

## LOST AT HOME

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

## Acknowledgments

This publication was developed by the UNICEF Data and Analytics Section, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, in partnership with the Migration and Displacement Team, Programme Division.

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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 (see p. 8, Fig. 1.1).** Nearly half – 19 million – were estimated to be children. And millions more are displaced every year by natural disasters.<sup>1</sup>

**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.<sup>2</sup> Internally displaced persons really are the invisible majority of the world's displaced population.<sup>3</sup>

**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.<sup>4</sup>

**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.<sup>5</sup> Some become caught up in cyclical displacement, which can mean finding durable solutions is even more difficult.<sup>6</sup>

**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,<sup>7</sup> set objectives aligned with the commitment to leave no one behind captured in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>



**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.<sup>11</sup> 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, by providing humanitarian assistance and support for durable solutions.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

**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<sup>16</sup> 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 on the lives of children on 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

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