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Internal Displacement and Responses at the Global Level: A Review of the Scholarship

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Abstract

This paper reviews the scholarship that addresses internal displacement at a global or general level. This includes research on global frameworks or processes concerned with internal displacement as well as that which addresses internal displacement in a general, or non-region/country-specific, way. It starts by describing the main internal displacement trends at the global level. It then reviews how scholarship on internal displacement at a global or general level has developed, respectively, in the fields of law and policy, other social sciences and humanities, and health and medicine. It ends by offering conclusions on the scope of existing research and directions for future study.

This review of the scholarly literature seeks to identify principal trends, gaps and opportunities relating to research on internal displacement. Towards this end, the review concentrates on academic publications, including monographs, chapters in edited volumes and peer-reviewed articles, from the early 1990s until the start of 2020, a period of approximately 30 years. It thus offers not only a critical review of the state of the art in this field of study but also a key point of reference for researchers looking to develop our understanding of internal displacement from the standpoint of a variety of different disciplines and themes.

The paper forms part of a series of papers published in this Working Paper Series that review the state of the scholarship on internal displacement at the global level and in particular regions as we enter the decade of the 2020s. This research forms part of the Interdisciplinary Network on Displacement, Conflict and Protection (AH/T005351/1) and Global Engagement on Internal Displacement in sub-Saharan Africa (EP/T003227/1) projects, pilots of which were supported by the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). It should be read in conjunction with the other review papers in this series.

Keywords

Internal Displacement, IDPs, Conflict, Global
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1. Introduction

At the start of the decade of the 2020s, this review of the scholarship provides an overview of the academic research literature to date relating to general or global aspects of the topics of internal displacement and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The study is designed to be read alongside the other studies in this series that review the published research on these themes in the regions of Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. It builds on a recent ‘state of the art’ review of research in the IDP field, which it complements with its more comprehensive review of the academic literature. This allows it to offer a broader perspective on how academic scholarship has sought to engage with questions of internal displacement and IDPs and the gaps and questions that emerge as a result of this analysis.

The review starts by reviewing the main trends identified by the key existing sources of quantitative data at the global level. It then reviews the published literature from scholarly sources in relation to law and policy, the other social sciences and humanities, and health that focus on developments at the global level or which offer a general, i.e. non-regionally based, perspective on internal displacement or IDPs. The study ends by offering conclusions on the overall scope of existing research on these general or global aspects of the topic and identifying areas where new research could be focused. Thus, read alongside the regional studies in this series, this review offers a perspective on the state of research scholarship on global or general approaches to internal displacement as we enter the 2020s.
2. Main trends in data on IDPs globally

For internal displacement linked to conflict and violence, quantitative data that offer a window onto trends at the global level are published by two organisations. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), which is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council, a non-governmental humanitarian agency, collates data from different sources to produce global estimates on internal displacement. In tandem, the office for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) publishes data on the IDPs whom it protects or assists in different countries around the world. In future, the Displacement Tracking Matrix operated by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) may also come to represent an alternative data source on global IDP trends. The Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) publishes profiling data on IDPs in particular countries but not at the global level. IDMC, JIPS and UNHCR also publish qualitative information about internal displacement.

Global reports by IDMC point to quite significant variations in the annual level of estimated new displacements linked to conflict and violence, ranging from an annual low of 2.9 million new displacements (2010) to an annual peak of 11.8 million new displacements (2017).\(^3\) On average, though, the overall number of estimated new displacements has been much higher over the last five-year period (47 million for 2015-2019) than for the preceding one (32 million for 2010-2014),\(^4\) or the one before that (20.9 million for 2005-2009).\(^5\) The general trend thus appears to be one of a steady increase in the estimated annual total of new internal displacements over the past 15 years, although this might also partly reflect improved methods for counting or estimating the number of new displacements.

Global estimates by IDMC of the total number of conflict and violence IDPs also show a general increase over the past 15 years. The annual figure for the total number of IDPs fluctuated around the 25 million IDPs mark for much of the period 2004-2013 before rising sharply from 2014 onwards to reach the global estimated total of 45.7 million IDPs as at the start of 2020.\(^6\) However, the difficulties of determining and verifying when internal displacement ends makes this a ‘best estimate’, and IDMC no longer offers separate estimates for the number of IDPs to return or achieve durable solutions during each year.\(^7\) A key trend within the global data on internal displacement linked to conflict and violence identified by IDMC is the emergence of ‘cyclical and protracted’ patterns of displacement.\(^8\)

The IDMC global data also allows for comparison of levels of internal displacement between regions over the past 15 years.\(^9\) In this regard, Africa consistently has both the highest number of new displacements and overall IDP population, with a wide range of affected countries. By contrast, the extent of internal displacement in Europe, Latin America and Asia has been generally less significant over the last 15 years, with only a few countries heavily affected, and showing a tendency towards decline. In the Middle East, although only a limited number of countries are affected, their levels of displacement have become increasingly significant in the past five years as a result of events linked to the Arab Spring. Globally, certain heavily-affected countries

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\(^3\) Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019, Geneva, IDMC, 2019, 1. In 2019, there were 8.5 million new displacements linked to these drivers. IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020, Geneva, IDMC, 2020.

\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) Figures provided for annual new displacements from IDMC global database, available at: https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data.


\(^7\) IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019, 50. Indeed, reflecting a decrease in confidence on the accuracy of these estimates, IDMC now prefers to report the “flow” numbers of new displacements rather than the “stock” numbers of people in displacement.

\(^8\) Ibid, vi.

\(^9\) Comparison of figures from IDMC global reports for years 2004 to 2018.
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regularly report high annual figures for new displacements. Moreover, in 2019, with few exceptions, the vast majority of new conflict- and violence-related internal displacement took place in countries of the global South.

UNHCR also publishes annual reports that contain quantitative data on internal displacement that offers a different perspective to IDMC data. Most importantly, this data speaks only to the numbers of IDPs protected and assisted by UNHCR. They thus estimate the population of concern to UNHCR in the countries where it operates rather than the entire IDP population in those countries or globally. Even so, for 2018 (the most recent year for which data is available), it is notable that the overall UNHCR total for IDPs and ‘persons in an IDP-like situation’, although reflecting a narrower range of countries, still exceeds that of the IDMC data. In general, at the global level, the UNHCR figures show that the number of IDPs being assisted or protected by that agency have increased steeply on an annual basis over the past 15 years, as have the number of countries where that IDP mandate is being exercised by UNHCR.

That much of this quantitative data on internal displacement takes the form of ‘estimates’ reflects inherent methodological challenges. Some involve deeper questions as to the scope of the IDP concept or the difficulty of developing indicators for key elements (e.g. when displacement ends). Others reflect practical issues, such as the kinds of tools that are used to collect IDP data for diverse purposes, the wider challenge of working with such vulnerable or hidden populations in unstable contexts. In response, the Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics (EGRIS) formed a sub-group on IDPs. Based on a review of current practice led by the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) and national governments, the sub-group published its recommendations on promoting improvement in 2018.

By contrast, whereas the overwhelming majority of IDPs are currently located in the global South, refugees are spread out across the world, with a presence in almost every country. Even so, the majority of the world’s refugees (some 85%) are located in countries in the global South, although almost two-thirds of refugees currently come from just five countries. Currently, there are some 25 million refugees worldwide. The absolute number of refugees is higher today than at any other recorded point in history. The number of refugees as a proportion of the global population is also approaching an historical high. After a dip in refugee numbers during the 1990s, the tendency over the past 15 years is of steady increase, mirroring the pattern for conflict-affected IDPs.

10 For example, Colombia, DRC, Somalia.
11 IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020. In Ukraine, 60 new displacements were recorded. In Mexico, 7,100 new displacements were recorded.
12 See the IDP tables in the statistical annexes to the annual reports by UNHCR on Global Trends and Statistical Yearbooks.
13 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Global Trends 2018, Geneva, UNHCR, 2019, Statistical Annex, Table 6. This gives a total population of concern in 2018 of 41,425,147 people, in comparison with the IDMC total for 2018 of 41.3 million. The category of ‘persons in an IDP-like situation’ includes ‘groups of persons who are inside their country of nationality or habitual residence and who face protection risks similar to those of IDPs but who, for practical or other reasons, could not be reported as such’ (ibid.).
14 At the end of 2004, the total was just over 5.4 million IDPs whilst at the end of 2018 this figure had increased to just over 41.4 million IDPs. Here too, there is a sudden jump in numbers during 2014.
15 At the end of 2004, UNHCR IDP populations of concern were listed for 13 countries whilst at the end of 2018 this figure had increased to 33 countries. For research and analysis on UNHCR’s work with IDPs, see section 3.1.2 below.
18 For current data on refugees, see UNHCR, Global Trends 2018.
3. Scholarship on internal displacement at the global level

Against the backdrop of these global trends in IDP figures, this section provides an overview of the main global or general aspects of internal displacement on which research has been published. It starts by considering that relating to law and policy (3.1), then the wider social sciences and humanities (3.2) and finally medicine and health (3.3).

3.1 Legal and policy research

Research on global or general aspects of internal displacement in the legal/policy field has tended to revolve around four main themes, which are highly interrelated, although these connections are not always drawn out in the literature itself. They are the development of an international framework for protection and assistance of IDPs (3.1.1), and the legal and policy aspects of the institutional response to IDPs at the international level (3.1.2), the global framework for assistance and protection of IDPs (3.1.3) and the implementation of assistance and protection in practice (3.1.4).

3.1.1 Development of an international framework

Research traces the emergence and growing consolidation of internal displacement as a matter of international concern during the late 1980s, and its take up within the United Nations (UN) system throughout the 1990s, is an area of research interest. It elucidates the move toward States and other actors at the international level recognising a need to assist and protect IDPs. Much of the analysis concentrates on the work of first Representative of the Secretary General (RSG) on IDPs, Francis Deng, and his team in putting the issue on the international agenda, even if this was not the first time that internal displacement was discussed in the UN context.

The concept of ‘sovereignty as responsibility’ proposed by Deng during the 1990s in part as a way to justify attention to IDPs in the face of State concerns that it would interfere in domestic affairs, has received relatively little elaboration in the IDP literature. This is not because research in the IDP field has not considered questions of sovereignty. Instead, it seems that the concept of ‘sovereignty as responsibility’ has been taken up as a foundation for broader analyses and policy ideas around the so-called ‘responsibility to protect’ (RtP or R2P). During the 2000s, this R2P agenda has generated substantial debate among academics but, with a few notable exceptions, remains largely disconnected from research on IDPs (as opposed to research on refugees).
Scholarship on international engagement with IDPs from the 1990s onwards largely focuses on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (Guiding Principles) that were drafted by Deng and his team and presented in 1998 to the UN Commission on Human Rights (now replaced by the UN Human Rights Council). This soft law instrument sets out 30 basic principles for the protection and assistance of IDPs. Those are claimed merely to interpret how broader standards of legal protection in existing international law apply to situations of internal displacement. As such, the Guiding Principles do not create a legal status for IDPs at the international level and their definition of the IDPs to whom they apply is merely descriptive.

The literature on the Guiding Principles focuses mainly on describing the creation of this normative framework and explaining the decision by Deng, in light of important contemporary legal and political considerations, to craft the Guiding Principles as a form of ‘soft’ rather than ‘hard’ law, as well as assessing the early stages of their dissemination and uptake by actors at the international level. Far less scholarly attention is devoted to other widely-applied global policy or soft law norms on IDPs, such as the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs. In part, this reflects the central role that the Guiding Principles have come to assume in IDP policy.

Moreover, much of the work on the Guiding Principles, particularly in the late 1990s and early 2000s, originates from members of Deng’s team - including his successor as Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on IDPs, Walter Kälin - and affiliated scholars. These studies tend to push the Guiding Principles as the key reference point for framing IDPs as a category of concern and developing the international response, with analysis concerned mainly with how to gain better traction for them in policy and practice. Moreover, since the late 2000s, the perceived success of the Guiding Principles has spawned a new set of studies interested in deriving wider lessons about normative and policy development in relation to a range of themes from the process of creating and disseminating the Guiding Principles.


30 For exceptions, see occasional references cited in following paragraphs, such as to the ‘Pinheiro Principles’.


Other literature, though, reflects more critically on the Guiding Principles. Scholars raise conceptual concerns, asking whether IDPs can really be treated as a category of concern distinct from other vulnerable populations. A growing body of work poses crucial questions about how the Guiding Principles (and IASC Framework) frame the ‘end of displacement’ and ‘durable solutions’ for IDPs. Many of these studies also consider challenges in implementing the Guiding Principles in practice, and a number reflect on the mechanisms responsible for their apparent impact on changing State behaviour. Finally, a handful of legal studies seek to elucidate the implications of the Guiding Principles for the development of international law on internal displacement.

### 3.1.2 Institutional response

Scholarly analysis has contributed to parallel debates about developing institutional responses to IDP situations at the international level. Thus, a strand of legal literature, mostly during the late 1990s, considered how, in general, international attention to IDPs might be reconciled with respect for State sovereignty. It was recognised that offers of protection to IDPs by the international community were a point of real political sensitivity. For legal scholars, though, a particular area of debate is whether international law provided international humanitarian organisations with a right to offer their services in support of IDPs and, if so, whether it establishes any legal parameters for a State to consent to or refuse such offers. Some of those scholars have also taken issue with the way in which the Guiding Principles articulate the rules in these underlying legal sources.

Another key strand of this literature deliberated the appropriate institutional locus and form of any international attention to IDPs at the international level. Questions about the role of the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, were central to this debate. Some early studies affirmed a legal mandate for UNHCR to act for IDPs, whilst others disputed it. Certainly, despite growing engagement of the agency in IDP situations during the 1990s and 2000s, scholars mostly joined UNHCR in rejecting proposals that it be given overall responsibility for IDPs in the UN system.

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39 See section 3.1.1 above and citations in footnotes 21-25 above.


42 Luopajarvi, “Is there an Obligation on States”, referring to Guiding Principle No. 25.


Some also questioned whether working with IDPs might compromise UNHCR’s core mandate for refugee protection, facilitate containment and generate a dysfunctional approach to IDP protection.\(^{46}\) Nonetheless, since 2005, when the UN system adopted a ‘cluster’ approach to IDPs, UNHCR has increasingly involved itself in IDP situations and leads the global clusters of ‘protection’, ‘shelter’ and ‘camp management’ (the last co-led with IOM) for conflict IDPs.\(^{47}\)

Other UN agencies also have specific operational responsibilities for IDPs under this cluster system. However, scholarly analyses of the engagement with internal displacement by other UN agencies and forums, and that of the cluster approach as a whole, are relatively limited and outdated.\(^{48}\) There is some analytical work that engages with the role of the RSG on IDPs,\(^{49}\) but this is mostly focused on the period of Deng’s tenure with little work on the mandates of the subsequent RSG on the human rights of IDPs (Walter Kälin, 2004-2010) or the Special Rapporteurs to the Human Rights Council on the Human Rights of IDPs (Chaloka Beyani, 2010-2016, and Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, 2016-). With one exception, little academic work exists on international institutions working on IDPs outside the UN system, whether international organisations, non-government organisations or civil society.

The exception is the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Indeed, the ICRC has attracted a small body of scholarly comment on its role with IDPs, although most of these publications are by ICRC staff members. This emphasises that the ICRC’s interest in both protection and assistance of IDPs during conflict derives from the humanitarian principles that guide its work and from its related role as the ‘guardian’ of the international law of armed conflict (ILAC).\(^{50}\) The operational approach of the ICRC towards IDPs is also explained and analysed, including its position that prioritis focusing on the vulnerability and specific needs of civilians in conflict over any concern for ‘excessive categorisation’ of victims as IDPs etc.\(^{51}\) Yet, by contrast, the wider components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have largely escaped


49 See section 3.1.1 and citations in footnotes 19, 26 and 29 above.


scholarly analysis.52

Overall, some scholars manifest a preoccupation that, particularly following the UN process of humanitarian reform and implementation of the cluster approach, ‘international commitment to addressing internal displacement seems to be diminishing’.53 That this analysis may reflect a wider perception of reducing interest at the international level in IDPs in recent years is suggested by the UN Secretary-General’s decision in 2019 to establish a High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement ‘to improve the approach and response to the issue, with a particular focus on durable solutions’54

3.1.3 Legal and policy framework

A growing concern with internal displacement among international law scholars also emerged during the 1990s. One crucial early debate concerned the form and the scope of protection due to IDPs in international law, given that no international instrument specific to the situation of such persons existed at that time.55 Yet the uptake of the Guiding Principles in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the publication of background legal studies and subsequent annotations that explained the empirical protection rationale and legal provenance of each principle,56 served rapidly to eclipse discussion of various alternative proposals for creating an international normative framework on IDP protection.57 Since then, international law interest has coalesced mainly around African regional developments.58

Nonetheless, scholars remain interested in locating the IDP concept within international law and policy. The essential distinction drawn by Deng and his team in the Guiding Principles between IDPs and refugees, with refugee law applying to IDPs only ‘by analogy’, has largely been endorsed by the subsequent literature.59 However, some authors have cautioned that promoting protection for IDPs risks undermining refugee protection by justifying containment strategies.60 Others, though, contend that such fears have not in fact manifested in practice and that a degree of interaction between the two fields is not necessarily negative.61 For instance, the longstanding refugee law concept of ‘internal flight alternative’ might be interpreted in light of standards in the Guiding Principles to help prevent premature refugee returns that might further exacerbate

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60  See, for instance, Barutciski, “Tensions between the Refugee Concept and the IDP Debate”.
IDP crises. By contrast, UNHCR involvement in-country with IDPs is not a form of ‘protection’ that legally vitiates refugee status. A reassessment of both links and tensions between the refugee and IDP fields is needed in light of developing practice. ILAC, also known as ‘international humanitarian law’ (IHL), regulates forcible displacement of civilians in both treaty and customary law. This has attracted a substantial body of somewhat settled analysis pertinent to IDPs that focuses on describing and debating the logic and scope of both explicit and implicit ILAC prohibitions on forcible displacement and their rendering as crimes under international law. A new treaty to prevent and punish forcible displacement as a crime has even been proposed by scholars. Several studies assess the wider protections that ILAC affords to those IDPs who have the status of civilians. The implications of ILAC rules for specific IDP concerns – such as the use of land mines, attacks on IDP camps, safety zones for IDPs, and the return of IDPs - are also considered in this literature.

Interest in the prevention of displacement carries through into research on the so-called ‘right not to be displaced’. However, the wider body of scholarship on IDPs and international human rights law is comparably fragmentary. Mostly, it tends to focus on the Guiding Principles. Thus, some authors criticise the international frameworks on IDP protection for not adequately incor-

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68 Jacques, Armed Conflict and Displacement, 185-208; Lavoyer, “Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons”
70 Jacques, Armed Conflict and Displacement, 209-244.
72 D.J. Cantor, Returns of Internally Displaced Persons in Armed Conflict: International Law and Its Application in Colombia, Leiden, Martinus Nijhoff, 2018, 82-120.
porating minority rights or disability rights standards. Others, by contrast, look at how human rights standards have been interpreted by treaty body mechanisms in application to situations of internal displacement. Where such interpretation draws on the Guiding Principles, a ‘hardening’ of those soft law standards may be discerned, including for principles that seem to develop rather than restate existing law.

Particularly during the 2000s, restitution of housing, land and property (HLP) rights for IDPs attracted real interest from scholars. This appears to be one area where the Guiding Principles do not simply restate existing law but push it to its limits. Moreover, HLP restitution is a challenge not only for IDPs but also for refugees, such that both scholarly analysis and the international framework on HLP rights that later emerged have often connected the two fields. A range of HLP restitution contexts from around the world have been analysed. More recently, it has been argued that restitution for IDPs should be conceived independently from return and must encompass remedies beyond just individual real property restitution. In practice, a gradual shift from the restitution of property rights to the promotion of housing rights and alternative forms of tenure has been identified.

Durable solutions, more generally, appear in the legal scholarship. This is another area where the Guiding Principles seem to go beyond merely restating existing law. Legal and policy analysis of the three solutions focuses more on return than resettlement or reintegration. The provenance, evolution and scope in international law of the asserted right of IDPs to return is a key concern, as is the significance of concepts of ‘voluntariness’, ‘safety’ and ‘dignity’ in IDP return contexts. Again, a connection with policy approaches to return in the refugee concept is drawn,

77 Cantor, “The IDP in International Law?”;
78 Phuong, The International Protection of IDPs, 60-64, referring to Guiding Principle No. 29(2).
79 See citations in following footnotes. For an example from the policy field, see UNCHR Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Housing and Property Restitution, 2005, UN Doc E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/17, Annex (also known as the ‘Pinheiro Principles’).
especially by authors concerned with how contextual factors shape return in practice.\textsuperscript{87} The UN’s ‘New Way of Working’ and its focus on ‘collective outcomes’ may also facilitate solutions to protracted IDP situations.\textsuperscript{88}

From the late 2000s, a particular line of enquiry analyses the relationship between durable solutions for IDPs and international peace and security. It considers how addressing internal displacement in the context of peace processes might impact on sustainable peace and development.\textsuperscript{89} A link to the literature on restitution for IDPs also exists as part of the scholarship on transitional justice.\textsuperscript{90} In the 2010s, though, the underlying interest in how durable solutions for IDPs connect to wider processes of sustainable development has attracted a small degree of scholarly interest in its own right.\textsuperscript{91} This coincides with a move in international policy to promote a response to IDPs (and refugees) with not only humanitarian but also development and peacebuilding elements, especially for solutions.\textsuperscript{92}

Finally, whilst a comparatively substantial body of academic research exists on the legal and policy framework for IDPs in contexts of conflict and violence, the literature on such frameworks for IDPs in other disaster situations is relatively minimal. This is an important point, since the few publications on the topic suggest that gaps in protection exist in relation to those disaster IDPs.\textsuperscript{93} This contrasts with a more established and growing literature on legal, policy and other aspects of development-induced internal displacement,\textsuperscript{94} and its impact on legal rights,\textsuperscript{95} and which overlaps somewhat with thematic concerns in the literature on displacement linked to the

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3.1.4 Assistance and protection in practice

Many of the studies of assistance and protection in the context of internal displacement focus on a single case study country.97 Relatively few studies examine legal and policy considerations in practice on a general basis or via comparison of a significant range of country case studies.

Several comparative studies of national laws or policies relating to IDPs exist. Crucially, following general acceptance of the standing of the Guiding Principles at the international level in the 2000s, they shift the analysis to domestic implementation. Even if the Guiding Principles remain a principal point of reference for many national instruments, these studies emphasise that the content of the diverse national laws and policies rightly reflects the specific circumstances of IDPs in each country.98 Certain trends have been identified in the variety of national instruments adopted by the late 2010s, including a tendency to overlook disaster IDPs and the prevention of displacement and an emphasis on return as the solution for IDPs.99 Crucial research has also begun to assess the extent to which such instruments have been effective in addressing displacement in practice.100

Other studies more carefully analyse responses to internal displacement in practice.101 Thus, some raise general questions over whether a status-based approach to protection is effective.102 Others consider the practical implications of engaging such actors as non-State armed groups or municipal authorities in protection, assistance and solution activities with IDPs in conflict contexts.103 One study considers the impact on humanitarian work with IDPs of the transformation of armed conflict in the twenty years since the Guiding Principles were presented.104 A limited literature that reflects generally on IDP self-protection also exists.105 Displacement in urban contexts is a topic of increasing interest in the literature on IDPs (and also on refugees), including on the challenges of responding to internal displacement in urban settings.106 Questions remain,

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97 See regional scoping studies for this project.
101 See, in general, Beyani, Baal and Caterina, “Conceptual Challenges”.
though, about singling out IDPs for special attention, especially as those who are unable to flee may be equally or more vulnerable. At the same time, on a general or global level, there is relatively little research on how IDP protection intersects with gender, childhood, sexuality and other forms of social identity, perhaps suggesting that such questions are seen as highly context-specific.

The role of data in facilitating this response to internal displacement on the ground has also seen a degree of scholarly interest. The lack of reliable IDP data is repeatedly identified by policy actors as a significant problem, with publications asserting the need for enhanced data-gathering and profiling of IDPs to help implement the Guiding Principles and improve assistance, protection and solutions outcomes for IDPs overall. At the same time, in the current political context and range of new technologies, scholars warn that it is crucial not to underestimate the data protection challenges facing humanitarian organisations involved in responding to situations of internal displacement.

### 3.2 Social sciences and humanities

In the social science literature, questions about the inception of the term ‘internally displaced persons’ form the basis of much historical and conceptual discussion. Although the phenomenon of internal displacement has always existed, the emergence of the term, and of IDPs as a discrete concern in the international community, is usually dated to the late 1980s. Indeed, it has been claimed that the “flight of refugees from former Yugoslavia into Western Europe during the early 1990s marked a critical turning point” in scholarly interest on internal displacement and in policy change. Similarly, a prominent collection of country case studies on the topic of internal displacement takes the post-Cold War era as its starting point.

The emergence of the term has engendered certain disciplinary shifts, primarily the integration of ‘Refugee Studies’ into the broader field of ‘Forced Migration Studies.’ This seems to capture what is common to both groups: involuntary movement. This disciplinary movement, though, is the object of some debate. Where some argue for a looser association between ‘refugee studies’ and ‘forced migration studies,’ others advocate for greater nuance in distinguishing different forms of migration within the field of forced migration. Rising numbers of IDPs in the post-Cold War era have led, according to some scholars, to IDPs moving up the “public and policy agendas to become a central concern in the humanitarian arena.” A greater interest in IDPs in academia and in policy has led to re-evaluations of the ‘refugee regime’ including the role of the

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108 Indeed, most of the scholarly literature on this point is found in studies undertaken in particular national or local contexts and lacks a strongly comparative aspect. For an assessment of the scope of that research, see the other reviews undertaken by the INDCaP project in this series.


113 Ibid., 356

114 Ibid., 90
UNHCR in intervening in situations of internal displacement.\textsuperscript{117}

Though potentially very valuable, there are few discourse analysis approaches to this topic.\textsuperscript{118} Instead, the debates circle around the entanglement of research and policy. Thus, the emergence of the term ‘IDP’ and the international recognition of the group is seen as indicative of gaps in displacement discourses, both in relation to policy and from the perspective of academic knowledge production.\textsuperscript{119} Analysing the visibility of displaced groups, they note that while the UN and or academics might not have been aware of internal displacement, those groups working on the ground such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and local governments would have had considerable experience and exposure to the issue. The authors take this as an opportunity to analyse the relationship between policy and academia, concluding that academics need a greater “awareness of the power relationships inherent in the act of making someone or something visible in a certain way”.\textsuperscript{120} Delving even further into the history of the terms ‘refugee’ and ‘IDP’, questions have been raised about why IDPs only begin to be recognised in the early 1990s when in fact internal displacement had been a serious concern after World War Two.\textsuperscript{121}

Outside these historical and disciplinary debates generated by the issue of internal displacement, much arts, humanities and social science research concerns national-level issues such as land use, housing, food and resources, the impact of regime changes, ongoing conflict and peace negotiations. On the latter, the treatment of IDPs within peace negotiations is an important concern, suggesting that successful integration of IDPs is actually an indicator of the success of post-conflict peace agreements.\textsuperscript{122} Others suggest that the domestic spread of conflict is found to be worsened by the movement of IDPs,\textsuperscript{123} and that a link exists between internal displacement and suicide terrorism.\textsuperscript{124} Moreover, IDPs decisions about where to go in civil war contexts often bifurcate into a choice between anonymity in a large city, or security within a rival stronghold.\textsuperscript{125} While issues of return are not considered extensively in the general humanities and social science literature, research on patterns of return suggests that successful resettling is dependent on property rights and economic opportunities.\textsuperscript{126}

Considering the effects of internal displacement on host communities, some researchers offer policy solutions on issues such as changes in labour and housing markets in contexts where a community is host to a group of IDPs.\textsuperscript{127} Housing is a key concern, including the impact of forced evictions and illegal demolition.\textsuperscript{128} Another study identifies urbanisation as a growing concern for humanitarian actors in relation to internal displacement.\textsuperscript{129} National governments come

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  \item \textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{118} One exception is a discussion of the ways in which state approaches to refugees and IDPs are reliant on the language of security and securitisation (F. Donnelly, “In the name of (de)securitization: Speaking security to protect migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons?”, \textit{International Review of the Red Cross}, 99(904), 2017, 241-261).
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 429.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} P. Orchard, “The Contested Origins of Internal Displacement”, \textit{International Journal of Refugee Law}, 28(2), 2016, 210-233. He suggests that the exclusion of internal displacement in the original drafting of the 1951 convention was in fact a deliberate strategy on the part of the United States to prevent an overly expansive refugee convention and assistance mandate for the UN.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} P. W. Fagen, “Peace Processes and IDP Solutions”, \textit{Refugee Survey Quarterly}, 28(1), 2009, 31-58.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} S. Choi & J. A. Piazza, “Internally Displaced Populations and Suicide Terrorism”, \textit{Journal of Conflict Resolution}, 60(6), 2016, 1008-1040.
  \item \textsuperscript{126} D. S. Sert, “Internal Displacement: Return, Property, Economy”, \textit{International Migration}, 52(5), 2014, 227-244.
\end{itemize}
under scrutiny in two papers, the first focusing on the rise in governments displacing their own populations\textsuperscript{130} and the second on changes in government attitudes towards the treatment of IDPs as a result of shifts in norms promoted by international non-governmental organisations and institutions like the UN.\textsuperscript{131} From a national to a supranational framework, a number of papers take up the challenges and opportunities for organisations like the UN, which have a remit that includes internal displacement. In particular, they address the challenges of protracted conflict situations\textsuperscript{132} and the significance of faith-based organisations and the importance of interfaith cooperation.\textsuperscript{133} An attention to faith and gender seem lacking in the literature, although some argue that women have particular protection and assistance needs that exceed those of men.\textsuperscript{134} Specific issues around the role of education in internal displacement are taken up in a wide-ranging collection.\textsuperscript{135}

Where there does seem to be a general consensus in the literature is on the importance of the participation of IDPs in projects that affect them\textsuperscript{136} and that IDPs be given plenty of opportunities to share their experiences and have their voices heard. Using direct testimony from Colombian IDPs, it is possible to set out advice on “how to behave” in situations of internal displacement.\textsuperscript{137} Participation seems especially important in relation to return and resettlement. Looking at community building in post-conflict situations, one study suggests the importance of engagement and participation with affected communities.\textsuperscript{138} Another argues for the importance of ‘microfoundations’ for the reasons informing IDP decision-making on return and calls for the reinstatement of refugees and IDPs as vital actors in the micro-politics of displacement and their own life options.\textsuperscript{139} One even more practice-based study recounts experiences of using art therapy with IDP teens who benefited from being empowered to voice their own stories.\textsuperscript{140}

3.3 Medicine and health

There appear to be relatively few general studies with IDPs published in the field of medicine and health. Many reviews of a particular health topic include literature on both refugees and IDPs. Most original research studies a particular IDP population. Even so, it is clear that mental health is one point of interest for health and medical researchers. Studies in that field suggest that IDPs are underrepresented in psycho-traumatology literature but argue that internal displacement as a form of ‘event centrality’ among IDPs predicted post-traumatic stress disorder.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{136} See e.g. Afolabi et al., “Assessment of Designers’ Perception of Post Conflict Housing Schemes for Internally Displaced Persons”.
\textsuperscript{137} S. Jakobsen, “How to behave: advice from IDPs”, Forced Migration Review, 37, 2011, 23-24
\textsuperscript{139} I. Serrano, “Understanding the dynamics of return: the importance of microfoundations”, Refuge, 25(1), 2008, 27-34.
Another study systematically reviews an extremely weak existing evidence base to identify risk factors associated with harmful alcohol use among forcible displaced persons, including IDPs.\textsuperscript{142}

Other studies focus on other health concerns for IDP populations, especially in comparison with refugees. Thus, a review of data from aid agencies suggests that, whilst mortality among refugees is not significantly different from baselines in host countries, significant excess mortality exists for IDPs (but also, to a lesser extent, for other residents) affected by complex humanitarian emergencies.\textsuperscript{143} Other publications also suggest health inequalities exist between IDP and refugee populations in general.\textsuperscript{144} Community health interventions are also researched in IDP contexts.\textsuperscript{145} A review of the somewhat fragmentary existing evidence base also suggests a positive impact for training and deploying law IDPs (and refugees) as health workers in camps.\textsuperscript{146}


\textsuperscript{144} F. Rae, “Border-controlled Health Inequality: The International Community’s Neglect of Internally Displaced Persons”, \textit{Medicine, Conflict and Survival}, 27(1), 2011, 33-41.

\textsuperscript{145} For instance, on the role of nurses in promoting effective autonomous IDP management of healthcare, see K. Solheim, “Patterns of Community Relationship: Nurses, Non-Governmental Organizations and Internally Displaced Persons”, \textit{International Nursing Review}, 52(1), 2005, 60-67. This is based on data from a camp on the Thai-Cambodia border.

4. Conclusions

Global data on IDPs collated by international institutions such as UNHCR and IDMC suggest that the numbers of IDPs, and the number of countries where this is a major issue, are both growing. At the same time, the weakness in the quantitative data means that the absolute precision of the figures, and such apparent numerical trends, cannot be taken entirely at face value. The establishment of a UNHCR-World Bank Group Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement may help to address quality concerns about data on IDPs over time. Nonetheless, even recognising the methodological concerns posed in this field, such data as currently exist do suggest that, at the start of the 2020s, internal displacement due to conflict is a phenomenon that exists principally in countries of the global South rather than those of the global North (although this has not always been the case).

Academic research on internal displacement at the global level, i.e. where not addressed towards particular IDP situations or countries, is most extensive in relation to legal and policy issues. It focuses at the international level, particularly on the Guiding Principles (and ILAC) and UNHCR (and ICRC). Much of that research feels quite outdated. There is scope for researchers to reengage with international law, policy and actors in the IDP field to take account of developments over the past decade or two. Moreover, there is a need for greater comparative (i.e. cross-contextual) work on law, policy and actors in distinct national contexts, drawing wider lessons for research and policy. The fact that a significant proportion of research on the international response to IDPs is produced by practitioners, and tends to be rather descriptive and even ‘promotional’ in nature, raises questions about what a critical research agenda might entail for this area of studies.

A more critical line of enquiry does emerge in academic research from social science and humanities disciplines that seeks to engage with internal displacement on a general basis. Perhaps the key debate there has revolved around the challenges posed to ‘refugee studies’ by a broader focus on IDPs as part of a move towards ‘forced migration studies’. Elements of that debate recur in contemporary analyses of internal displacement, although the debate itself feels largely outdated or overtaken by events in practice. Alongside that, a wider body of social sciences and humanities scholarship on internal displacement does not really exist. Studies of particular IDP situations predominate. As a result, there is scope to develop broader sets of ‘debates’ on internal displacement by linking this disconnected body of research to cross-cutting themes like gender and by promoting comparative analyses of different IDP situations. Finally, the humanities disciplines in particular are largely absent from research on IDPs, although growing work on refugees within the humanities offers a platform for building such work.

For the medical and health sciences, this same sense of a somewhat ‘disconnected’ body of literature prevails in relation to the rather isolated and bare bones research carried out within those disciplines on IDP-related themes. Certainly, considerable scope seems to exist for building on the few ‘meta’-analyses that currently exist in order to draw together and interrogate research on particular situations about how medical and health issues play out in the internal displacement context. Research in these fields also seems relatively insulated from the debates and themes being researched in the law/policy and social science/humanities fields. Finally, it is notable that many health-related studies on IDPs seem to be focused on camp-based populations, raising the question of how this body of research can be supplemented by more consistent work with IDPs outside IDP camp contexts.


148 The fact that a substantial quantity of recent IDP research is located in the Forced Migration Review journal, as practitioner-oriented short-piece platform, seems to reflect this tendency.
Finally, in terms of particular themes that might emerge as research priorities, this scoping study confirms some of the ‘global’ themes identified by the ‘state-of-the-art’ report on IDP research published in 2019. They include: regional approaches to IDP protection and assistance; comparative studies of the implementation of IDP law/policy in practice; comparative micro-politics of internal displacement; development and internal displacement; urban displacement; the relationship of internal and cross-border displacement; internal displacement in disaster contexts; funding and IDP responses; area-based approaches to IDP responses; and internal displacement and host communities. For researchers, we could also ask the broader questions about: how and where should academics contribute to policy/practice debates on internal displacement; and how can we integrate internal displacement into wider debates that cut across a more diverse set of academic disciplines?

149 Al-Mahaidi, Gross & Cantor, Revitalising IDP Research.
5. Selected Bibliography


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