

**Introductory Remarks of Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, to the GP20 Steering Group Meeting of 17 June 2020:
Internal Displacement in Cities: Prevention, Protection and Solutions**

First of all, I would like to express my thanks to the organizers - the GP20 Secretariat, as well as to all the co-organisers of this meeting, including the ICRC, UN Habitat, JIPS and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. I also welcome the timeliness of this event: The 21st century marks what can truly be called an urban era. As we have already heard, urbanization is a global issue, and this trend is only projected to grow. There is therefore a very urgent need to spotlight the particular needs and challenges posted by urban displacement which is an ever increasing phenomenon. Indeed, the pace and scale of urbanization, the prevalence of ongoing conflicts around the world, climate change as well as urban violence, mean that the issue of urban displacement will only grow in relevance and become more complex.

I would also like to make reference to the already existing and important work done in this field. The topic of urban displacement was addressed by my predecessor in his 2014 report to the General Assembly ([A/69/295](#)), which focused on achieving durable solutions for internally displaced persons in urban settings. Notably as well, the ICRC has published a ground breaking study on urban displacement in 2018 and which further placed the issue on the agenda. UN Habitat has likewise taken up the issue within the context of the growth of cities and the challenges thereof.

Urban displacement is changing the social fabrics of cities around the world. As cities grow, they will increasingly attract IDPs and urban settings will also increasingly be a cause of displacement in and of themselves.

The attraction of IDPs to cities is understandable: camp settings and other informal displacement sites are often not a viable option for individuals and families. The long term and protracted nature of displacement in camp settings, with limited options for durable solutions, coupled with few employment opportunities, as well as very often limited access to education and healthcare mean that people may be attracted by cities. This is particularly true for those who have decided that they cannot return to their place of origin.

IDPs arriving to cities may face particular challenges – they may arrive with few assets, no networks, lack of language or other cultural barriers, lack of relevant documentation and may be subject to discrimination. Many may end up in marginal urban settlements, with inadequate access to housing, healthcare, education, which may increase their vulnerability to a secondary displacement. Indeed, displacement to urban areas can contribute to the proliferation of informal settlements, and put pressure on peri-urban areas. This can also have impact on social dynamics by increasing competition for employment and resources.

In particular, work in the informal sector in cities can be particularly tenuous – as has been shown most recently by COVID-19. The loss of livelihoods caused by the lockdown measures is

straining vulnerable displaced families, especially in urban locations as most are employed in the informal sectors where the earnings are received only on a daily basis, which has in many cases now stopped. We have received reports of IDPs in camp settings who cannot leave for the urban settings where they are able to obtain livelihood opportunities.

Furthermore, urban settings may play their own role in generating new displacement. Rapid unplanned settlements and urban growth in hazard prone areas can lead to new displacement. Climate change may also impact cities, in particular coastal ones, or informal settlements in cities located on floodplains, hillsides. There is also the question of urban displacement out of once affordable areas, to more marginal ones.

Last but not the least, there is the question of criminal violence, and urban conflict, both of which can cause as well as contribute to urban displacement. In this regard I would like to reference the work that my mandate has done, including missions to both [El Salvador](#) and [Honduras](#), where my mandate looked at the issue of criminal and gang violence, which was a major cause of urban displacement.

In examining urban displacement, we must always prioritize the human rights of IDPs in trying to generate solutions to this complex situation. IDPs, including those in urban settings, are not a homogenous group, they have different needs and capacities. Particular attention may need to be paid, for example, for those with intersecting vulnerabilities, including those with disabilities, or the particular situation of women, girls. The question of intersecting vulnerabilities is something that I have sought to prioritize in my work, and the mandate has published an important report on [IDP children](#), and is publishing a report this summer to the Human Rights Council on [persons with disabilities in displacement contexts](#). I also take note of the report by my predecessor which focused on [IDP women](#).

These issues raised by urban displacement are complex, and require deep thinking. What they also require is ongoing participation and dialogue with those most affected – both displaced persons and host communities. Indeed the importance of including and involving IDPs in all decisions affecting them remains one of my priorities – and of the GP20 Plan of Action – and I have written a detailed report about [IDP Participation](#) which can be useful in this regard.

In conclusion, I would like to close by noting that I am very excited to participate in this webinar, and see it as an opportunity to explore some of these complexities in more detail.

Thank you for your commitment.