



CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN THE MANIPUR VALLEY DISTRICTS

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ABSTRACT

The ethnic conflict between the largely Hindu Meiteis community of the valley district of Manipur and Christians from the Kuki and Zo tribes in the hill districts of Manipur happened on May 3, 2023, resulting in one of the worst humanitarian crises for the northeastern part of India since its Independence. Close to 58,000 people have been rendered homeless due to the ethnic conflict and have become internally displaced persons who are taking shelter elsewhere, mainly in other valley districts like Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Thoubal, and Kakching. It has been three years since then, but still, because of the government's intervention and rehabilitation program worth Rs. 523 crores, many are still living in camps and have difficulties in every aspect of life. This essay will discuss some problems encountered by the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the valley areas of Manipur.

Keywords – Internal Displacement, Relief Camp Conditions, Psychosocial Trauma, Rehabilitation and Resettlement, Human Rights Violations



1. Introduction

As per the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (GPID), internal displacement refers to the involuntary relocation inside the territorial jurisdiction of one's country and is regarded as one of the largest humanitarian challenges. In the case of Manipur, however, the situation has reached a very crucial point. It became obvious that the violence spread faster than the state's ability to control the situation. Many houses, businesses, religious institutions, and structures were set ablaze. Vigilance groups comprising armed men are actively participated in the violent activities. The number of displaced persons was determined to be 58,881 according to official government statistics as of May 3, 2023, with 174 relief camps established as of March 10, 2026, with over 260 fatalities (Assam Tribune, 2026; Amnesty International, 2025).

These districts account for only ten percent of the land area of Manipur, yet they include the majority of the Meitei population and relief camps that accommodate displaced Meiteis from other nearby bordering districts, as well as Kukis-Zos displaced either within or near the valley regions.

Conflict and Extent of Displacement

The conflict in Manipur does not arise out of any single reason. The reasons for the conflict stem from historical inequities in power between valley and hill regions, competition for land and resource possession, demographics on both sides, previous insurgencies, narcotic trafficking at the Myanmar border, and mistrust between the predominant Meitei community in the valley of Manipur and Kuki-Zo tribe living in the hills (Homegrown India, 2026). The Meiteis are 53 percent of the Manipur population, while the Nagas and Kukis-Zos represent 40 percent of the population but own 90 percent of the land area in Manipur state (Oxford Human Rights Hub, 2023).

Violence occurred among the two groups, ethnic zones were segregated, displacement took place, and militias emerged, making it impossible for any sort of reconciliation to take place since the institutions did not manage to stop the violence (Homegrown India, 2026).

Displacement of such a magnitude is hard to comprehend. The official statistics suggest that 58,881 individuals have been affected since May 3, 2023 (Assam Tribune, 2026). In the period when displacement reached its peak, 300 camps were required to be built in order to provide shelter to 60,000 individuals, comprising of men, women, and children, in Imphal valley as well as hills (New Kerala, 2026). The RTI response of April 2026 indicated that there were 174 active relief camps as of March 10, 2026, and this figure was inclusive of the 3,000 temporary housing shelters constructed by Manipur Police Housing Corporation Ltd (Assam Tribune, 2026). Moreover, according to the same report, 7,894 homes were destroyed and 2,646 got damaged during the conflict (Assam Tribune, 2026). In the valley region, the majority of the IDPs is made up of Meiteis who had fled from their place of residence in inter-district border areas, mixed villages, and areas near the hills.

Inadequacy of Proper Shelter and Living Conditions

The problem of inadequate sheltering is the biggest issue that is faced by the internally displaced persons in valley areas. While immediate camps were set up in various schools and government buildings, etc., yet, they were only meant to be temporary shelters. But almost after three years of the unrest, the IDPs continue to live in relief camps.

As per a press release by Amnesty International based on interviews conducted with health professionals, camp inmates, relief organizations, and reporters, there are more than 50,000 people still living in relief camps throughout the region in conditions of poor hygiene and malnutrition (Amnesty International, 2025).

Moreover, while the central government took control of the situation as early as February 2025, it seems that the situation inside the camps remains critical. The camps are overcrowded, which forces the families to live in confined spaces alongside people whom they did not even know. Privacy for women and



girls no longer exists. Moreover, there are very few toilets in relation to the number of people residing in the camps. Water supply is also not always consistent in these camps, and, when available, the quality is poor.

A community worker working in one such camp in a confidential conversation with Amnesty International, reported the situation in the following words, “Healthcare facilities at these camps are pathetic. There are regular cases of measles, dysentery, and fever... There are people with cancers and tuberculosis who require dialysis treatment. The government hospital close by cannot treat such patients, and there are hardly any specialist doctors here, which is a cause of worry. We are getting some help from the civil societies and NGOs but not much from the government” (Amnesty International, 2025).

Lack of Adequate Housing Facilities

The first and foremost problem confronting the IDP camps in valley districts relates to the lack of appropriate housing facilities. Relief camps were arranged in schools, community halls, government buildings, and other such makeshift arrangements. Though these were supposed to be temporary in nature, almost two and a half years after the onset of the conflict, these camps continue to provide accommodation to thousands of people.

As per Amnesty International, which had interviewed the health staff, residents, humanitarian organizations, and media personnel in relief camps in Manipur, “more than 50,000 IDPs still live in the relief camps in the state, in inhuman conditions and with limited access to healthcare, sanitation, and nutrition” (Amnesty International, 2025). Furthermore, despite President’s Rule being imposed on February 2025 in Manipur, which means the suspension of the state government and thus supremacy of the central government in Manipur, no improvements have been seen in the relief camps.

In most cases, people are scared of going back to their respective villages even though their homes exist since the region has been taken over by armed groups and cannot guarantee peace and security. Moreover, some of the houses have either been destroyed or taken over by vigilante groups (Amnesty International, 2025).

Access to food is a problem amongst the displaced persons in the valley regions. Although food assistance was extended by the government, it was not reliable or sufficient. According to a report by Fieldnotes cited in Amnesty International (2024), in February 2024, the provision of relief supplies by the government had been stopped in some camps. People from Churachandpur and other places then started demonstrating to obtain the basic requirements of food. In the wake of these demonstrations, NGOs, churches, and civil organizations started supplying food to the affected people.

Food aid quality is another concern. The displaced population was engaged in agriculture or other business-related work. Due to the disruption of food aid, they may face hunger or starvation. It will be more difficult for children, pregnant women, lactating mothers, older people, and patients suffering from chronic diseases.

According to the report of the People's Tribunal on the Conflict in Manipur (2025), healthcare and nutritional needs of the displaced population in the camps were not met, especially women, children, older people, and disabled people (Ground Zero, 2025). It was reported that the Ministry of Home Affairs had allotted only Rs. 21,700,000 (USD 256,470) for helping relief and rehabilitation efforts for the year 2024-25 (Amnesty International, 2025).

Concerns Pertaining to Healthcare Services and Public Health Emergency

While the insurgency in Manipur resulted in displacement, it has also caused considerable harm to the underdeveloped healthcare system in Manipur. As pointed out by the People’s Tribunal Report, “the healthcare system of Manipur completely broke down due to violence. This involved attacks on healthcare facilities, looting and damaging of medical instruments, ambulances, and other healthcare equipment; there was a total breakdown of referral services and logistics systems” (Ground Zero, 2025).



Healthcare services are difficult to obtain for people who have been internally displaced in the valley regions. The healthcare centres in the valley region lack adequate capacity to provide sufficient healthcare services at the government hospitals. For instances of chronic diseases, things become worse. Some research conducted in the Imphal Review of Arts and Politics Journal (2025) has shown that “In the case of serious sickness, they are normally taken to the private hospitals which are very costly. And this poses a problem for those displaced people who do not have means of survival.”

It can easily be seen what consequences overcrowded refugee camps can have on public health. Many cases have been recorded where there was an outbreak of disease like measles, dysentery, and fever.

The threat of contracting waterborne diseases persists in light of unsanitary conditions. Diseases that normally occur outside of the usual habitat find themselves in the camp environment. Pregnant women and children are especially prone to ill health caused by camp environments. In Manipur, in 2025, four deaths have occurred because of childbirth complications (NENOW, 2025).

Mental Health Crisis

It is imperative to mention the psychological impact of IDP crisis on the wellbeing of the community which is also quite damaging, but goes unnoticed. The violent acts committed in May 2023 were extremely traumatizing for the IDPs as they saw their dear ones being killed, their property being ruined, including religious buildings, and sometimes sexually abused too.

In a survey carried out between October and December 2023 in the district of Imphal East and published in the Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care, it was found out that 65.8% of the IDPs were affected by PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). Furthermore, 24.8% displayed symptoms of moderate anxiety, whereas 15.2% had a severe condition. PTSD was found in more women, people of age 20-59 years, and those who had marital and occupation changes because of the conflict. The destruction of their property also led to PTSD among 75.8% of the community.

From the outcomes achieved at the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences in Imphal, it is evident that the IDPs are experiencing hopelessness, fear, distress, anxiety, alienation from family relations, confusion, and depression. The prolonged period of instability in society has resulted in the collapse of the social infrastructure, and the individuals can no longer adjust to the environment. This is referred to as psychosocial disempowerment, based on the findings of the experts.

Another challenge for the community is uncertainty about returning home. They cannot develop a plan for their resettlement, hence making them hopeless and increasing their likelihood of attempting suicide. Besides, they are lacking psychosocial services and counselling for trauma in the camps, which worsen their situation.

Within the IDP population, the children are the most vulnerable. Those who have grown up witnessing violence as children and have lived in camps where there is nothing resembling normalcy show symptoms of mental trauma and abnormalities.

Disruption in Education

The education system has been adversely affected by the displacement issue in Manipur. According to NLIU Law Review (2025), children in Manipur are facing an uncertain future as their education is hindered. They cannot acquire knowledge in this disruptive environment. As per the results of research carried out in International Journal of Interdisciplinary Approaches in Psychology (2026), the education of displaced children has been disrupted as a result of the displacement issue in Manipur.

Educational disruption occurred through different ways. The structures in the educational institutions from the war-torn regions have been destroyed, converted to camps, and left without occupants. Children attending school in the conflict areas have lost access to school, learning material, and suitable



environment, as well as teachers and friends in the classrooms. Even though schools operate normally in the valley areas, the internally displaced children encountered various obstacles in accessing school. They found it hard to wear uniform, use learning materials, suffer from discrimination and psychological problems, transport issues, among other problems.

Impacts of this nature are indeed alarming. Long term impacts of this nature in education shall have people who are not highly educated, have lower lifetime earnings, low levels of engagement, and among communities which have tensions amongst their ethnic lines, there shall be low levels of social integration leading to peace. Commentators have aptly observed in this context that, “education of a whole generation has been jeopardized.” (New Kerala, 2026) Although there is an intention to rehabilitate the learners in the policy formulated by governments, this is not the case on the ground at all in camps.

Loss of Jobs and Economic Hardship

There have been numerous economic impacts experienced by those displaced due to conflict. These included communities of farmers, traders, government workers, artisans and even daily wage earners having properties such as farms, livestock, shops and even other property. All these have been stripped away from them very quickly. There have been Meitei tribesmen living around borders, whose livelihoods are farming, yet now they find themselves jobless due to the loss of their farm lands.

The authorities have attempted to provide assistance through the provision of job training. However, this initiative did not yield many positive results. Crafts making, pickling, and textiles are not providing any income as there are no links to the markets. "Several respondents have indicated that although the NGOs had made prior commitments, they had failed to come for picking up the finished products, resulting in the labour not receiving due remuneration" (Imphal Review, 2025). This causes further disillusionment among the population.

Furthermore, the unrest affects the economy of valley districts. Transport links between the valleys and the hills are severed, and thus agricultural produce as well as other goods become inaccessible. The number of consumers becomes smaller, which means that small and medium-sized businesses have to deal with the threat of robberies. Officials who were evacuated from hill districts have caused complications within the administration.

Violence Based on Gender and the Vulnerability of Women and Children

Women and children living in the relief camps in Manipur are highly vulnerable. The ladies are vulnerable since they lack a protective environment in the camps. There have been instances of sexual harassment, domestic violence, and abuse by social workers in the relief camps.

According to a report on human rights by Oxford Human Rights Hub (2023), both women and children have had to endure the most brutal form of abuse in the conflict zone. The situation has been exacerbated by the existing culture of patriarchy, while government inefficiency makes the scenario worse. There is no gender-specific facilities in the relief camps, which include provision of lighting, separate toilets, and complaints' reporting mechanism.

The Quint (2024) reported the miserable condition of women who are staying in the relief camps in Manipur. They come together in desperation in an effort to start a new life. However, relief camps, which are supposed to be a safe haven for them, become an arena of nightmares when they reminisce about the sexual assault of their daughters, murder of their husbands, and burning down of their houses. Amnesty International reports at least 32 cases of sexual violence against ethnic tribal communities perpetrated by the armed groups, but nothing happens to those involved (Amnesty International, 2024).

Legal and Documentation Problems

There are numerous legal and documentation problems being faced by the displaced persons from Manipur. Although initially it may seem like these issues are not that apparent, they become serious challenges when



it comes to access to services or relocation. This is due to the fact that, having been engaged in this predicament, they had no choice but to leave behind documents such as land titles, ID cards, diplomas, educational certificates, property titles, etc. India has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and has no policy concerning the situation of the displaced. Nevertheless, India used the Disaster Management Act (DMA) of 2005 to resolve the problem. However, the use of this act to solve the problem is inappropriate for two main reasons. To begin with, this Act deals with natural disaster and not conflicts among communities. Further, the Manipur Disaster Management Policy considers only natural disasters such as earthquake and flood, and completely overlooks communal conflict. As a result, the displaced persons are considered as victims of natural disaster and do not think about their unique conditions.

Although the principle concerning internally displaced persons adopted by the United Nations is not binding on India, yet the country needs to comply with those guidelines since India had ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in 1979.

According to the international law, the displaced people are entitled to get various facilities like housing, drinking water, sanitation, health services, etc., and any denial will amount to violation of the treaty (Amnesty International, 2025).

In the absence of an effective policy, the displaced people have no legal grounds to demand anything from anyone, enjoy their right on property, and remain responsible for losing their property.

The Impunity Issue and Its Impact on Displacement

One of the challenges in tackling the issue of displacement in the valley districts is the absence of punishment in the form of legal sanctions for committing violent acts. As can be seen from the People's Tribunal Report (2025), the violent acts in Manipur were planned and done intentionally on some specific ethnic communities; however, this did not stop the government from taking action against the perpetrators. Both the organizations remain unscared of possible punishment, thus forcing those who are displaced not to return to their native places as they lack security. In the opinion of Human Rights Watch (2025), India's Supreme Court is worried about the total failure of rule of law in Manipur. As per Human Rights Watch (2025), "We sought help and intervention from the Prime Minister in our community's interest, but to no avail, as we saw many of us killed and injured" (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

Insufficiency of the Government's Response

The response of the government to the IDP crisis in the valley regions of Manipur is highly inadequate. The government has taken a tardy approach, lack of resources, and lacks a rights-based approach. As per Aakar Patel of Amnesty International, the lack of consideration for people in relief camps in terms of their needs two years after the breakout of the ethnic conflict is unacceptable on part of the Indian government (Amnesty International, 2025).

The government has passed a ₹523 crore package for Resettlement and Rehabilitation for the period 2025-26, which has a three-stage process (India Today NE, 2025). Phase I covers families that have partial damage to their houses, Phase II covers families having housing plans under PMAY-G in their districts, while Phase III, which is the toughest one, covers moving individuals from valley to hill areas (Assam Tribune, 2026). As of January 2026, about 3,700 families/16,500 IDPs have been resettled at an estimated cost of ₹124 crore (New Kerala, 2026).

Nonetheless, there exist many difficulties. Resettlement requires time proportional to the population affected. Demonstrations were organized by hundreds of individuals within the capital city of Imphal in January 2026 with demands for returning to their homes (New Kerala, 2026). The Special Secretary (Home) states that various problems impact resettlement, such as security, preparation of the place, availability of land, resources, climate, and employment opportunities (Northeast Today, 2025). Security poses a problem that has a significant impact on resettlement. The transition from emergency aid to Direct



Benefit Transfer (DBT) of Internally Displaced Persons since November 2025 was a fantastic idea, given its flexibility and recognition (Northeast Today, 2025). Nonetheless, DBT cannot substitute the need for safe resettlement involving security, housing, and job opportunities among other things.

Disintegration of Social Structure and Loss of Cultural Identity

The internally displaced population in the valley is suffering from not only homelessness but also disintegration of social structure and loss of cultural identity. Those who followed common traditions, shared agricultural methods, spoke the same language, and were strongly bonded by families are being disintegrated very rapidly. The family bond which was once so strong that members could not be torn apart easily now find themselves dispersed among different camps and even in different countries.

In the camps within the valley, internally displaced persons who come from the same village try to stay in one place in order to preserve their social ties. But because of the camp life style, which includes crowding, dependence on aid, lack of activity, and insecurity, these social ties begin to break down. The social structure of the communities, which is an integral part of resolving conflicts, is not functioning properly in the camps.

Implications

The disintegration socially and culturally has implications for how people can go ahead and reconcile themselves with others in the same community, because individuals who survive through fear and dependence cannot be expected to move on to negotiation and compromise in order to have peace.

Recommendations

Among the recommendations made based on the results presented above include measures from different angles.

1. The aspect of safety is very essential in securing the lives of such people not only before but also during the process of relocation. What should be done is to ensure that these internally displaced persons do not go back into areas controlled by armed groups.
2. The vigilantism needs to be addressed by the Indian government, and perpetrators of violence should be dealt with appropriately.
3. Mental health counselling needs to increase. Given the fact that about 65.8% of the persons in such camps suffer from PTSD (Rajkumari et al., 2024), it cannot be an excuse for the absence of mental health counselling services for the victims of trauma. Such counselling needs to include professional psychologists, community-based services, and special programs targeting children.
4. Whenever livelihood services are offered, then market access should be considered. These IDPs need skills, capital, production capacity and access to markets in order to sell their produce.
5. There should be educational programs targeting the children of the IDPs. That is to say that there should be operating schools, which will either operate from within the camp or near the camp. Psychological help for traumatized kids and remedial education for slow learners should be included in this plan.
6. Gender-sensitive programs are also required. Lighting, separate toilets for men and women, and a process of registering complains should be available. Counselling and legal assistance for victims of gender-based violence are required as well. Those perpetrating sexual violence need to be made accountable regardless of their social standing.
7. Those IDPs whose important documents have been lost should get support in retrieving them and accessing legal counsel. If that does not happen, they cannot avail themselves of social benefits, jobs, and legal aid.



8. Accountability and justice are crucial to any sustainable solution as stated in the People's Tribunal Report (2025): "accountability and justice are essential to building trust, democracy, and harmony in Manipur."

9.

Conclusion

People who have been displaced from their homeland within valley regions of Manipur are experiencing many problems. They do not have a house, employment, social relationships and they feel insecure and unwanted. Besides, they are living in very crowded camps that are less than human. Not only are their children deprived of their right to education, but they are also going through psychological trauma and are exposed to gender-based violence. The most serious problem they are facing is that they cannot go back home.

Unfortunately, after three years the help that is being provided for them is still not enough. The government promises an assistance package worth Rs. 523 crores along with a three-phase rehabilitation process. However, this will not be enough until they have security, justice, laws, and sufficient help.

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement stipulate that the internally displaced people (IDPs) have rights to the security of person within their countries, the right to leave their country, the right to seek asylum, and the right not to be subjected to refoulement to their countries of origin. Apart from those, the right to repatriation with dignity is another fundamental right possessed by the internally displaced people (IDPs). There is more than financial support needed to guarantee such rights.

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