimates for the number of IDPs at the end of the year disaggregated by sex and age. One of the main differences is that our coverage includes conflict and di-

sasters worldwide, while UNHCR focuses solely on conflicts in the countries where it operates.

### Validation

Given the different standards and methodologies that sources use, data reliability also differs. We place significant emphasis on making our data as reliable and accurate as possible, which means it is vital we verify and validate our estimates rigorously. We distinguish between sources with low, medium or high reliability, which we assess based on their data collection and verification methods.

For sources with low reliability and some with medium reliability, we have to find other sources to confirm their figures before they can be included in our verified dataset. This is known as triangulation, and it is ever more relevant given today's fast-moving news cycle and the fact that anyone can put forward unverified information or disinformation.

We recorded more than 18,000 datapoints to produce our 2024 estimates, of which more than 6,300 were used for triangulation. By way of one example, we collected more than 80 data points to triangulate our estimate for displacement triggered by communal violence in India's Manipur state.

Once all of the data is analysed and triangulated, it goes through a thorough process of internal and external quality assurance. It is checked internally for typos, and to ensure the original documents have been interpreted correctly and the data analysis and compilation is logical. We then share our analyses with primary data sources wherever possible and invite feedback. In many countries, we analyse the data jointly with partners to ensure accuracy and correct interpretation of their work. We also seek validation or endorsement of our estimates from in-country partners, including governments, before they are included in our validated dataset.

For example, we produce our estimates for displacement triggered by conflict and violence in Mexico jointly with UNHCR and the Ibero-American University by analysing and validating data from open sources and civil society organisations across the country. We similarly analyse data from 3iSolutions on displacements in Colombia jointly, as we do with partners who provide data on flood dis-

placement in West Africa. We also convene a number of multi-stakeholder consultations each year to gather feedback on our methodology and estimates.

### Integrity and comparability

We began revising our historical data in 2024 to reflect our current methodology and make sure that all of the datapoints used since 2008 are as reliable as our current data. Doing so has also allowed us to add disaggregated data on subnational level wherever such data existed for the historical displacement events.

This is key to maintaining the integrity, comparability and usability of our data. It ensures that displacement trends reflect actual developments rather than methodological inconsistencies, which in turn allows more accurate analysis and predictive modelling. The introduction of subnational data disaggregation helps to inform more targeted humanitarian responses, moving beyond national-level statistics to identify specific affected areas.

Enhanced interoperability makes our dataset more accessible for integration with external datasets. It also ensures the long-term preservation of records by filling data gaps in past reporting for displacement triggered by conflict, violence and disasters. These improvements will establish a more robust, timely and actionable dataset as an evidence base to inform policies and interventions to reduce, respond to and resolve internal displacement.

## Establishing a solid global baseline

To calculate a global estimate of the number of IDPs at the end of each year is a complex process for a number of reasons, including outdated data and lack of clarity on what durable solutions mean in different settings. We undertook a complex exercise in 2024 to make our global stock estimate more up-to-date, verified and reliable to provide a solid global baseline for measuring progress.

We reviewed all caseloads of IDPs to verify their relevance and reliability via secondary data reviews and consultations with in-country missions, governments and international organisations. This allowed us to obtain updated data for several decaying caseloads linked to conflict and violence, including Bangladesh and Guatemala, for which we had not been able to verify the data for more than two

decades. It also allowed us to remove caseloads such as Nicaragua, Türkiye and Uganda, which we could not confirm, meaning they were no longer reliable enough to be included in our global dataset.

The revision is also allowing us to align our methodologies for calculating conflict and disaster stocks. Until 2024, the number of people living in displacement as result of disasters at the end of each year was considered a significant underestimate, while some of our conflict figures were overestimates.

We have also introduced more systematic use of housing destruction data to help estimate the duration of displacement triggered by conflict and disasters, and we will refine this part of our methodology further for the 2025 data.

We rely on our partners to assess what durable solutions mean in each setting and determine whether IDPs have resolved their plight or are about to, at which point we remove them from our stock figures.

We also produce timeseries information on the total number of IDPs, which allows to follow the evolution of caseloads during and across years. We tend to record the number of IDPs before, during and after an event. When available, we capture data on pre-emptive evacuations daily for the first ten days of an emergency, then every three days until day 30 and every ten days until day 90 unless there is a major change. After day 90 we capture data every month, again unless there is a major change, ideally until all IDPs have resolved their situation. Such information helps us understand how long it takes for IDPs to recover in different settings and after being displaced by different triggers.

Few countries, however, have monitoring mechanisms which allow us to track the end of displacement. Of more than 7,700 displacement events recorded in 2024, only 468 were monitored until the reported number of IDPs reached zero. Just three countries, Malaysia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, accounted for more than 55 per cent of these events, which highlights a significant gap in measuring the duration of displacement globally.



Who uses IDMC’s data?

Humanitarian agencies use our data for emergency responses. It is fed into the Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX), which generates signals that inform targeted programming and emergency interventions for IDPs, logistics, mapping, and needs assessments. The World Food Programme has also developed dashboards to visualise our data to support its humanitarian operations.

We provide our data to many organisations for forecasting, anticipatory action and modelling purposes. The UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is exploring how to use it for anticipatory action to assess crisis risks and predict displacement events based on our dataset. UNHCR’s data science team, IOM’s global migration data analysis centre and Qatar’s Hamad Bin Khalifa University use our dataset and apply modelling to forecast displacement patterns, analyse social vulnerability and detect movements using computer vision.

The Danish Refugee Council uses our dataset to produce its Global Displacement Forecast, which is based on historical trends. It uses artificial intelligence (AI) to process vast amounts of data and run algorithms to predict future displacement scenarios based on many different indicators including conflict, health, environment, food insecurity, and socioeconomic conditions. The forecasts help humanitarian organisations plan and respond more effectively to the needs of those affected.<sup>9</sup>

In similar vein, we use our own data to calibrate our disaster displacement risk model, which helps governments to understand the potential future scale of displacement under different climate scenarios.

Academic institutions and the German Federal Foreign Office use our data to understand displacement trends and perform data analysis. ETH Zürich, Georgetown University, Harvard University and the University of Cambridge, for example, are engaged in research on displacement, climate-induced migration and the health impacts of shocks such as disasters and conflicts using our GIDD.

Navigating a new funding landscape

As governments and international organisations are forced to reprioritise in a new environment of drastic fund-

ing cuts, the continued need for independent, reliable and trusted data to support informed decision making and advocate for effective support for the world’s most vulnerable people, including those internally displaced, cannot be overstressed.

Collecting displacement data will always involve various stakeholders, so it is important to develop clear and harmonised approaches. Partnerships need to be strengthened at the local, national and international level, as do governments’ capacities to collect and record data themselves. As we all pull together to navigate this new landscape, greater collaboration will be key to unlocking the potential of data to generate evidence and insights about the whole spectrum of human mobility and its links to development challenges and opportunities.

The systematic application of the IRIS standards at the national and regional level would help to build more meaningful bridges between the generation of evidence and policymaking to prevent, respond to and resolve displacement. It would also help to build sustainable data systems maintained by governments, one of the cornerstones of national ownership and accountability.

It is time as well to expand our exploration of new technologies that could help to structure unstructured information, speed up data entry and quality assurance processes and analyse data more efficiently while maintaining the highest standards of data protection. The Complex Risk Analytics Fund is supporting us and other organisations to invest in such work. Surveys that complement data from registries also show that a mixed-method approach is most useful in many settings, and they are less resource-intensive than data collection conducted via key informants or household surveys.

As financial resources shrink across the humanitarian and development sectors, it will be vital to design the most cost-efficient ways of collecting, aggregating and analysing data with a clear purpose to ensure the preservation and sustainability of such crucial datasets such as our database (GIDD) for the future.

Endnotes

1 UN, Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, undated; EGRISS, About us, undated; UN, In Focus: Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, undated

2 EGRISS, Implementation progress, undated

3 Detailed explanations about how we arrive at our estimates for each country, including methodological considerations and caveats, can be found in our online country profiles

4 IDMC, Repository of good practices: DROMIC’s structured and comprehensive reporting of displacement impacts, undated

5 IOM, IOM Hands over Displacement Tracking Matrix to Mali, 14 November 2014; IDMC, Internal Displacement in Africa: an overview of trends and developments, November 2024

6 IOM, IOM Hands over Displacement Tracking Matrix to Mali, 14 November 2014

7 IOM, IOM Mali Country Strategy 2021-2024, November 2021

8 Al Ameen, Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU), IDMC, REACH Initiative, Site Settlement Working Group (SSWG), North-east Syria Forum (NES)

9 DRC, Global Displacement Forecast, March 2025

Author: Ivana Hajžmanová

Editor: Jeremy Lennard

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Every day, people flee conflict and disasters and become displaced inside their own countries. IDMC provides data and analysis and supports partners to identify and implement solutions to internal displacement.

Join us as we work to make real and lasting change for internally displaced people in the decade ahead.



**The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre**

La Voie Creuse 16, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland

+41 22 552 3600 | [info@idmc.ch](mailto:info@idmc.ch)



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