

## **Inter-State Dialogue on Internal Displacement: Promoting Global Platforms?**

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**For full analysis and reference to sources, see IDRP research paper by the same authors.**

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There is no formal State-based forum at the global level specifically dedicated to internal displacement. This executive summary thus: (i) explores the potential of existing fora as sites or models for inter-State dialogue on internal displacement (sections 1-3); and (ii) assesses the need for a dedicated global forum on internal displacement (section 4).

Specific attention is given to: a) human rights platforms, particularly UN human rights treaty bodies (HRTBs) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a procedure of the UN Human Rights Council in which all States participate (in section 1); b) refugee-related fora, namely the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (EXCOM) and Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) (in section 2); and c) informal fora specifically on internal displacement, such as the GP20 process and the Displacement Dialogues (in section 3).

## 1. UN human rights platforms

Internal displacement is often framed as a human rights issue. UN HRTBs have frequently addressed internal displacement. However, HRTB procedures are generally not fora for inter-State discussion, but instead bilateral dialogues between HRTBs and individual States. Thus, by design, their capacity for inter-State dialogue is limited.

The UPR can more accurately be characterised as a truly global mechanism for inter-State dialogue. It is intended to be 'a cooperative mechanism, based on an interactive dialogue' between Member States, 'with the full involvement of the country concerned and with consideration given to its capacity-building needs'.<sup>1</sup> However, internal displacement is:

- Scarcely addressed, even in respect to those States with the highest IDP populations;
- Narrowly conceptualised, with an almost universal absence of references to disaster-induced displacement; and
- Susceptible to political tensions, which when combined with the UPR's very public arena, can inhibit constructive peer-to-peer discussion and limit scrutiny of State practices.

## 2. Refugee protection fora

IDPs are similar to refugees in many ways. As such, the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) finds itself involved in both IDP and refugee response.

One way to feed into UNHCR's policy vis-à-vis IDPs is through EXCOM, which is composed of States. However, EXCOM's capacity to systematically address issues relating to internal displacement is restricted by the limits of UNHCR's operational mandate with respect to IDPs, specifically:

- Its mandate is focused principally on the refugee response;
- Its IDP efforts thus mainly relate to conflict-induced displacement; and

- Its IDP activities must be carried out as part of the cluster system of IDP response, which involves many other UN agencies and NGOs.

Although the GCR has been criticised for ‘virtually’ ignoring IDPs, one of its key objectives is to support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. As such, IDP response should be a key consideration when implementing the GCR, and there are numerous ways in which IDP issues can be raised within the GCR framework. For example:

- The Global Refugee Forum (GRF) takes place every four years. It is a very broad, high-level platform in which to raise awareness of IDP issues (insofar as they relate to refugee issues). However, IDP issues were not widely discussed at the last GRF, in 2019.
- The Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) in Central America and Mexico is a regional Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) of the kind promoted by the GCR. It provides a forum for the articulation of strategic actions and new initiatives to address forced displacement and international protection needs from a regional and human rights approach. Its rotating presidency holds multi-stakeholder dialogues, which includes MIRPS countries, on issues related to emergencies and current challenges in the search for comprehensive solutions. A working group on IDPs has also been established, which will convene three workshops on IDP matters.

### 3. Informal internal displacement-specific platforms

Certain platforms specifically dedicated to promoting inter-State dialogue on internal displacement globally already exist, although they have an informal character.

For instance, the GP20 process was initiated in 2018 to mark the twentieth anniversary of the UN Guiding Principles.<sup>2</sup> It is a three-year, multi-stakeholder endeavour. Although the promotion of inter-State dialogue does not feature in the GP20’s core objectives, it has nonetheless co-convened two regional ‘State-to-State exchanges’, both in Africa. These exchanges sought to facilitate the sharing of good practices, challenges and recommendations in respect to preventing, addressing and resolving internal displacement.

Similarly, the Displacement Dialogues, also initiated in 2018, are ambassadorial-level discussions of global aspiration that take place outside the structure of any formal international organisation. The Dialogues provide a space where fellow IDP-hosting States can come together, by invitation and under Chatham House rules, to ‘identify common challenges, share concerns and consider solutions’. Interest from ambassadors has been high, and a breadth of cross-cutting issues have to date been discussed.

It is still too early to draw definitive conclusions as to their success of these platforms. Even so, some preliminary conclusions are that:

- These platforms appear to be providing a space conducive to more candid discussion, as well as fostering new partnerships between previously unacquainted States (Displacement Dialogues) and galvanising relationships between neighbours (GP20 regional exchanges).

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<sup>2</sup> Pursuant to a call by the General Assembly in ‘Protection of and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons’, 14 November 2017, A/C.3/72/L.46/Rev.1, para. 9.

- Questions remain about their design, longevity and scalability, including transparency concerns, reach beyond Geneva and certain African regions, and the risk of politicisation.

#### 4. Conclusion: a new platform for internal displacement?

There are benefits to raising IDP issues through existing fora, such as bringing IDP issues to the attention of an international audience (GRF, EXCOM, UPR) and/or discussing IDP issues in a more informal way (GP20 and Displacement Dialogues). However, there are also serious in-built limitations to these fora as platforms to promote inter-State dialogue on internal displacement. The absence of references to internal displacement in the GCR and the UPR, as well as the lack of any formal IDP forum, seemingly indicates a lack of priority and political will at the global level.

This might ultimately make it unlikely that a dedicated global IDP forum will be established. However, it is precisely for this reason that one is more important and more urgent than ever. We are now witnessing the highest number of IDPs on record, with over 41.3 million people internally displaced by conflict and violence, and many millions of others by disasters, at the start of 2020. The creation of a formal IDP-specific forum would firmly, and finally, put IDP protection issues and related State practice on the international agenda. The question remains, though, whether a global forum of this kind or regional platforms would be more effective in promoting peer-to-peer learning and dialogue between States affected by and/or concerned with internal displacement.<sup>3</sup>

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3 See the briefing on Africa as a regional example by Abebe.