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LOST AT HOME

The risks and challenges for internally displaced children and the urgent actions needed to protect them

Acknowledgments

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The risks and challenges for internally displaced children and the urgent actions needed to protect them

May 2020

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HIDDEN WITHIN THEIR OWN BORDERS

Today, more children than ever before are displaced within their own countries. Their harrowing stories of displacement are unfolding every day, and with increasing frequency. **At the end of 2019, approximately 45.7 million people were internally displaced by conflict and violence (Fig. 1.1).** Nearly half – 19 million – were estimated to be children. And millions more are displaced every year by natural disasters.[1]

Annually, the number of internally displaced persons regularly outpaces that of refugees, in many recent years at more than twice the total. And while most of those internally displaced do not end up crossing international borders, many will become refugees and vulnerable migrants.[2] Internally displaced persons really are the invisible majority of the world's displaced population.[3]

Looking ahead, climate-related resource scarcity and conflicts will likely continue to trigger massive – and extensive – displacement. The World Bank estimates there could be more than 140 million people internally displaced by climate by 2050. That's 100 times the scale of Europe's refugee and migrant crisis in 2015–2016.[4]

In many countries around the world, internally displaced children persistently lack access to basic services. This effectively limits or denies them the right to education, health, protection and non-discrimination. These deprivations can be particularly acute in the life of a child. Removed from a stable, secure home and the communities they need to thrive – family, friends, classmates and teachers – internally displaced children are exposed to a host of harms and dangers. Family separation, negative coping strategies such as child labour and child marriage, and violence, exploitation, abuse and trafficking pose direct threats to their lives and futures. **Internally displaced persons can be displaced multiple times or live in protracted displacement,** their needs and vulnerabilities changing during the process.[5] Some become caught up in cyclical displacement, which can mean finding durable solutions is even more difficult.[6]

Despite its global scale, internal displacement is largely overshadowed by the current political and public focus on refugees and migrants. Two United Nations (UN) agreements, the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees,[7] set objectives aligned with the commitment to leave no one behind captured in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[8] Yet despite the fact that the first step for many refugees and migrants in displacement is within their own borders, neither compact explicitly addresses the concerns of internally displaced people. **Internal displacement requires global action.** In response to a UN General Assembly Resolution on Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons, a three-year GP20 Plan of Action was launched to strengthen collaboration in addressing the challenges of internal displacement.[9] The establishment of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement in late 2019 aims to bring about concrete and long-term solutions to these challenges.[10]

Children living in internal displacement are protected by a strong international legal framework, compelling countries to act. The Convention on the Rights of the Child seeks to ensure that all children have access to school and safe, healthy environments with the appropriate legal and social protection, without discrimination.[11] Further, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement encompass principles from existing international law to protect the rights and freedoms of internally displaced persons throughout the cycle of displacement through provision of humanitarian assistance and support for durable solutions.[12] The African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) also offers additional protection for those living in internal displacement within the African Union.[13] Adhering to the international humanitarian framework can help reduce the scale of displacement and also protect those who have already been displaced.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promised to leave no one behind. But around the world, millions of internally displaced children continue to be invisible in the data, the hardest to reach, and among the most marginalized. As the decade of acceleration begins, the Secretary-General has called for increased focus on inclusion.[14] Now is the time to double-down on our global commitment to reach the furthest behind.

Protecting and including internally displaced children is not only right in principle – it also builds better societies and economies. When put into practice, these measures have the potential to generate huge returns for countries, driving economic growth and laying the path for more inclusive societies that ensure every child, no matter the circumstance, enjoys a childhood free from unnecessary harm.[15]

Some national and local governments and their partners are already actively engaged in initiatives to support and protect internally displaced children. Although much has been done, there is an urgent need to do more. As the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement[16] convenes in 2020 to address the global challenge of internal displacement, UNICEF calls on countries to ensure principles – and practices – place children front and centre. These measures must provide safe homes, protection and equitable access to services for every internally displaced child and translate into tangible impact in the lives of children the ground.

Children themselves know their needs better than anyone and can help develop stronger solutions that impact their lives. Their voices and opinions must be heard in our efforts to develop policies and programmes that better protect and uphold their rights to safety, security and well-being. Dedicated action is needed to ensure children's meaningful participation in the decisions that affect them, including commitments from governments and the international community to take a clear, adequately resourced directional approach.

Key info box: Drivers of internal displacement

Hurricane Irma was the largest disaster event in 2017. The storm affected more than 15 Caribbean countries and territories and displaced around 2 million people, including Tiquanisha Lewis, 5, and her sister Tiquania, 2. Amid uprooted palm trees, corrugated roofs torn off homes, and debris and rubble, a swing was one of the only things left standing. "The kids have seen everything turned upside down," their mother said. Nearly every school across the region was affected by Irma. In the Caribbean and its 29 Small Island Developing States, storms and flooding led to 3.4 million displacements between 2014 and 2018 – including 761,000 of children – six times as many as over the preceding five years. UNICEF has concluded that without development efforts to stem the effects of climate change on children and families, the scale of forced displacement in the region will continue to quicken pace.[17]

Internal displacement can happen suddenly, following an environmental disaster like a hurricane or an earthquake. It may occur over a short, intense period of civil war; it may take place slowly and continually over decades; it may be the result of public or private sector development projects.

What causes displacement?

Conflict and violence are key causes of internal displacement for children and their families. Armed conflicts and the use of explosive weapons can cause injury and death, and may lead to the destruction of schools, hospitals, water facilities and other civilian infrastructure, forcing children and their families to flee. Child protection concerns such as child trafficking, child marriage, domestic violence, and forced recruitment of children into armed groups, military forces or gangs are often exacerbated in situations of warfare and disasters. Protracted crises can also diminish families' and communities' capacity to secure work and basic services, and may lead to further displacement so that additional resources can be accessed.

Discrimination, the denial of rights to specific groups, and statelessness are also at the core of many displacement contexts. Statelessness is often a result of discrimination on grounds of race, ethnicity, religion or gender, and stateless people most often belong to minority groups. The deprivation of nationality creates social and political tensions that can precipitate conflict, violence and displacement, with considerable costs to human rights protection, development and security.

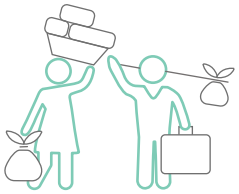
Climate change-induced disasters such as sea-level rise, severe storms and floods devastate communities, forcing children and families to leave their homes. Data show an average of 20 million new displacements associated with disasters like flooding and drought each year between 2015 and 2019. This is more than double the 8.5 million new displacements as consequence of conflict and violence in 2019. Climate change will continue to affect children disproportionally, with around 500 million children living in areas with very high risk of flooding and nearly 160 million living in areas of extreme or high risk of drought.

Addressing the root

In countries around the globe, governments and partners are working to address some of the root causes of displacement. Many of these efforts are linked to programmes and policies aimed at achieving the SDGs.

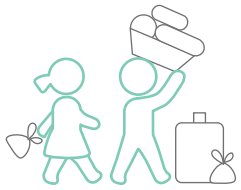
For instance, **Somalia** has worked to deliver water to reduce the negative effects of drought in a central region of the country where access to water has been the source of conflict between three sub-clans. Meetings were organized with elders from the three communities and local authorities to build consensus for the project and secure agreement on forming a water committee to manage the new resource. Approximately 26,000 people in multiple communities now benefit from a sustainable water supply. Agreement between parties has reduced the likelihood of future conflict and contributed to social cohesion and resilience.

THE NATURE OF DISPLACEMENT: TRENDS AND PATTERNS



46 million

persons living in displacement within their own country due to **conflict and violence** at the end of 2019



among them

19 million children

33 million **new displacements** during 2019

25 million

associated with **natural disasters**

8.5 million

as consequence of **conflict and violence**

12 million

new displacements involving **children**

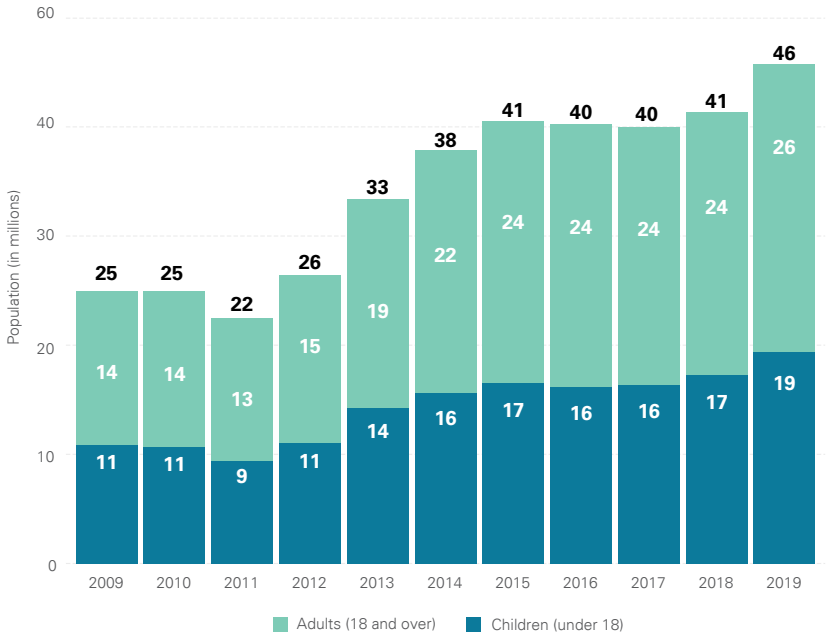
Source: *UNICEF analysis based on Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global Internal Displacement Database, 2020.*

Because data about internally displaced persons disaggregated by age are scarce, it is difficult to reliably determine the number of children in this situation. UNICEF estimates that children accounted for 42 per cent of those internally displaced by conflict and violence at the end of 2019. That's about 19 million children. The year 2019 saw 33 million new displacements – 25 million associated with conflict and violence and 8.5 million as consequence of natural disasters – mostly in connection to weather-related events such as storms and floods. Together, around 12 million of these new displacements in 2019 involved children.

Internal displacements due to conflict and violence are higher now than ever before recorded – 19 million of them involved children.

Around 45.7 million persons were living in forced displacement as a consequence of conflict and violence at the end of 2019. The number has been over 40 million for the last five years – a steep increase from a decade ago, when around 25 million displaced persons were recorded. Among the displaced population in 2019 were 19 million children – a share of almost 42 per cent – up from 11 million in 2009.

Figure 1.1 Number of persons internally displaced due to conflict and violence by age, 2009 to 2019 (in millions)

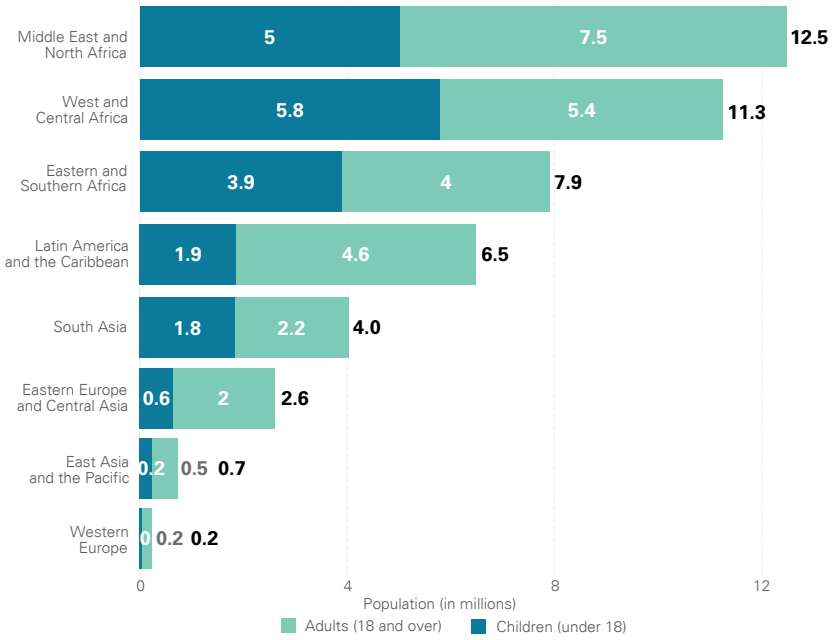


Source: UNICEF analysis based on Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global Internal Displacement Database, 2020.

The largest number of internally displaced children due to conflict and violence can be found in West and Central Africa and in the Middle East and North Africa.

In the Middle East and North Africa alone, over 12 million people were internally displaced as a result of conflict and violence at the end of 2019. Almost all of them live in just three countries: the Syrian Arab Republic (6.5 million), Yemen (3.6 million) and Iraq (1.6 million). Around 5 million of the displaced persons in this region are children. Even more children were displaced in West and Central Africa: 5.8 million of the total 11.3 million. Across sub-Saharan Africa, over 19 million people lived in internal displacement due to conflict and violence. This is 4 out of 10 internally displaced persons globally – and half of the world's displaced children.

Figure 1.2 Number of persons internally displaced due to conflict and violence by region and age, 2019 (in millions)



Geographical grouping based on UNICEF regional classifications (see "Notes").

***Source**: UNICEF analysis based on Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global Internal Displacement Database, 2020.*

Three countries account for more than one third of all children displacement due to conflict and violence.

One in four of all internally displaced persons due to conflict and violence in 2019 – 6.5 million people – were living in the Syrian Arab Republic alone. This includes 2.4 million children. Together with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2.9 million) and Yemen (1.7 million), these three countries account for one in three (36 per cent) of all children internally displaced due to conflict and violence. An additional five countries have more than 1 million displaced children within their own borders: Colombia (1.5 million), Afghanistan (1.5 million), Somalia (1.4 million), Nigeria (1.3 million) and the Sudan (1.0 million).

Figure 1.3b Countries with largest number of internally displaced persons due to conflict and violence by age, 2019 (in millions)

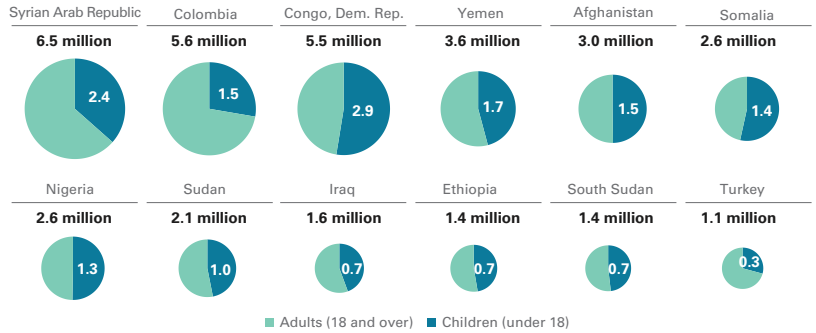
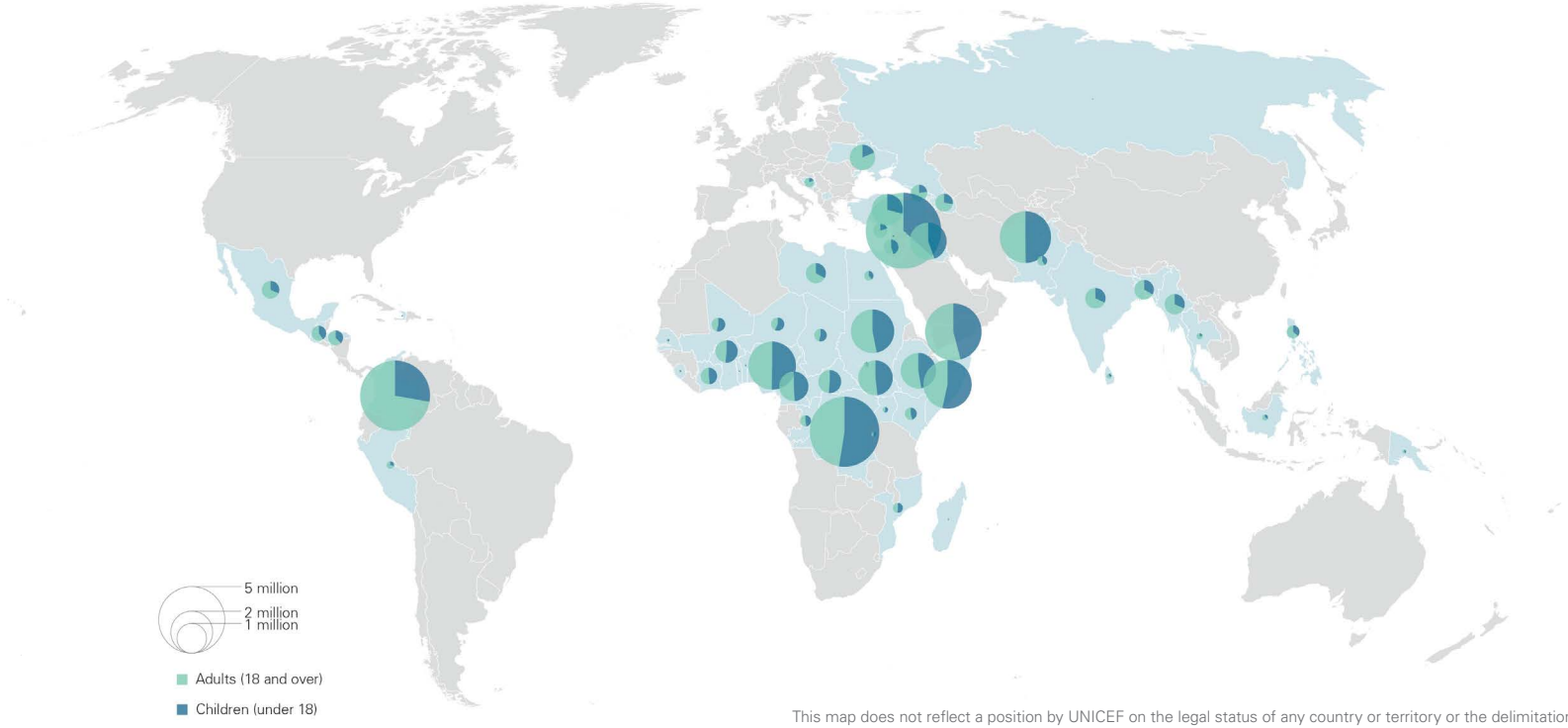


Figure 1.3a Number of internally displaced persons due to conflict and violence, 2019 (in millions)



This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

Source: *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global Internal Displacement Database, 2020; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre,* Number of IDPs by Age at the End of 2019, *April 2020.*

Figure 1.4a New internal displacements due to disasters, 2019 (in thousands)

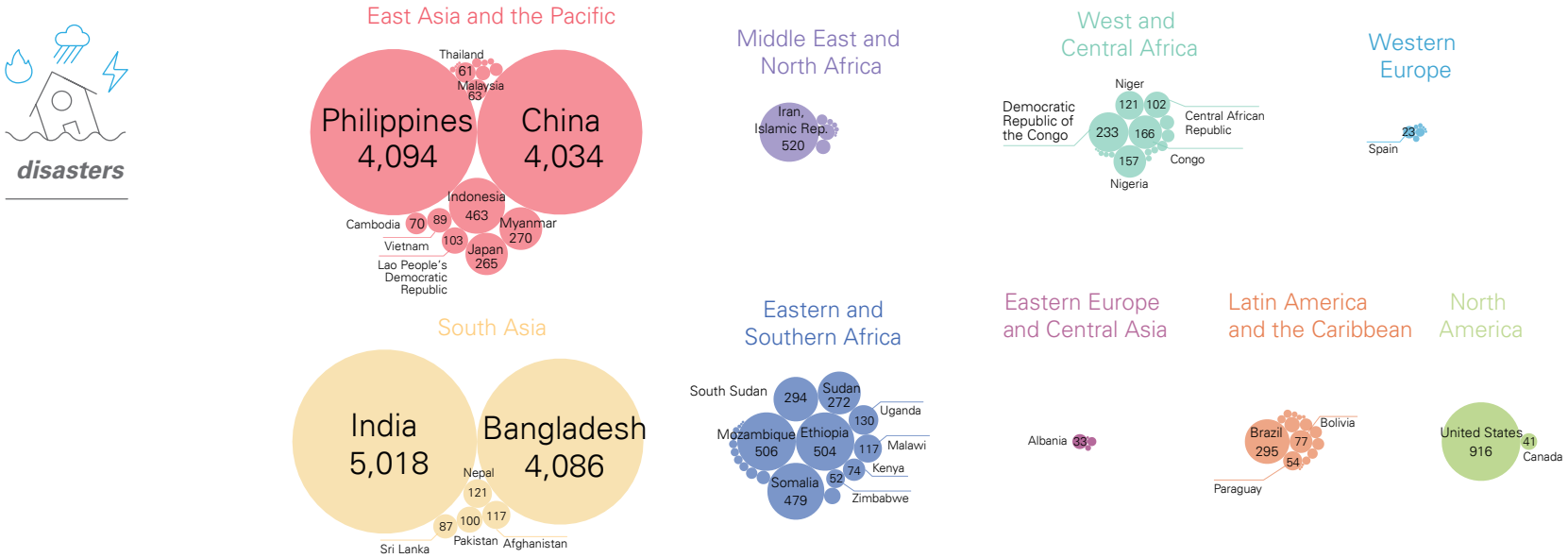
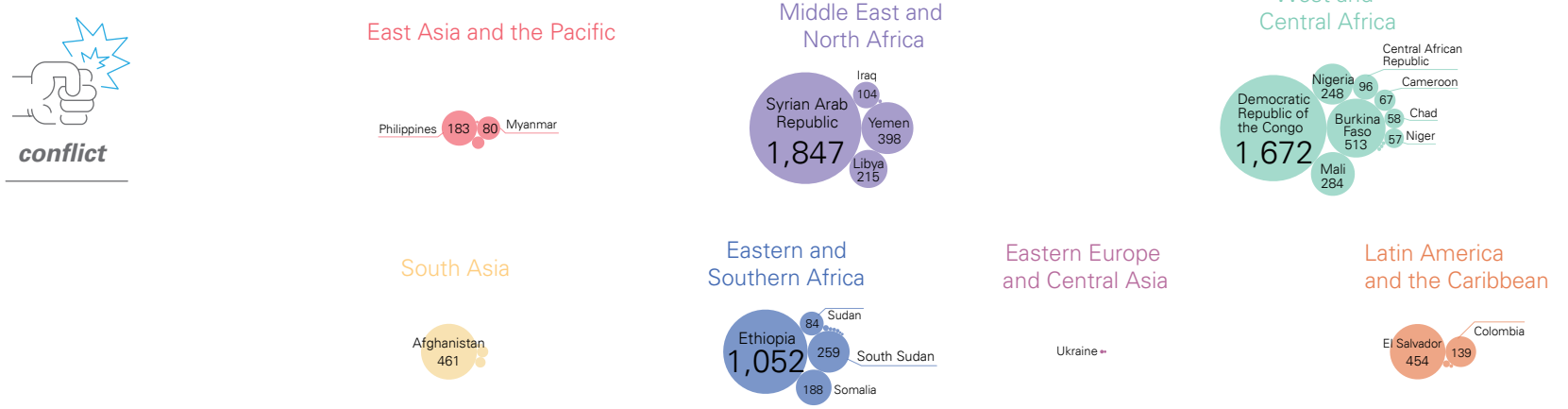
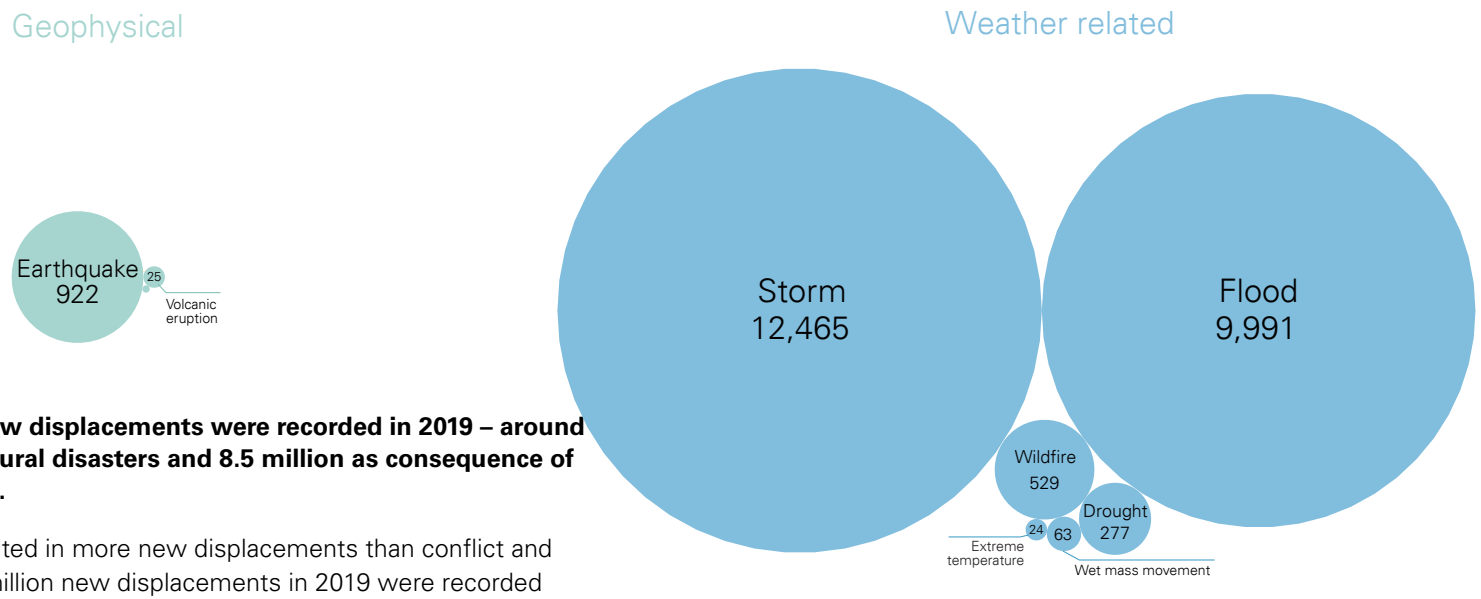


Figure 1.4b New internal displacements due to conflict and violence, 2019 (in thousands)



Geographical grouping based on UNICEF regional classifications (see "Notes").
***Source**: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global Internal Displacement Database, 2020.*

Figure 1.5 New displacements due to natural disasters by hazard type, 2019 (in thousands)



***Source**: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global Internal Displacement Database, 2020.*

Almost 33 million new displacements were recorded in 2019 – around 25 million due to natural disasters and 8.5 million as consequence of conflict and violence.

Natural disasters resulted in more new displacements than conflict and violence. Almost 10 million new displacements in 2019 were recorded in East Asia and the Pacific (39 per cent) – and almost the same number in South Asia (9.5 million). India, the Philippines, Bangladesh and China all suffered from natural disasters leading to displacement in the millions, which accounted for 69 per cent of global disaster-induced displacements. These were overwhelmingly caused by extreme conditions created by dangerous storms and floods. Globally, around 8.2 million disaster-related displacements are estimated to have been related to children.

The Syrian Arab Republic was the site of the largest number of conflict-related new displacements in 2019, where almost 1.9 million forced displacements were recorded. Other large numbers of new displacements were observed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1.7 million) and Ethiopia (1.0 million). In total, sub-Saharan Africa saw 4.6 million new displacements due to conflict and violence in 2019: 1.6 million in Eastern and Southern Africa and 3.0 million in West and Central Africa.

The vast majority of internal displacements due to natural disasters are weather related.

Around 96 per cent of the 25 million new displacements in 2019 due to natural disasters were caused by weather-related events; only 4 per cent (950,000) were consequences of geophysical events such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Storms (12.4 million) and floods (10.0 million) together were responsible for over 22 million new displacements during 2019, or 92 per cent of all disaster-induced displacements.

Key info box: Closing the data gaps to protect children

Specifics on the lives of children in internal displacement are alarmingly scarce. Internally displaced populations are largely invisible in official statistics as displacement status is often not included in routine administrative data systems, censuses or household surveys. In addition, data are often not disaggregated by age or sex, posing additional challenges to counting the exact number of internally displaced children and understanding their situations.

A right to be seen

These data gaps negatively impact internally displaced children's access to services and education, well-being and long-term development. Without the right data, the protection risks and vulnerabilities children face remain by and large unknown and interventions cannot be appropriately responsive. Poor data violate these children's right to a fair and equal chance in life.

Not only does this serious absence of data compound the grave risks associated with displacement, but it also carries another consequence: Countries are missing out on vital opportunities to invest in the future as these children mature and become productive adults. Supporting children now sets the course for more successful economies and societies.

Key pieces of the puzzle

Quality, timely and accessible data and evidence are critical to improving the lives of internally displaced children and their families. Key demographic details such as age and gender are essential pieces of the puzzle. It is impossible to understand the scope and scale of internal displacement and how it is depriving children of their rights without these specifics. These data are also necessary to monitor progress toward the child migration-relevant targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a call for countries to significantly increase reliable data disaggregated by indicators such as gender, age, and migratory status.

Specific data on the life, development and well-being of internally displaced children, including living conditions, safety and protection needs, and access to health care, health and education outcomes, are critical to understanding the stories of internally displaced children. Investing in improved data collection efforts and availability lays the groundwork for evidence-based policies that better protect displaced children and position them as rights-holders.

THE LIVES OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN

WILL I BE SAFE?

In northeastern Nigeria, abduction of children is a frequent occurrence. Since 2013, over 1,000 children have suffered this fate at the hands of Boko Haram.[18] Abducted boys have been forced to attack their own families and communities while girls are held captive and forced into marriage, often subjected to extreme sexual violence. Aisha was abducted at age 14, held captive for a year and regularly raped.[19] Eventually, she got pregnant. "I got very sick and developed complications with the pregnancy. I am told I was thrown away." Luckily, the adolescent was found during a military patrol and taken to a hospital. After receiving treatment, Aisha was moved to a camp for internally displaced people. Her village, Dalarge, no longer exists. It was razed to the ground, the inhabitants abducted and their food and animals looted. Over 30,000 people – including many girls with similar stories – live in the camp.[20]

When uprooted from their homes, children can encounter serious protection risks. They are vulnerable to abuse, violence and exploitation, including trafficking and child labour.[21] Though there are few reliable global data, empirical and anecdotal evidence indicates that violence against internally displaced children and women is widespread. Rape and sexual violence have been widely reported in internal displacement contexts, from Somalia to Iraq. In places where female genital mutilation is practised, increased violence may prevent activists from accessing communities to carry out their advocacy work against the practice, or girls may find themselves displaced to communities where the practice is common.[22] Unaccompanied and separated children are more likely to endure neglect, abuse, and forced, dangerous or exploitative forms of labour than accompanied children, who instead may experience physical or psychological trauma in the family.[23] Adolescent girls and young women face higher risks of sexual violence, abductions, child marriage, and murder, while boys are at increased risk of exploitation, violence or recruitment by combatant forces.[24]

In countries with widespread displacement – both internal and as refugees – child marriage has been documented as a negative coping strategy. For example, in Iraq, the practice increased from 15 per cent

of girls in 1997 to 24 per cent in 2016, including 5 per cent among children younger than 15.[25] In pre-war Yemen, child marriage stood at 32 per cent;[26] according to a UNICEF survey of six Yemeni governates, by 2017 up to 72.5 per cent of female respondents (aged 15 to 49 years) said they were married before age 18 and about 44.5 per cent before age 15.[27] Half of all girls in South Sudan are married before they turn 18, and in Somalia, a United Nations Population Fund/UNICEF analysis found that 45.3 per cent of Somali women aged between 20 and 24 were married or in union before turning 18.[28]

Children from impoverished families may be forced to work, putting them at risk of exploitation, including child labour. Girls may be expected to take up more chores at home. In Somalia, where more than 2.6 million people are internally displaced, child labour is commonplace; about half of all Somali children aged 5 to 14 years are engaged in this practice.[29] In the Sudan, internally displaced boys (some of whom live on the streets) drive donkeys and polish shoes, but are also involved in riskier work such as stealing and begging. Girls sell tea in the market, perform domestic work, or scavenge to support themselves and their families.[30]

The recruitment of child soldiers is one of the worst forms of child labour and commonly occurs in countries with high levels of internal displacement, from Colombia to Liberia to South Sudan. Forced recruitment may precipitate internal displacement, in cases where children are separated from their families and lack the means to reunite with them; or, the reverse may be true, where children who have first been separated from their families and are living within camps or on the streets are targeted by armed groups.[31]

In many displacement contexts, governments and partners are already taking action to protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse by:

- **Investing in and training social and community workers, police, lawyers and teachers in child rights and child protection** to equip them to prevent and respond to all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse – and to understand how displacement can impact children's safety and access to rights and services.

  Iraq *designed and implemented a comprehensive training package to strengthen the capacity of government social workers involved in child protection, especially those working in case management and family tracing and reunification, through direct case supervision, peer-to-peer support and on the on-the-job training and mentoring. Front-line workers, including health workers, community workers, teachers and camp managers were also trained with the skills needed to identify and refer vulnerable children to the services they need.*

- **Recognizing and addressing child-specific drivers, enable access to education and birth registration,** such as forced recruitment into armed groups or gangs, child trafficking, and family and domestic violence, through community system strengthening and capacity development to influence social behaviour change.

  Nigeria *invested in and trained community-based volunteers deployed in the country's northeast to strengthen access to child protection services that prevent and address some of the key child protection drivers, enable access to education, boost birth registration, and support behaviour change-related activities among caregivers.*

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO MY FAMILY?

Displacement uproots children's lives and puts enormous strain on families. Conflict, violence and disasters destroy communities and shift family structures. Children can become separated in the early period of displacement, when conditions are dangerous, upon arrival at camps during screening processes, or after long periods on the move. Sometimes children may be forced to move on their own. Or they may be left behind following displacement when their parents leave to pursue work opportunities in another city or town, suddenly finding themselves as head of households. Separation from family can leave children more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation or neglect. In many situations, family structures change when parents or siblings fall victim to war or disasters, or when men are recruited to combat (and possibly killed), stay behind to maintain land, or migrate in search of work.[32]

Protecting internally displaced children means keeping them with their parents or caretakers and fast-tracking procedures that reunite them with their family members. This calls for stronger policies and programming that prevent children from being separated from their families and more efficient procedures to reunite them. However, family reunification needs to be in line with the best interests of the child, which includes an assessment of the family and community circumstances to ensure that the child has not fled an abusive environment. Where the original family environment is not conducive to sustainable reintegration, alternative care options must be explored, such as placement in extended family or with non-relative alternative caregivers and certified host families.[33]

Governments and partners are working to respect the right to family life for internally displaced children by:

- **Recognizing in law and practice that all children have the right to family life, regardless of their displacement status.** Putting this into practice means including and operationalizing specific provisions on protecting family life within law, policy and procedures at the national and sub-national levels.

  ***Iraq**'s National Policy on Displacement expressly recognizes both the right to family unity and the right of internally displaced persons to obtain information on missing relatives, and it equally reflects the corresponding duties of governmental authorities to "protect the integrity of the family and community" and "to provide the required information" on the missing.[34]*

- **Addressing the legal and practical barriers that prevent or delay family reunification,** and investing in accelerated procedures to avoid undue waiting and preventing children from being stranded alone.

  *In **South Sudan**, more than 5,000 children were reunited with their families between 2013 and 2017, with the help of UNICEF and its partners.[35] Reuniting these children requires that multiple local and international partners work together to manage cases and locate family members. The process involves case management support to each of the registered unaccompanied and separated children.*

NAVISTAR

WILL I GO TO SCHOOL?

It's been a year since Hussaini, 14, from Burkina Faso, has set foot in a classroom. The last time he did, it turned catastrophic.[36] "We heard screaming, then people started firing guns – there was shooting everywhere. They shot at our teachers and killed one of them. They burned down the classrooms." The adolescent and his parents, grandparents, sisters and brothers fled, walking day and night for four days before reaching the village of Gorom-Gorom, where they now live in a camp for internally displaced persons. Hussaini is one of more than 1.9 million children forced out of school across eight countries in West and Central Africa due to violence and insecurity, according to June 2019 figures.[37] Collectively, at the end of 2019, internal displacements due to conflict and violence totalled 11.3 million people in the entire region. At least half of these were children.[38] In Burkina Faso, in February 2020, 2,506 schools were closed in the country due to insecurity, affecting 342,200 children and 10,908 teachers.[39]

Too many internally displaced children grow up deprived of an education, learning opportunities and the long-term benefits they afford. A lack of capacity, inadequate resources and persistent insecurity, social tensions, and discrimination are all significant barriers to education in many displacement situations. Conflict and disaster can place great strain on already inadequate education systems and infrastructure, in many cases making them ill-equipped to provide even basic education for displaced children.[40] Schools may also be occupied for other uses, like temporary shelters,[41] and teachers may not be available, adequately paid or trained to teach children and youth who have lived through traumatic events.[42]

This is particularly true for conflict-affected areas: For instance, available data in 2015 showed that internally displaced children did not have access to any form of education in 19 of 42 camps in Nigeria, while in Iraq, only a third of internally displaced children had access.[43] And in Yemen, only one in three internally displaced school-age children in Lahj governorate were enrolled in school – girls were affected more than boys.[44]

Displaced families may be unable to obtain the necessary civic registration required by schools in their new places of residence nor to

afford school materials like books or school uniforms. When families lack access to education for their children, this can prompt further movement in pursuit of better opportunities.

Attending school can strengthen children's resilience and support their development.[45] Access to quality inclusive education brings significant economic and social benefits to displaced populations and their host communities. It helps build cohesive societies and can play a critical role in fighting prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination.[46] By improving livelihood opportunities and supporting socioeconomic development for all, it also has the potential to address some of the causes of displacement and prevent future crises.[47]

Governments have an obligation to provide equal access to education for internally displaced children. And while much has been done, far greater efforts and investments need to be devoted to minimizing the disruption to education that internal displacement causes, while maximizing the potential protection and other vital support that schools provide students.

Governments are working to ensure equitable access to quality education for internally displaced children and their host communities by:

- **Including internally displaced children in national education systems.** All internally displaced children should be accepted by all schools and alternative education programmes without discrimination, in accordance with their rights as citizens or habitual residents.

Somalia *accelerated efforts to provide primary education across 13 regions of Puntland, Somaliland and South Central Somalia by including internally displaced children in the national education system. The project aimed to improve the quality of teaching and strengthen the management of schools. As a result, more than 32,000 learners gained access to primary education.*[48]

- **Strengthening education systems so they can provide high-quality learning opportunities for host community children,** and absorb displaced children, catering to their specific needs. This means addressing operational challenges such as teachers' pay and infrastructure issues and developing curricula, methods and materials that help children overcome language and cultural barriers. Further, teachers should be prepared to address adversity and hardship, provide mental health and psychosocial support to displaced students, and reinforce principles that promote social cohesion and gender equality.

  In ***Ukraine****, two regions (Donetsk and Luhansk) and three cities (Kiev, Kharkiv and Dnipro) host the largest numbers of the country's internally displaced persons (1.2 million, or 80 per cent),*[49] *and their education facilities face shortages of classroom space and resources. In response, the government has created additional school places, moved state universities from conflict regions, simplified admission procedures, covered tuition costs and provided incentives, including loans and textbooks, for internally displaced children and youth.*[50]

WILL I HAVE ACCESS TO THE SERVICES I NEED?

"This is not a place for children," says Ramez, 10, (right), of his new home: a juvenile detention centre-turned-shelter in the Syrian Arab Republic. Since December 2019, an escalation in violence affecting the southern rural province of Idlib has forced nearly 300,000 Syrians to find safety elsewhere in the country. Women and children comprise an estimated 80 per cent of these internally displaced persons. Ramez's family is one of 45 that have taken shelter in the juvenile detention centre, where they live in the most basic conditions. Another 10-year-old living at the centre, a girl named Shourouk, adds, "This is such a gloomy place. I cannot sleep well." Other families have settled in schools, mosques and makeshift tented settlements.[51]

Adequate and affordable housing

Children are profoundly impacted by their immediate living circumstances. For a child displaced from home, living alone in a camp for displaced people or having found refuge with relatives elsewhere will dramatically impact their safety and well-being. Children in internal displacement camps and informal settlements can encounter inadequate housing, overcrowding and lack of spaces where they feel safe. In urban areas, reliably determining the share of internally displaced persons is difficult. But a recent Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre study estimates that at least half of the global internally displaced population lives in urban settings – with huge variability between country contexts.[52] These children and their families may share a house with relatives or a host family, rent an apartment alone or with other displaced households, stay in collective shelters or live in informal settlements on a city's margins. Internally displaced children may also end up on the street when housing is unavailable.

The location of housing is crucial to ensuring children can access schools, health care and other services. If settlements are far away

from schools, or if transport is either non-existent or too expensive, children cannot access the services they need. Additionally, the informal settlements where internally displaced persons often live can be in precarious areas, exposed to flooding and landslides, and out of reach of municipal services such as waste management and sanitation.

Health care

Health care is critical for internally displaced children and their families to avoid unnecessary suffering and death among already vulnerable families. Ailments such as measles, diarrhoea and respiratory infections thrive in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions and emergency shelters, camps or among host communities. And research suggests internally displaced persons experience higher levels of death and disease than local populations.[53] Furthermore, displacement settings often lack the services to address the special needs of children with disabilities, who may find themselves among the most marginalized.[54] Internally displaced children also commonly experience anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and somatic stress.[55] Among Iraqi Kurdistan children living in camps, post-traumatic stress disorder prevalence was reported at 87 per cent.[56]

Yet, access to basic health care for internally displaced children and their families is often hampered by bureaucratic red tape or insufficient service provision. Mental health and psychosocial support is often scarce. Camps for displaced people face staff shortages, limited and weak infrastructure, insecurity, and poor organization. In places with political complexities, these factors further hinder access to health services for displaced populations. Poor health and lack of access to appropriate care can lead caregivers to seek help or medicine from the informal economy or through illegal channels.[57]

Health outcomes among internally displaced persons are not only an issue of access: Economic hardship and health-seeking behaviours can also play a role. Evidence suggests those displaced in urban settings are often forced to deprioritize health care in favor of income security to cope with displacement.[58] Internally displaced mothers in Ukraine opted to reduce their consumption of nutritious foods to overcome economic hardship, a decision with known impacts on maternal and child health.[59]

Safe drinking water and sanitation

Safe drinking water and adequate sanitation are fundamental to ensuring children's health. Lack of safe drinking water within or close to the home can mean long journeys to remote water collection points, particularly for girls, who are often assigned this chore. This can negatively impact children's education and subject them to harassment and other threats along the way.[60] Proper sanitation facilities also allow girls and women to practice safe menstrual hygiene management. When girls lose access to school following their displacement, they may also be deprived of a source for free sanitary products that would otherwise not be available.

Further, when water supply and sewage treatment systems are damaged – a common effect of warfare or disasters – waterborne diseases like cholera can easily spread. In Yemen, where 3,635,000 were internally displaced at the end of 2019,[61] a cholera epidemic affected more than 1.3 million people between April 2017 and

December 2018 – nearly 29 per cent of cases were in children under 5.[62] In protracted conflict, diarrhoeal disease can be more deadly than violence, with children under five 20 times more likely to die from diarrhoeal disease linked to unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene.[63]

Livelihood opportunities

Very often, displacement results in the complete or temporary loss of livelihoods – whether in terms of farmland, employment or the family home. When families lose the personal networks of their home communities, they may also lose traditional means of gaining employment and community-based care for their children or elders. Without childcare, parents may be limited in their ability to find or perform work in their new communities.

Children and their families often face higher financial pressures in urban settings,[64] where a large-scale influx of internally displaced persons can lead to rent increases while at the same time reducing unskilled labour wages.[65] The resulting economic insecurity can impact a child's sense of safety and certainty and limit parents' ability to properly take care of children. Children themselves may be forced to work to contribute to the family or care for younger siblings so parents can work. Child marriage may also be used as a negative coping strategy to enhance income for economically deprived families.

Providing equitable and inclusive services for internally displaced children and their communities is critical. Many governments are already taking steps to:

- **Address legal and practical barriers that prevent internally displaced children from accessing the national and local services they need.**

  *During 2019, 4.7 million people in **the Syrian Arab Republic** were reached with improved and sustained access to safe water and over 1.1 million people through enhanced sanitation services with support from UNICEF. WASH in schools reached over 260,000 children, including children with disabilities, in 238 schools throughout the country. Over 1.7 million people were reached through distribution of WASH non-food items such as family hygiene kits, soap and aqua tabs.*[66]

- **Ensure all children, regardless of their displacement status, can access quality mental health and psychosocial support services** in host communities, and following return to their communities of origin.

  *Municipalities in **Honduras**, including San Pedro Sula, Catacamas and Choloma, are supporting returned migrant children and other children at risk through care, psychosocial support and referral to psychologists when required. Many of these children cannot go back to their communities of origin due to gang violence and discrimination and as a result are internally displaced.*

- **Strengthen social safety nets, including through the use of cash transfers to families with children,** and expand opportunities for family income and youth employment and **promote social cohesion and facilitate peaceful conflict resolution.**

  ***Sierra Leone**, in partnership with UNDP and CAUSE Sierra Leone, has supported 5,000 young people to start their own businesses. This has been achieved through strengthening policy and coordination at the national level to improve youth employment and providing basic support services, including mentoring for micro- and small enterprises as well as career advisory services.*

Key info box: The unseen victims of COVID-19

The needs of children living in internal displacement are acute, immediate and demand action. Now, the global spread of COVID-19 threatens to further erode these children's already precarious existence. At the launch of the global humanitarian response plan for COVID-19, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that those in internal displacement are among the "ultra-vulnerable". UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore has called children the "hidden victims" of the coronavirus. "For children on the move or living through conflicts, the consequences will be unlike any we have ever seen," she said. "We must not let them down."

Acute losses

Though data show that children have so far been spared the direct effects of COVID-19, the socioeconomic impacts for children stand to be enormous. And for millions of internally displaced children, these losses will be felt with even more intensity. Crisis has already upended their communities and dramatically shifted their day-to-day existence. They have already lost access to school, health services, their homes and communities. Their lives are already defined by great vulnerability, which stands to worsen as the pandemic spreads in their contexts of displacements. Without efforts to protect these children, the already difficult challenges they face will become even more dire.

Crowded living quarters, limited to no access to clean water and sanitation, severely curtailed health care – the precise conditions health experts have cautioned against in the fight against the coronavirus – are the reality for millions living in internal displacement. Families living in displacement in hard-to-reach places may be cut off from mass communications, meaning they are likely to miss out on the lifesaving public health messages of this time. The combination of these factors sets the course for rapid spread of the virus, which will result in loss of human life and further damage to already fragile communities. It will be a great challenge to control this spread without concerted efforts to address poor living; water, sanitation and hygiene; and health care conditions of internal displacement.

Defenseless against the virus

In places like Syria's Idlib Province (see story p. 20), for instance, years of warfare have devastated medical infrastructure and water facilities. Doctor to patient ratios are alarmingly poor. The displaced often live outside or in tents packed with family members, with little to no access to water. These conditions echo those of displacement settings around the world. Without the means to socially distance or wash hands, internally displaced families are being deprived of the first line of defense against the virus, paving the way for even greater hardship and loss of life.

Children and their families living in displacement are likely to be intensely affected by the spread of COVID-19 unless quick action is taken to protect them and ensure response plans consider their unique needs. Should someone fall sick, the supplies, care, conditions and communication that protect against disease and offer solutions must be in place. The lives of millions are on the line, now with more urgency than ever before.

WILL I BE EXCLUDED OR TREATED DIFFERENTLY?

Once a child has been internally displaced, the challenge becomes integrating into new surroundings. Even though they have moved within their own countries, internally displaced children may be displaced into areas where different ethnic, religious or linguistic groups are the majority. Many children will experience exclusion and discrimination as they try to integrate into their new surroundings. Discrimination can fuel social tensions when the displaced come from different ethnic groups than host populations. And this can be further exacerbated by competition for resources and livelihood opportunities – all having a serious impact on children's lives. Returning home and reintegrating present their own challenges (see "When displacement is over", p. 25); some children may experience attacks, harassment and intimidation in their communities of origin for having left. And returned internally displaced persons may experience attacks, harassment and intimidation in their communities of origin for having left.

Forward-thinking communities have recognized that working to integrate and include internally displaced children and families as soon as they arrive helps everyone. It is beneficial for children, families and nations. Many initiatives are already underway to shine a light on the positive contributions of uprooted children. Local governments and communities are recognizing the potential and huge contributions young internally displaced people can make when the right conditions are in place to bring out their best – and are already playing a critical role promoting inclusion and integration by incubating solutions and generating evidence on 'what works' for children, families and communities.

To address discrimination and exclusion, regional bodies, national and local governments and partners are working to:

- **End legal and policy discrimination** based on displacement or residence status, as well as all practices that criminalize undocumented stay.

  *At the regional level, the **Organization of American States** has adopted several resolutions urging states in the Americas to promote public activities and information campaigns to fight racism, discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance towards internally displaced persons.*[67]

- **Promote integration and empowerment of internally displaced children and their families through schools and communities.** This includes equipping schoolteachers and community leaders with the tools to confront stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination in the classroom, playground and wider community, and to strengthen displaced children's self-esteem and sense of belonging.

  ***Uganda** trains and supports inter-ethnic child-friendly learning spaces open to Nuer, Dinka and host community children. The programme not only helps children learn and develop, but also creates social cohesion between children and caregivers, with the result that Nuer children come to play with Dinka children and vice versa in their respective households.*

  Uganda's capital, Kampala, works to address the needs of displaced populations in the city under the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. The city's "Kampala for All" initiative prioritizes the inclusion and integration at the community level and combat xenophobia and discrimination in the city.

Key info box: When displacement is over

The impacts of displacement do not end when a child goes home. Return and reintegration entail their own challenges – this is true as much for internally displaced children as for refugees, though the latter dominates global debates. Typically, internally displaced children return to communities that must rebuild damaged or destroyed infrastructure, homes, schools and care facilities. Because internal displacement is so often protracted, some children have spent much of their childhoods in a camp or informal setting. They may have missed critical time in the classroom. It takes time for families to find stability again, both economic and psychological.

Sustainable outcomes

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights defines the end of displacement as when a "durable solution" is found, which, in the case of children, must be child-sensitive and always based on a child's best interests. Ideally, the outcome should be that internally displaced persons' assistance and protection needs are being met and they have either returned home, locally integrated or settled somewhere new in the country.[68]

Data on outcomes for children after internal displacement has ended are limited, but a few studies highlight the alarming circumstances children may be returning to. Children in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Syria who had returned from internal or international displacement have been found to suffer deprivations across a range of areas: poor access to housing, land and property; inadequate opportunities to go to school; limited safe water, sanitation and hygiene; challenges in proper nutrition; limited child mental health services; and poor access to legal safety (legal identity, adequate judicial system).[69]

Protection at home

The protection and support of internally displaced children must also include the many dimensions that will affect their lives when displacement ends. To this end, key recommendations include:

- **Ensure the safety of returnees.** Internally displaced children and their families must be protected from attacks, harassment, intimidation and persecution or any other form of punitive action upon return to their home communities.
- **Support returnee children and families to rebuild their homes.** Returnees should be supported with access to mechanisms for property restitution or compensation to support reconstruction of their houses.
- **Recognize the needs of reintegration as similar to the needs of displacement.** Governments should provide reintegration assistance to all children and families and prioritize access to education, health, social protection and psychosocial support, alongside inclusion in national and local systems and services that brings returnee and local children together.

THE WAY FORWARD

Although much has been done, we need to do more. It is critical that we act now. Protecting, including and empowering internally displaced children, and tackling child-specific drivers of displacement – especially all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse – require strategic investments and a united effort from political leaders, civil society, private sector, multilateral partners, and children and young people themselves. By rallying around these key actions and practices and building on solutions that work, we can unlock the enormous potential of internally displaced children and youth by upholding their rights to protection and empowerment. These efforts must be inclusive and engage a diverse group, ensuring, for example, that the voices of married girls, young mothers, children with disabilities, and the many girls and boys who are generating income for their families are amplified.

As government officials and experts convene under the auspices of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, they have an unparalleled opportunity to marshal the resources, commitment and political will needed to protect and care for internally displaced children and their families. They have the chance to embrace a shared responsibility to invest in their uprooted children and the host communities where they build their new homes. **UNICEF calls on the Panel to ensure principles and practices that provide a safe home, protection and equitable access to services for every internally displaced child are front and centre, for the benefit of children, communities and countries. These measures will also provide important momentum towards our joint commitment to achieving the SDGs.**

Critical to delivering on this agenda is better, timely and accessible data and evidence, disaggregated by age and gender, to improve our understanding of how internal displacement affects children and their families. **Internally displaced children and youth themselves must have a seat at the table, be taken seriously and offered the opportunity to be part of the solution.**

Notes

Estimating the number of internally displaced children

Information on sex and age of internally displaced populations is very sparse and coverage is often low. In the absence of reliable data, the number of displaced children can be approximated by applying the age structure of the national population to the internally displaced population.[70] An implicit assumption of this method is that displacement occurs randomly in terms of age and sex, and that the displaced population is representative of the national population. Although this assumption is plausible, anecdotal evidence and the limited existing research[71] show that this is not necessarily the case, in particular when displacement is due to conflict and violence. In these situations, women and children are often the first to get displaced, while men may stay behind (at least initially) to guard home or livestock. Men may also take part in the fighting – either voluntarily or forcefully recruited – or be killed in the conflict. Thus, using the national age structure likely underestimates the true number of displaced children.[72] This echoes observation of refugee populations, where the share of children is usually higher than the national average in the origin country. In an analysis of 13 refugee populations with good age data (i.e., information about age was available for at least 75 per cent of the refugee population information) in 10 countries, the share of children was higher than in the origin country. Since most refugees of conflict and violence start out as being internally displaced, it is likely that the same relationship holds for internally displaced populations in general.

Understanding displacement numbers

Most numbers on internal displacement in this report come from the Global Internal Displacement Database (GIDD) maintained by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Numbers on displaced children are estimated based on the age structure of the national population (see "Estimating the number of internally displaced children").

Displacement numbers refer either to persons living in displacement at a particular point in time (also called "stock" data) or to the number of new displacements during a year. The stock number shows how many people have been displaced in the past and are forced to live away from their home at a given point in time. It includes persons having been displaced just recently or living in displacement for many years – but it may not include persons who were displaced sometime during the year and have returned to their homes before the end of the year. New displacements, on the other hand, refer to number of displacement incidents over the course of a given year. Note must be taken that the number of new displacements cannot be equated with the number of displaced persons: Every new displacement relates to one person, but the same person can get displaced more than once over the course of the year (this being significant, for example, for displacements in northeastern Nigeria due to Boko Haram activities). Both measurements, though, are important to be considered in this context: While the stock number gives an impression of the scale of the displacement situation at the moment, the number of new displacements is a better indicator for the intensity of recent events causing displacement.

Regional classifications

The regional classifications used in this report and for which aggregate data are provided in the text and charts are UNICEF regions. Aggregates may differ from regional classifications with the same name from other organizations (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa) because they include different countries. For a list of countries included in each region, see https://data.unicef.org/regionalclassifications.

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