

The IDP Protection Expert Group: Contributing experience and expertise to enhance IDP protection around the world

Over the past two decades, internal displacement has risen at an alarming rate as a result of conflict, violence and disasters, including those related to the aggravating effects of climate change. At the end of 2022, there were 71.1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide. Not only is this the highest number of IDPs ever recorded, it is more than double the number recorded just a decade ago.

In response to these staggering figures, and at the request of 57 Member States, the United Nations Secretary-General commissioned a High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement in 2019 to identify concrete recommendations on how to better prevent, respond and achieve solutions to the global internal displacement crisis. The Panel, sharing its recommendations in September 2021, indicated that the world was at a breaking point and that the collective failure to prevent, address, and resolve internal displacement needed urgent rectification. In response to the Panel's report, the Secretary-General has promulgated an Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, which lays out his own vision for mobilizing collective action and advancing durable solutions for the internally displaced.

Alongside these efforts and to leverage their long-standing collaboration, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Global Protection Cluster founded the IDP Protection Expert Group (IPEG). The IPEG aims to foster political will and national leadership, as well as coordinate senior-level international support for strengthened protection responses. They seek to achieve this through the use of a group of members composed of former Special Rapporteurs, ex-Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators, respected thought leaders, policy experts, and academics across various disciplines. The IPEG's establishment was formally announced at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals' meeting in October 2021.

IPEG's mission

The vision of the IPEG is a world where the rights of internally displaced persons are safeguarded and upheld. Its mission is to work towards this vision by providing expert advice, bridging gaps between theory and practice, and fostering innovative approaches to addressing internal displacement issues. The group aims to enhance the effectiveness of responses to internal displacement through collaborative engagement and ensuring the voices and perspectives of displaced persons themselves, as citizens with agency, are heard and incorporated into decision-making processes.

In undertaking its work, the IPEG leverages a comprehensive and targeted approach. It utilizes three distinct yet interconnected modalities to address the complexities of internal displacement effectively.

Protection Support Missions

IPEG organizes Protection Support Missions to countries particularly affected by internal displacement, which provide opportunities for high-level dialogue and experience exchange with Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators and UN Country Teams/Humanitarian Country Teams. These missions aim to build momentum for IDP protection efforts and break down barriers to effective international and national protection responses. Through constructive dialogue and mutual learning, IPEG helps build strategic responses to internal displacement.

In September 2021, the IPEG conducted a mission to **Burkina Faso**, focusing on key issues such as domesticating the Kampala Convention, advancing protection in urban settings, and issues surrounding housing, land, and property, as well as protection of civilians (PoC).

In **South Sudan** in July 2022, the IPEG's mission focused on the centrality of protection, law and policy on internal displacement, and the issue of returns and the environment for solutions. They provided key recommendations relating to protection strategies and IDP inclusion in transitional processes.

In **Honduras** in October 2022, the IPEG, alongside key partners, helped play a critical role in mobilising ministerial and congressional-level engagement on pending legislation, leading to the adoption of a national IDP law in December 2022.

Post-Mission Follow-Up

Following the Protection Support Missions, IPEG are available to conduct targeted briefings to inform and mobilize coordinated international support on key protection issues. These briefings provide vital insights and guidance to international actors, promoting a unified approach to addressing internal displacement. In some cases, IPEG members conducted follow-up country visits.

Global Advocacy and Policy Debate

At the global level, IPEG actively engages in advocacy and policy debates, fostering an exchange of experiences on protection issues related to internal displacement. It advocates for improved policies and measures, and it uses its platform to shed light on critical issues and promote best practices.

To this end, IPEG organized an **Inaugural Expert Roundtable on Key Challenges in IDP Protection** at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in Sanremo in October 2022. This event brought together experts in the field to discuss, analyze, and propose innovative solutions to the challenges facing IDP protection today.

The IPEG Members: A Diverse Gathering of IDP Experts Steeped in Experience

The core of IPEG's offering is the experience and expertise of its core members drawn from decades of engagement in issues of internal displacement. Composed of nine distinguished professionals with a significant breadth and depth of experience across numerous key disciplines, the group's collective wisdom encompasses issues from climate change action, disaster risk reduction, and development, to the coordination of international humanitarian and development aid. Adept in human rights, humanitarian protection, and the development of legal frameworks, the IPEG members bring robust insight to all matters of IDP rights and protection. Furthermore, their expertise in peacebuilding, security, governance, and law contributes to a comprehensive approach in addressing the complex challenges of internal displacement. Altogether, the IPEG members are a diverse and dynamic collection of experts committed to supporting innovative, effective responses to internal displacement challenges worldwide.

Paula Gaviria Betancur: Currently serving as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Paula's career is marked by her commitment to human rights and peace-building initiatives. She has made significant contributions to shaping policy and providing direction in addressing displacement issues, particularly in her native Colombia.

Cecilia Jimenez-Damary: A lawyer with specialization in human rights and international humanitarian law, Cecilia dedicated six years of her career serving as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons. Her extensive advocacy for human rights in the Asia-Pacific region has left a substantial mark on IDP protection.

Chaloka Beyani: Chaloka is an international law expert who served as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons for six years. His profound understanding of international law and his work with numerous international organizations provide invaluable insights into the complexities of internal displacement.

Walter Kälin: Professor Walter Kälin contributes a deep understanding of international and constitutional law to the Advisory Group. With a history of representing the United Nations Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, he has been at the forefront of advocating for displaced persons' rights and turning laws and policies into action.

Peter de Clercq: With a career in the United Nations spanning three decades, Peter de Clercq brings a profound understanding of managing humanitarian and development assistance, particularly in displacement contexts. His diverse experience provides the group with practical knowledge of field operations.

Jennifer Welsh: A distinguished academic, Professor Jennifer Welsh contributes a solid background in global governance, security, and international peace. Her experience working with the United Nations, particularly on the Responsibility to Protect, provides a critical perspective on international security and displacement.

Atle Solberg: As a political scientist with hands-on experience in humanitarian action and displacement situations, Atle Solberg provides a comprehensive understanding of displacement due to conflict and natural disasters. His work with various international organizations makes him a key contributor to the group.

Nina Birkeland: Nina Birkeland's expertise lies in addressing displacement issues related to climate change and natural disasters. She has been pivotal in developing the Norwegian Refugee Council's work on climate displacement, bringing a unique perspective to the group.

Maya Sahli-Fadel: Maya Sahli-Fadel, an Algerian jurist, provides a distinct legal perspective to the group. Her work with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, as well as her extensive legal teaching, brings to the group a comprehensive understanding of the legal aspects of displacement.