

Key Challenges in IDP Protection: The Inaugural IPEG Roundtable

On 25 October 2022, the IDP Protection Expert Group (IPEG) hosted an inaugural roundtable discussion on 'Key Challenges in IDP Protection' at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in Sanremo, Italy. The roundtable explored in depth three of the recurring challenges in IDP protection that the IPEG had observed over the course of three missions during its inaugural year to Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Honduras and beyond: 1) fostering national responsibility and ownership, 2) protecting key rights of IDPs, and 3) supporting whole-of-society approaches and the participation of IDPs.

In the spirit of fostering candid, innovative dialogue, the roundtable observed the Chatham House Rule. Participants included thought-leaders from the IPEG Advisory Group, the United Nations system, national governments, regional organisations, civil society, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, and academia.

Fostering National Responsibility and Ownership

The first challenge discussed was the importance of fostering national responsibility and ownership for the protection and assistance of IDPs. Participants highlighted the primary role of national authorities, as defined by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the Kampala Convention. This approach necessitates comprehensive governmental strategies, urging ministries responsible for climate change, disaster risk reduction, and urban planning to work in synergy with those overseeing displacement responses. Yet, participants recognized the practical complexities of applying national responsibility in various contexts. With federal states potentially facing internal disagreements over approaches to be taken, or resource-poor governments offloading responsibilities to the international community, a delicate balancing act is required. The international community should enrich, not replace, national actions.

Protecting Key Rights of IDPs

The second challenge centred on ensuring IDPs' rights under international human rights and international humanitarian law. The discourse underscored a worrying trend: a decline in visibility of IDP protection in both national and international arenas, leading to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of IDPs often going unaddressed. Further advocacy is needed to raise the profile of these issues once more. At the national level, it is essential to engage key stakeholders across all governmental entities, like military and security sector actors, and national human rights institutions.

The dialogue championed diversity, noting that IDPs are not a homogenous group and protection responses must be tailored to meet distinct needs, such as in relation to housing, land, and property rights. Additionally, participants highlighted the prevention of arbitrary displacement as a core human rights issue that requires the urgent attention of the international community.

Supporting whole-of-society approaches and the participation of IDPs

The third and final challenge invoked during the roundtable was that of fostering and supporting whole-of-society approaches and encouraging the participation of IDPs. Participants emphasized the importance of engaging IDPs in the design, planning, and implementation of displacement responses, as well as in political and peace processes. A broader, context-appropriate understanding of IDP protection and participation should also ensure that women, youth, and minority groups have a voice.

The economic inclusion of IDPs, notably the right to work and start businesses, was also underscored. Localisation was perceived as a crucial precondition for meaningful participation, thereby calling for engagement of local actors in the humanitarian and development responses.

The Role of the IPEG

As the roundtable concluded, participants turned their attention to the potential role for IPEG in addressing these identified challenges. The group's main function was seen as supporting the promotion of IDP protection by leveraging the experience and expertise of its members. Participants proposed diverse strategies to achieve this, pointing to the power of robust external engagement to shed light on the often-neglected issue of IDP protection. Others emphasised the value of thorough follow-up to IPEG field missions, harnessing the immediacy and relevance of newly acquired insights. The potential for collaboration with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and academic communities was also stressed, signalling the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach in finding sustainable solutions.