

Challenging internal displacement policy within the broader security environment

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IDP Settlements in Tsmindatskali, Gori, Georgia, March 2010. Credit: Georgia IDP Project/University of Arizona

The time frame defining "protracted displacement" by the United Nations may need to be significantly shortened, according to a new study on internally displaced persons (IDPs) which suggests earlier support is needed for affected communities.

According to the UN, protracted displacement occurs when 25,000 or more people have been living in exile for five or more consecutive years. However, new research by Dr. Jared Dmello at the University of Adelaide and Professor Emerita Beth Mitchneck from the University of Arizona that looked at IDPs in the aftermath of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War challenges this, suggesting that protracted displacement of people happens much sooner.

"We found that within 20 months after displacement, the social networks of IDPs in Georgia mirrored the structures of IDPs in Abkhazia after 20 years of displacement," said Dr. Dmello.

The [study](#), published in *International Migration*, found that the social networks began to mirror those of long-term displaced persons far earlier than the five-year benchmark currently used by the UN. This finding has [profound implications](#) regarding the understanding of challenges faced by displaced populations and the support they need.

"Globally, there are approximately 21.3 million refugees living in protracted displacement, with two-thirds from just six countries. IDPs are not receiving the necessary resources and support to rebuild their lives at the most effective intervention points," said Dr. Dmello.

"This delay in recognizing their protracted displacement status has long-term impacts on their well-being and their ability to rebuild [social capital](#) within their new realities, with research showing that the exact effects vary by gender, education, and income generation status."

The research also highlights that IDPs experience displacement differently from other forced migrants, such as refugees or voluntary migrants, warranting a new analytical approach.

The study introduces the concept of "networks of persistence," which reflects IDP's networks that neither fully align with survival strategies nor complete integration into new communities, rather oscillating between the two. Networks of persistence emphasize social connectivity with new neighbors, as important support during displacement.

"IDPs in Georgia rely on their neighbors for support more than their former neighbors still residing in South Ossetia," said Dr. Dmello. "These former neighbors are likely to have also been victims of the violence that made them IDPs in the first place."

The research offers a critical lens through which to view current global conflicts, including the ongoing situation in Ukraine.

"History is at risk of repeating itself if we fail to learn from the past," said Dr. Dmello.

"Russian aggression in Ukraine reflects similar themes from its attack on Georgia, which led to the initial displacement of the participants in this study."

Dr. Dmello emphasized the importance of understanding how IDPs leverage their social networks to survive and rebuild their lives.

"While this study focuses on IDPs in Georgia, internal [displacement](#) is a serious issue worldwide, especially in areas of conflict such as Syria, Israel/Palestine, and Ukraine. Our findings serve as a grim warning about the long-term consequences of failing to assist IDPs with local integration."

Dr. Dmello said further research is needed to explore how early interventions can affect the transition from survival networks to integration networks, ultimately informing policy and practice.

"Identifying the most effective points of intervention could be key to aiding the successful integration of internally displaced persons."

More information: Jared R. Dmello et al, Networks of persistence: A new framework for protracted displacement from a Georgian lens, *International Migration* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/imig.13327](https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13327)

Provided by University of Adelaide

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