

UM6P Research Chair on Forced Displacement – 2025 Webinar Series

Data on migration and forced displacement in the Global South: Challenges and opportunities

UM6P Research Chair's 2025 Webinar Series

Although most displaced people reside in the Global South,¹ research on migration and displacement remains largely shaped by the Global North,² often sidelining the complex realities and inequalities experienced in the Global South. The UM6P Research Chair on Forced Displacement aims to address this imbalance by generating regionally grounded insights to inform policy development. The UM6P Chair's Webinar Series brings together diverse voices from the Global North and the Global South to explore key issues related to displacement, fostering dialogue between academics, policymakers, and practitioners.

This scene-setting brief introduces the topic of the fourth session in the Webinar Series, titled 'Data on migration and forced displacement in the Global South: Challenges and opportunities.'

Introduction: Why migration and displacement data matter

Data on migration and displacement play a key role in public debates, policymaking, advocacy and academic discussion.^{3,4,5} Large numbers, such as irregular border crossings or asylum applications, are frequently highlighted by the media or used by politicians in various countries, even though these numbers are often inexact or incomplete.^{6,7,8} However, migration data are not neutral; they are shaped by various actors and purposes.^{4,5,7} While generating more data does not necessarily lead to better policies or improving people's lives, reliable and comparable data on migration and displacement are crucial for designing effective policies and interventions^{4,8,9} and for ensuring 'fair and informed migration governance'.³

Challenges in producing and using data

On a global scale, major gaps in migration data persist due to differing and evolving definitions, concepts and indicators.⁴ The limitations of traditional data sources, such as questionnaire-based data collections (e.g., surveys, censuses) and administrative data sources (e.g., population registers), have also been foregrounded, including non-representative samples,

¹ UNHCR. (2025). *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2024*. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2024>

² Achieng, M., & El Fadil, A. (2020). What is wrong with the narrative on African migration? In A. Adepoju, C. Fumagalli, & N. Nyabola (Eds.), *Africa Migration Report: Challenging the narrative* (pp. 1–14). IOM. <https://publications.iom.int/books/africa-migration-report-challenging-narrative>

³ Appriou, A., Sloop, J., & Sohst, R. (2025). Towards the more effective use of irregular migration data. In D. Kierans & A. Kraler (Eds.), *Handbook on irregular migration: Data concepts, methods and practices* (pp. 121–128). University of Krems Press. <https://doi.org/10.48341/g31s-vq79>

⁴ Kraler, A., & Reichel, D. (2022). Migration statistics. In P. Scholten (Ed.), *Introduction to migration studies* (pp. 439–462). Springer.

⁵ Krynsky Baal, N. (2018). *Forced displacement data: Critical gaps and key opportunities in the context of the Global Compact on Refugees*. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/forced-displacement-data-critical-gaps-and-key-opportunities-context-global-compact-refugees>

⁶ Kierans, D., & Kraler, A. (2025a). Progress, limits, and the need for sustained effort. In D. Kierans & A. Kraler (Eds.), *Handbook on irregular migration: Data concepts, methods and practices* (pp. 129–132). University of Krems Press. <https://doi.org/10.48341/g31s-vq79>

⁷ Sloop, J., & Sohst, R. (2024). *Towards the more effective use of irregular migration data in policymaking*. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/irregular-migration-data-policymaking>

⁸ University of Oxford Podcasts. (2024, July 16). *Global migration data: Making sense of the numbers* [Podcast]. The Migration Oxford Podcast. <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/global-migration-data-making-sense-numbers?audio=1>

⁹ Masaki, T., & Madson, B. (2023). *Data gaps in microdata in the context of forced displacement* (Policy Research Working Paper no. 10631). <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/b2967e5b-eb8d-4c22-b9b8-98017b882a18>

difficulties in capturing certain groups of migrants, lack of comparability across countries and delayed publication.^{4,10,11}

Forced displacement data systems in the Global South face additional constraints, particularly in relation to data on internally displaced persons and in terms of thematic and geographic coverage.^{5,9} Countries hosting high numbers of forcibly displaced persons often experience operational challenges such as resource constraints, inadequate infrastructure, limited institutional capacity, poor access and insecurity.^{5,12} Inconsistent definitions and methods across actors and countries also result into limited coordination and duplication of efforts.^{5,10,13} Another important shortcoming is the limited availability of (long-term) socio-economic data due to an overwhelming focus on data collection for humanitarian programming and assistance. When socio-economic data do exist, they are often not aligned with existing statistical standards, making comparison with national populations or host communities difficult.⁵

Similar challenges arise when assessing data on irregular migration. Issues include inconsistent definitions, the overrepresentation of specific groups of irregular migrants, a lack of longitudinal data, and a gap between data availability and data use in policymaking and decision-making.^{3,7} Rather than establishing an evidence base, data collection is often a ‘byproduct of ongoing operations [e.g., staffing, budgeting] or reflects political priorities [e.g., border controls]’.⁷ These constraints result in irregular migration data frequently being of low quality, underutilised and prone to misinterpretation.^{3,14}

Due to their ‘increased velocity, volume, and variety’⁴ compared to traditional data sources, new and emerging sources such as big data increasing gain attention, ranging from mobile phone data and social media to satellite imagery.^{4,5,8,11} However, instead of being the silver bullet, these data sources also come with considerable challenges and risks. Big data are often prone to bias as its generation depends on access, geography and demography.^{4,10,11} Using such data could also pose security and ethical issues: datasets often include identifiable information, individuals cannot actively consent to data collection and processing, and there is a risk that data could be used for surveillance, discrimination or even persecution of specific groups.^{4,8,10} Importantly, much of this data is produced by private companies.⁸ Because of these challenges, big data ‘may not always be appropriate or may need to be used in conjunction with traditional methods’.¹⁰

Progress on improving data on migration and displacement

Despite these long-standing challenges, considerable progress has been made at national, regional and international levels to improve the quality and innovation of migration and displacement data.^{5,8} A growing range of data is now accessible through publicly available databases, such as IOM’s [Migration Data Portal](#), [Missing Migrants Project](#), [Africa Migration Data Network \(AMDN\)](#) and [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#), as well as the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement’s [Forced Displacement Microdata dashboard](#).

Data are a prominent part of both the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration¹⁵ and the Global Compact on Refugees.¹⁶ Several key sets of recommendations have also been published in recent years, including the ‘International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (IRRS)’,¹³ the ‘International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS)’,¹⁷ the ‘International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics (IROSS)’¹⁸—all developed by the Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics (EGRIS)—as well as the recently endorsed ‘Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration and Temporary Mobility’.¹⁹

¹⁰ Franklins, L. H. V., Parrish, R., Burns, R., Cafilisch, A., Mallick, B., Rahman, T., Routsis, V., López, A. S., Tatem, A. J., & Trigwell, R. (2021). Key opportunities and challenges for the use of big data in migration research and policy. *UCL Open Environment*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444/ucloe.000027>

¹¹ Luca, M., Barlacchi, G., Oliver, N., & Lepri, B. (2022). Leveraging mobile phone data for migration flows. In A.A. Salah, E. E. Korkmaz, & T. Bircan (Eds.), *Data science for migration and mobility studies* (pp. 71-93). <https://doi.org/10.5871/bacad/9780197267103.001.0001>

¹² Mukhekhe Mukoro, V., Loschmann, C., Tabasso, D., & Galal, H. (2024). *Violence-driven displacement in Mexico: Why including internally displaced persons in national statistics is necessary to inform a protection-based response*. <https://www.jointdatacenter.org/violence-driven-displacement-in-mexico-why-including-internally-displaced-persons-in-national-statistics-is-necessary-to-inform-a-protection-based-response/>

¹³ EGRIS. (2018). *International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-manuals-and-guidelines/-/ks-gq-18-004>

¹⁴ Kierans, D., & Kraler, A. (2025b). Introduction – Making the case for better data on irregular migration. In D. Kierans & A. Kraler (Eds.), *Handbook on irregular migration: Data concepts, methods and practices* (pp. 17-22). University of Krems Press. <https://doi.org/10.48341/g31s-vq79>

¹⁵ UN. (2018a). *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*. https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180711_final_draft_0.pdf

¹⁶ UN. (2018b). *Global Compact on Refugees*. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-compact-refugees-booklet>

¹⁷ EGRIS. (2020). *International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS)*. <https://egrisstats.org/recommendations/international-recommendations-on-idp-statistics-iris/>

¹⁸ EGRIS. (2023). *International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics (IROSS)*. <https://egrisstats.org/recommendations/international-recommendations-on-statelessness-statistics-iross/>

¹⁹ UN. (2025). *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration and Temporary Mobility*. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/sconcerns/migration/docs/Recommendations%20on%20Statistics%20of%20International%20Migration%20and%20Temporary%20Mobility.pdf>

Importantly, ‘doing it better is not just about collecting more data’⁸ but about making better use of the data that already exists, ensuring that data are properly contextualised so that different actors can critically assess and use them, and ensuring that data are ethically managed.^{4,5,8}

Outlining the fourth session in the Webinar Series

The fourth webinar will explore the current state of data on migration and forced displacement in the Global South, persistent challenges and promising opportunities and innovative tools to strengthen evidence for research, practice and policy.

➔ Find below the invitation including more information about the fourth session in the Webinar Series, which will take place on Tuesday, 9 December 2025, from 4.00pm to 5.30pm (GMT+1). Register using this [link](#).



The graphic features a light green background with wavy patterns. At the top, logos for UM6P, AIRESS (Africa Institute for Research in Economics and Social Sciences), IDRC-CRDI, and Canada are displayed. Below these is the IDRC Research Chair on Forced Displacement logo in three languages. A central green banner reads 'RESEARCH CHAIR ON FORCED DISPLACEMENT WEBINAR SERIES'. The main title is 'DATA ON MIGRATION AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES'. The date and time are 'Tuesday, 9 December from 4pm to 5.30pm (GMT+1)'. The moderator is 'Moderated by Myriam Cherti, IDRC Research Chair on Forced Displacement at UM6P'. Five speakers are listed with their photos and titles: Namira Negrn (Director of the African Migration Observatory), Karima Belhaj (Head of Migration and Mobility Department, Haut Commissariat au Plan du Maroc), Kenza Aggad (Capacity Development and Statistics Officer, IOM), Iván Martín (Affiliate Professor, UM6P), and Mary Boatema Setrana (Director of the Centre for Migration Studies and IDRC Research Chair on Forced Displacement in Anglophone West Africa, University of Ghana). A QR code is provided for participation.

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RESEARCH CHAIR ON FORCED DISPLACEMENT WEBINAR SERIES

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DISCUSSANT
Mary Boatema Setrana
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TO PARTICIPATE

