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## Event Report

# Making the most vulnerable visible: Data gaps and official statistics on forced displacement

JOINTLY ORGANIZED BY THE EXPERT GROUP ON REFUGEE AND IDP STATISTICS (EGRIS) AND  
THE WORLD BANK-UNHCR JOINT DATA CENTER ON FORCED DISPLACEMENT (JDC)



## Leaving no one behind

The third edition of the UN World Data Forum was held from 3 to 6 October in a hybrid format, enabling participants to join the event physically in Bern as well as virtually from across the globe. The Forum covered a diverse range of topics linked to the changing data landscapes and needs brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was an opportunity to take stock of how far the statistical community has progressed in implementing the data revolution for sustainable data as part of the global commitment to develop statistical capacities for improved monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A key area of discussions focused on the need for quality and timely data on the most vulnerable groups to ensure no one is left behind.

As part of these dialogues, the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (JDC) in collaboration with the Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics (EGRIS) held a lively virtual session on “Making the most vulnerable visible: Data gaps and official statistics on forced displacement”. The webinar focused on the data gaps in the area of forced displacement and the importance of official statistics for informed policymaking, development planning, and programming at national, regional and global levels. The panel counted with the participation of Mr. Sharmarke Farah (Director General of the Somali National Bureau of Statistics), Ms. Olena Shevtsova (Deputy Director of Administrative Directorate, State Statistics Service of Ukraine), Mr. Lucas Gómez (Presidential Envoy for the

Colombia Venezuela Border, Government of Colombia), Ms. Haishan Fu (Director of Development Data Group, World Bank), Mr. Björn Gillsäter (Head of the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement), and Ms. Natalia Baal (Coordinator of the Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

Overall, the objective of the session was to contribute to the debate on how to make forcibly displaced people statistically visible. The session discussed current challenges in the collection, production, and dissemination of quality and comparable official statistics on forced displacement and illustrated local and global initiatives that aim at tackling these obstacles. Particular emphasis was given to the International Recommendations on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) Statistics (IRRS and IRIS), developed by the multi-stakeholder EGRIS and endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission, including good practice examples from Somalia and Ukraine in their implementation at country level. Colombia also shared its relevant experience in the area of refugee and migration statistics and emphasized the importance of data to inform evidence-based policymaking at the local level. In addition to these country cases, the World Bank presented some of its projects conducted in collaboration with the JDC and UNHCR that aim at enhancing data collection exercises on forcibly displaced in developing countries.

## Data and evidence gaps on forced displacement

As of the end of 2020, 82 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide. Limited information is available on their composition in terms of age, gender, and diversity and little is known about their living and socioeconomic conditions. These gaps in official statistics on refugees and IDPs hinder the assessment of their basic and ongoing needs and their degree of integration or achievement of durable solutions.

The lack of quality official statistics on forced displacement is associated with several challenges faced by local and international actors. The use of inconsistent definitions and concepts as well as variation in the methods of data collection, compilation and presentation often leads to limited comparability of statistics across time and different contexts. The nature of forced displacement itself also presents a set of technical, operational, and political challenges which affect the reliability and accuracy of data sources. In

addition, national data collection exercises do not often include questions that enable the identification of refugees and IDPs, limiting the comparison with general migrants and the wider population. Coordination between different actors might also be a challenge as in some contexts there is limited connection between national statistical offices and the institutions responsible for data collection on refugees and IDPs. These challenges also vary significantly across countries, depending, for example, on the size of forcibly displaced populations, the capacities of the national statistical and administrative systems, and the national policy priorities.

Strengthening data systems and standards that lead to improved quality and national ownership of data on forced displacement are thus at the essence of the [JDC Strategy for 2021-2023](#) as well as [EGRIS' third mandate \(2020-2024\)](#).

# International Recommendations on Refugee and IDP Statistics



Until recently, there were no globally endorsed standards for the collection, compilation, and dissemination of official statistics on refugees. With the objective of filling this gap, in March 2016, the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) established the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (EGRIS) to develop [International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics \(IRRS\)](#) and a [Technical Report on Statistics of Internally Displaced Persons](#). Both documents were presented and endorsed at the 49th session of the UNSC in March 2018. At the same occasion, the UNSC extended the EGRIS mandate to cover the development of [International Recommendations on IDP Statistics \(IRIS\)](#), which were subsequently endorsed at its 51st session in 2020.

Both set of recommendations have been developed through a collaborative process anchored in active participation from national authorities and regional and international agencies with relevant expertise in the area of forced displacement statistics. With the objective of supporting countries and actors to improve the overall quality and availability of official statistics on refugees and IDPs, the IRRS and IRIS provide recommendations on: standardized terminology and classifications; list of basic data tabulations and variables; assessment of relevant data sources and methods for collecting statistics on refugees and IDPs; identification of socioeconomic indicators for refugee integration and wellbeing as well as measurement of durable solutions for IDPs, including a list of relevant SDG indicators to be disaggregated by forced displacement. Recommendations on how to improve coordination at national, regional, and international levels are also included in both documents.

EGRIS is currently in its third mandate, investing in building capacities of national statistical offices for the implementation of the IRRS and IRIS. Some countries have already taken steps into the implementation of the recommendations providing good practices and lessons learned. This is the case of Somalia and Ukraine, which have shared their country specific approaches to the implementation of the recommendations during the JDC-EGRIS Session.

## Somalia: Building data ownership

The establishment of the Somalia National Bureau of Statistics (SNBS) in 2020 created a significant impulse towards filling statistical gaps and building governmental ownership over the available data. By recognizing that greater availability of official statistics on IDPs is crucial for informed policymaking, the National Bureau has focused on improving the methods to generate statistics, the ways to fill existing data gaps as well as the means by which to bring data closer to decision-makers. In Somalia, 2.9 million people have been displaced due to protracted conflicts and natural disasters. Since its establishment, SNBS has extensively engaged with humanitarian and development organizations to define the numbers of IDPs in the country. For the first time, the National Statistical Office was involved in this process, which prompted many discussions around statistical standards, definitions, and frameworks. As one of the first countries to request technical assistance from EGRIS, the National Bureau is engaged in implementing the IRIS to produce improved data on IDPs, that would enable identifying the different causes of displacement; their vulnerabilities; as well as comparing the situation of the IDP populations to the host communities. Although this process is still ongoing, it illustrates SNBS' commitment to making IDPs more visible in their data collection efforts.



**Mr. Sharmarke Farah**

*“The goal of EGRIS of bringing on board the official statistical community in the production and publication of statistics on refugees and IDPs resonated with us; creating ownership is part of our efforts and goals; [as well as] evidence-driven policymaking, collaboration among partners, and comparability.”*



## Ukraine: Coordination for improved data on IDPs

In December 2020, State Statistics Service of Ukraine (SSSU) jointly with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) set the stage for discussions on the implementation of the International Recommendations on IDP Statistics in Ukraine through the organization of a webinar on the topic. This initiative propelled the creation of a working group, including SSSU, relevant national line ministries and institutions, civil society, as well as regional and international actors, whose overall goal is to adapt the international recommendations to the Ukrainian context in a coordinated and comprehensive manner. The working group's engagement in the process is illustrated by the translation of the IRIS into Ukrainian, which has been crucial in guaranteeing all partners are familiarized with the content of the recommendations and are able to apply them to national context and priorities. This process demonstrates the importance of engaging relevant actors from national level alongside regional and international stakeholders to ensure strong coordination mechanisms and a synergy of efforts. That is why the support and global expertise of EGRIS has been vital in ensuring a robust framework and a global exchange of lessons learned. Parallely, SSSU is an important actor at the global level, being a long-standing member of EGRIS, whose contributions and experiences have been relevant to the development of IRIS and continue to inform other EGRIS country members.



**Ms. Olena Shevtsova**

*"It is important to engage all stakeholders at the process of initiation. It is important to set a working group and ensure multi-level engagement during this work. It is crucial to recall the working out algorithm of work providing synergy of efforts to make sure all stakeholders are involved and no overlapping is happening."*

## Evidence-informed decision making

Quality and reliable disaggregated statistics on refugee and IDP populations play a crucial role in implementing evidence-based responses and ensuring that resources and capacities are appropriately utilized. There is a range of potential users of these statistics including local authorities, national authorities and regional and international organizations. Data are necessary to better understand the phenomenon of forced displacement, to analyze its impacts, and to measure changes over time. Quality statistics on these population groups also provide the requisite evidence to support more effective monitoring, evaluation and accountability of policies and programs, enhance public debate and advocacy, and prompt stronger global partnerships towards global commitments, including advancing the 2030 agenda.

The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to emphasizing the importance of evidence to inform sound actions. It has also highlighted the need to invest in innovative approaches as well as on the right data infrastructures to ensure sustainability and resilience of data systems. The inclusion of vulnerable groups has become a crucial topic in the data agenda to ensure the impacts of the COVID-19 on these groups are well captured and adequate responses are provided.



Part of the effort of international organizations, such as the World Bank, have been to actively collaborate with partners to improve the availability of data and support better decision making regarding vulnerable groups, including forcibly displaced. Infrastructure, innovation and inclusion are elements that together pave the way for a stronger data future and thereby a better life for the forcibly displaced. As an illustration, due to the difficulties of face-to-face data collection posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank, with the support of JDC and UNHCR, has implemented rounds of High Frequency Phone Surveys in developing countries integrating forcibly displaced persons.

Results of the surveys were made accessible to the public to promote the wider use for policy analysis.

The strengthening of data systems and standards on forced displacement statistics, and the improvement of socio-economic evidence on forcibly displaced populations are also at the core of the work of the JDC. The [Joint Data Center](#) was established in 2019 to improve the quality and availability of socioeconomic microdata on those forcibly displaced, with the aim to inform policymaking and programming. Better socioeconomic evidence can support enhancing the ability of stakeholders to make timely and evidence-informed decisions that can improve the lives of affected people and ensure they are not left behind.



**Ms. Haishan Fu**

*"For far too long, refugees and internally displaced people have often been invisible in the data we usually collect and use to inform critical policy decisions by the government. It is clear statistically speaking; we are still facing some of the most fundamental issues in this regard; from harmonizing definitions to refining methodologies, and making data accessible for more impactful use."*

## Colombia: Data enhancing protection responses

As the second country hosting the highest numbers of persons displaced abroad, Colombia has granted Temporary Protection Status (TPS) to hundreds of Venezuelans who have fled into the country in an effort to provide support through economic and social integration. Interestingly, the modalities for the TPS were based on the data gathered by the Special Group for Migration Statistics (created in 2019 together with the Department of National Statistics) as it allowed for projections on the needs of this population group as well as their numbers. As of now, 1.3 million Venezuelans have virtually pre-registered for the Temporary Protection Permit which enables the state to hold crucial information on these refugees and migrants and thereby an ability of rendering them visible. As such, data is seen as an instrument to ensure the integration of Venezuelan refugees and migrants into the education, health and labor systems as well as to inform improved policy decisions.



**Mr. Lucas Gómez**

*"With data we are moving in the direction of redefining programs directed towards migrants and host communities; accurate monitoring of services and goods for migrant population; and, better and more informed decisions."*

## The way forward

Overall, the session has provided important insights into the ways by which is possible to obtain improved and more reliable figures on forcibly displaced populations. It also highlighted the importance of data for increased visibility of these groups in policymaking and programme development. The country testimonies illustrate the importance of data ownership; capacity building of national statistical offices; and ensuring alignment with international standards to produce quality official statistics on forced displacement. The session also underscored the possibilities that arise from national statistical capacity building when collaborating with global stakeholders.

Indeed, the efforts made by the Colombian, Somalian, and Ukrainian governments, and the World Bank together with the work undertaken by EGRIS and the JDC, reflect the aptitude for bringing vulnerable groups to light. As such, the session ultimately demonstrates that our commitment to increasing the availability of quality, disaggregated data on forcibly displaced populations can and ought to be upheld as it will effectively allow us to make visible those who are invisible, and to make sure that no one is left behind.