

## **The Human Rights of Internally Displaced Individuals: An Intersectional Perspective**

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## Introduction and Background Information

As 2022 came to a close, 71.1 million people across the world were reported to be internally displaced – a staggering 62.5 million of whom were affected by conflict and violence.<sup>1</sup> In an increasingly interconnected and rapidly progressing world, the specter of displacement has devastated diverse communities, often leaving its mark with profound obstacles impacting the very nature of human rights. Whether it be innocent kids fleeing the devastating repercussions of the war in Ukraine or families escaping the waves of the December 2004 tsunamis, the dynamics of displacement have impacted vulnerable populations in several distinct ways: climate change, generalized violence, and peace negotiations.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, consequently, it has become imperative to analyze the impacts that such driving factors hold on the complexities of displacement to address the needs of marginalized groups and enable a secure future for families and posterity. Approximately three-quarters of the world's internally displaced people (IDPs) live in 10 countries – Syria, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ukraine, Colombia, Ethiopia, Yemen, Nigeria, Somalia, and Sudan.<sup>3</sup> In this report, we aim to highlight the leading factors behind internal displacement – climate change, and peace negotiations – and the feasibility of sustainable integration and/or reintegration into communities; investigate the concerns of countries with the most IDPs; analyze existing implementations and policies for internal displacement; and recommend actions that need to be taken to ensure a safe, secure, and sustainable future for human rights.

## Climate Change and Internal Displacement

According to the United Nations, climate change refers to the long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns.<sup>4</sup> These long-term changes have been natural over the vast majority of Earth's history; however, since the 1800s, human industrial and agricultural activity has been the main driver of climate change. Since then, the long-term changes to the earth's temperature and weather patterns have become more abrupt and severe. The consequences of these abrupt changes to the Earth's climate are far-reaching and have significant implications for all living organisms that inhabit the Earth. One of the most dire challenges is the internal displacement of human beings. Out of the over 71 million people who were internally displaced in 2022, most

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<sup>1</sup> "GRID 2023 | 2023 Global Report on Internal Displacement - IDMC." <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2023/>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>2</sup> "Issues in focus: Natural Disasters and Internal Displacement - OHCHR." <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-internally-displaced-persons/issues-focus-natural-disasters-and-internal-displacement>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>3</sup> "All-time high of 71 million people internally displaced worldwide." 11 May. 2023, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/media-centres/all-time-high-of-71-million-people-internally-displaced-worldwide>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>4</sup> "What Is Climate Change? - the United Nations." <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

were displaced due to natural disasters caused by climate change.<sup>5</sup> Internal displacement continues to challenge the lives of millions each year, devastating well-being and forcing many to leave their homes and seek alternative and sometimes dangerous methods of meeting their needs.

Climate change-related internal displacement has extensive consequences, beyond the immediate challenges presented by physical relocation. Displaced individuals, communities, families, and economic establishments face a myriad of challenges, including social, economic, and psychological impacts. As people are uprooted from their homes due to rising sea levels, droughts, or extreme weather events, they often lose their livelihoods, cultural ties, and social networks. This loss of “home” and so much more is significantly traumatizing and denies future generations connections to their past and identity, which can lead to cultural decay and loss.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the strain on infrastructure and resources in areas receiving an influx of displaced populations can lead to increased competition for limited resources, exacerbating existing social and economic tensions.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the psychological toll of forced displacement, such as trauma, grief, and loss, can have long-lasting effects on individuals and communities. Climate-induced internal displacement not only disrupts lives and livelihoods but also poses significant challenges to social cohesion, economic stability, and mental well-being, underscoring the urgent need for effective climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

It is important to note that climate change can lead to internal displacement through various mechanisms, all of which stem from the altering environmental conditions caused by global warming. Rising sea levels, for instance, pose a significant threat to coastal communities, as they result in increased flooding and erosion. As coastlines recede, people living in low-lying areas are forced to abandon their homes and relocate to safer regions. Additionally, extreme weather events such as hurricanes, cyclones, and droughts are becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change. These events can destroy infrastructure, crops, and livelihoods, making it impossible for affected populations to sustain themselves in their original locations. Moreover, shifts in precipitation patterns and prolonged periods of drought can lead to water scarcity and agricultural failures, prompting rural communities to migrate in search of more habitable regions with better access to resources. Overall, the adverse impacts of climate change disrupt

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<sup>5</sup> "Issues in focus: Natural Disasters and Internal Displacement - OHCHR."

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-internally-displaced-persons/issues-focus-natural-disasters-and-internal-displacement>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>6</sup> "Forced Migration, Cultural Identity, and Trauma - EuropeNow." 1 Feb. 2017,

<https://www.europenowjournal.org/2017/01/31/special-feature-forced-migration-cultural-identity-and-trauma/>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>7</sup> "The ripple effect: economic impacts of internal displacement."

<https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/201810-literature-review-economic-impacts.pdf>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

ecosystems, threaten livelihoods, and compromise the habitability of certain areas, ultimately driving internal displacement as people seek refuge from these changing conditions.<sup>8</sup>

Some especially significant human rights concerns presented by internal displacement and climate change include a fundamental lack of access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing. Climate change, especially through rising sea levels and natural disasters, can destroy housing which can ultimately lead to a self-perpetuating loop where those displaced by climate change need housing but are unable to get the housing they so desperately need. Data also indicates that this effects of this issue is not stratified evenly between individuals from different races and gender identities; often low income women of color are especially effected by these challenges and are at the highest risk of homelessness due to climate change-related internal displacement.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, this brings up numerous issues within the context of homelessness where homelessness can often be criminalized which can further pupetutate financial, social, and psychological inequity, compromising the dignity of internally displaced individuals.<sup>10</sup>

Climate change-induced internal displacement does not have equal repercussions on the lives of the people that it affects. Marginalized populations such as women, children, people of color, members of the LGBTI community, and residents of developing countries, usually bear the brunt of the experience of being internally displaced. They tend to disproportionately lack basic human rights, which include the access to healthcare, education, food, and basic necessities for survival compared to the people who are not a part of marginalized communities.<sup>11</sup> Thus, addressing climate change-induced internal displacement in an equitable manner that focuses on marginalized individuals is an issue that must be addressed by the Special Rapporteur.

Due to the fundamental difference in access to durable solutions is crucial due to social barriers, displaced persons encounter obstacles such as legal and administrative challenges, lack of access to basic services, and limited economic opportunities, hindering their ability to rebuild their lives and achieve long-term stability. By focusing on these pressing issues, the Special Rapporteur can shed light on the urgent need for comprehensive approaches that prioritize human rights, remove barriers, and create conducive conditions for achieving durable solutions for those affected by internal displacement caused by climate change. Some especially effective methods of

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<sup>8</sup> "Displacement Caused by the Effects of Climate Change: Who Will ...." 10 Oct. 2008, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/displacement-caused-by-the-effects-of-climate-change-who-will-be-affected-and-what-are-the-gaps-in-the-normative-framework-for-their-protection/>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>9</sup> "Displaced women at risk of homelessness – how to support ...." <https://www.internal-displacement.org/expert-opinion/displaced-women-at-risk-of-homelessness-how-to-support-displaced-womens-rights>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>10</sup> "Ending the Criminalization and Forced Displacement of Unhoused ...." <https://endhomelessness.org/blog/services-not-sweeps-ending-the-criminalization-and-forced-displacement-of-unhoused-people/>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>11</sup> "Climate change and disaster displacement | UNHCR UK." <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/what-we-do/how-we-work/environment-disasters-and-climate-change/climate-change-and-disaster>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

addressing these issues include working with governments to bring awareness and create consensus between different political parties. By passing policy in conjunction with grassroots action, some of these challenges can be overcome.

Addressing climate change-induced internal displacement in an equitable manner is indeed complex. It does not involve providing relief to the individuals from marginalized communities who are currently internally displaced— it also involves implementing preventative policies that would protect individuals from marginalized communities who are the most vulnerable to displacement. Moreover, it will have to involve addressing the root of the issue by implementing policies that would curb greenhouse gas emissions in areas that are in close proximity to individuals from marginalized communities.

### **(Re)integration of Internally Displaced Persons**

The integration and/or reintegration of internally displaced persons must be addressed to protect human rights. The challenges associated with reintegration vary depending on the specific groups among the IDPs and the situations in which they find themselves. Specifically, discrimination, stigmatization, and exclusion may pose barriers to reintegration efforts. However, to combat the most common challenges associated with reintegration, the UN Special Rapporteur must guarantee access to basic services such as housing, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities through multi-stakeholder communication, policy change, and work with grassroots NGOs.

Internally displaced persons located in urban areas often face issues in obtaining basic necessities including clean water, shelter, healthcare and hygiene, and education. With little to no information about the new environments they are placed in, IDPs often find themselves deprived of mental and social support.<sup>12 13</sup> Newcomers who are particularly displaced from rural areas and are not accustomed to life in cities may struggle to understand their rights and the access they have to housing and other benefits. IDPs who resort to living in urban areas tend to reside in low-income and overpopulated areas, where the supply of basic needs and services is limited, adding pressure to already existing issues in host communities. Internal displacement particularly affects children as well, often leading internally displaced families to adopt harmful coping strategies such as child labor or early marriage.<sup>14</sup> These effects may cause interruptions in the children's academic careers, an increase in their vulnerability to crime, and general long-term trauma.

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<sup>12</sup> "Understanding the health needs of internally displaced persons."

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666623521000386>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>13</sup> "Water Scarcity & Internally Displaced Persons - The Water Project."

<https://thewaterproject.org/water-scarcity/water-scarcity-internally-displaced-persons>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>14</sup> "Child marriage among displaced populations – a 2019 study in ...." 21 Apr. 2022,

<https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-022-13220-x>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

To foster a supportive environment for internally displaced persons, factors such as social cohesion, mental and psychological health, identity, and cultural and spiritual considerations must all be considered. By allowing IDPs to build positive social relationships, social cohesion enhances the interconnectedness and solidarity within a community, thus paving the way for equity and opportunities for those who may have felt excluded otherwise.<sup>15 16</sup> Additionally, access to mental health services, psychosocial support, and trauma-informed care are essential. These items help IDPs heal, cope with their experiences, and settle into their new lives. Displacement also disrupts one's sense of identity, which plays a key factor in reintegration. The preservation and expression of IDPs' cultures, languages, and traditions empower them while building resilience, as well. Recognition and respect for diverse identities create an inclusive environment for reintegration. Considering cultural and spiritual items such as places of worship and spiritual activities would bolster the overall well-being of IDPs who may implicitly seek familiarity in their new surroundings.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of the approach, these interconnected factors require holistic and context-specific executions. Inclusive policies and programs engaging IDPs and host communities are vital for sustainable integration. The Special Rapporteur can collaborate with relevant government agencies and international organizations to promote the protection of human rights and the inclusion of IDPs in national policies and programs. Advocating for the allocation of resources to address the specific challenges faced by IDPs and host communities would also help combat the complex nature of reintegration. Overall, evidence-based policies backed and encouraged by extensive research must be taken into consideration and acted upon.

### **Peacebuilding in Regards to Internally Displaced Persons**

Before embarking on peacebuilding efforts for internally displaced persons (IDPs), it is imperative to confront the critical human rights challenges they face. IDPs worldwide endure a range of violence and discrimination, exacerbating their struggles for adequate shelter, employment, and education.<sup>18</sup> These human rights issues are only reinforced by the role of intersectionality, where marginalized groups, especially women, face compounded challenges. As highlighted by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, in countries such as Somalia and South Sudan, displaced women experience higher levels of intimate partner violence compared to women in the host population, significantly surpassing national and global

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<sup>15</sup> "An exploration of social determinants of health amongst internally ..." 15 Dec. 2009, <https://conflictandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1752-1505-3-10>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>16</sup> "Understanding Social Cohesion: Internally Displaced People and ..." 27 Oct. 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/events/2022/10/21/understanding-social-cohesion-internally-displaced-people>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>17</sup> "Churches and internally displaced survivors of sexual violence in." 17 Dec. 2019, <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/hts/article/view/213545/201392>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>18</sup> "Internally displaced children, youth and education | IDMC." <https://www.internal-displacement.org/research-areas/children-youth-education>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

averages.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, IDP women face barriers to employment due to discriminatory norms and regulatory obstacles. The right to shelter also remains a pressing concern, with a significant proportion of IDPs feeling restricted in their freedom to move. These grave human rights issues necessitate the Special Rapporteur's attention and reporting, emphasizing the need for peacebuilding to address these challenges.

In the context of peacebuilding, it is crucial to ensure the meaningful inclusion of IDPs from the outset, recognizing that they are the most directly affected by the conflict and displacement. Their participation is not an afterthought but a necessity.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, diversity and inclusion must be prioritized, considering the intersectionality of the human rights issues faced by IDPs. Women, youth, and other marginalized groups within the IDP population should be represented and their perspectives should be sought, as they offer valuable insights into the root causes of displacement, the impact of the conflict on their lives, and potential solutions.

During negotiations and peace agreements, it is important to address language and literacy barriers. This can be achieved through the integration of workshops, speeches, programs, and awareness initiatives that cater to different communication needs. Equipping individuals with negotiation and conflict resolution skills, as well as ensuring their understanding of their rights, is crucial. Sustainable changes should be prioritized, and post-conflict programs should be established to ensure the implementation of agreements. To maintain accountability and facilitate ongoing dialogue, the establishment of IDP-led organizations or committees, alongside open platforms for discussion, can provide spaces for all voices to be heard.<sup>21</sup>

By addressing the human rights challenges faced by IDPs, prioritizing their inclusion and diverse representation, and implementing sustainable peacebuilding measures, the Special Rapporteur can contribute to more inclusive and effective solutions for IDPs in post-conflict contexts.

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<sup>19</sup> "A new lens on forced displacement - GIWPS - Georgetown University." <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/index-story/a-new-lens-on-forced-displacement/>. Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>20</sup> "Inclusion of Internally Displaced Persons - UNHCR." [https://www.unhcr.org/ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2020/03/Briefing-Note-on-Inclusion-of-Internally-Displaced-Persons\\_2020.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2020/03/Briefing-Note-on-Inclusion-of-Internally-Displaced-Persons_2020.pdf). Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.

<sup>21</sup> "How a focus on language can improve responses to internal ...." [https://www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/sites/www.un.org.internal-displacement-panel/files/published\\_translators\\_without\\_borders\\_submission.pdf](https://www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/sites/www.un.org.internal-displacement-panel/files/published_translators_without_borders_submission.pdf). Accessed 12 Jun. 2023.