

Internally displaced people

This month's newsletter brings you information on the discussion of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

1.1 Internally displaced persons

Close to 25 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) - roughly twice the total number of refugees - are currently in need of assistance. These refugees have been displaced from their homes and livelihoods by violence and persecution.

Because they remain within the borders of their own countries, they do not fall under the legal status of refugees. The primary responsibility for protecting and assisting these internal refugees therefore rests with the governments of the respective states.

Cases such as the humanitarian crisis in Darfur have shown that often IDPs are not only denied assistance but deliberately displaced as part of their government's policies. Interference with the nation-states in cases where the assistance to IDPs is not given is problematic since it entails infraction of the principle of sovereignty and national self-determination. Despite this, there is a moral imperative to act in the case of internally displaced persons and concerted action of a wide range of humanitarian, development, and political actors is required.

The international community has reacted to the problem of IDPs in different ways. One of the approaches is to establish a framework of legal norms guaranteeing the assistance of IDPs. The most important contribution so far has been the development of international standards the United Nations agreed on in 1998, the non-binding "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement". Additionally, in 2002 the UN established the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division to address the needs of the internally displaced refugees. Via such measures the international community has acknowledged and addressed the problem of IDPs. Still, legal and binding solutions are not yet provided for and real commitment to helping the displaced civilians is often lacking.

1.2 Legal aspects

Since IDPs do not cross borders they are not protected by the 1951 Refugee Convention but mainly by national and human rights laws. International humanitarian law only applies if the IDPs are in a country undergoing armed conflict. In this case, IDPs are considered civilians and therefore protected by The Fourth Geneva Convention "relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War". This convention prohibits displacement of civilians in armed conflicts. If this rule is not respected, international forces can offer protection during displacement by prohibiting attacks on

civilians and their belongings, as well as preventing starvation, destruction of vital objects of the civilian population, and collective punishments.

The largest numbers of IDPs are found in countries affected by domestic conflict where public institutions and services have collapsed. To confront these shortcomings and to provide a legal framework for the protection of IDPs, the UN launched the first international standard for IDPs in 1998, the "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement". The principles outline rights and guarantees relevant to the protection of persons forced into displacement while displacement is taking place, as well as during return or resettlement and reintegration. This legally non-binding document seeks to empower governments and humanitarian organizations working with displaced persons.

Babajalscha Meili
ISN Editor

1.3 International organizations

Protections and Solutions in Situations of Internal Displacement: Learning from UNHCR's Operational Experience

This report was published by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2002. The aim of this report is to identify and compare good practices of UNHCR operational experience with the protection of internally displaced persons.

Internally Displaced Persons: General Assembly Resolutions, by UNHCR, Geneva, Switzerland

This website provides an overview of the UN General Assembly resolutions in connection with IDPs from 1994 until 2002.

Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division (IDD), by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Geneva, Switzerland and New York, US

The main role of the division is to coordinate an effective response to the needs of the internally displaced people worldwide. The division provides support to those in the field responding to internally displaced persons crises. This website provides information on the division's activities as well as reports and documents.

Consistent and Predictable Responses to IDPs: A Review of UNHCR Decision-Making Processes

This report was published by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in March 2005. This review was commissioned by the UNHCR's Internal Working Group on Internally Displaced Persons in order to bring greater clarity and consistency to the interpretation of UNHCR policy and operational guidelines on involvement with IDPs.

Within and Beyond Borders: An Independent Review of Post-Conflict Fund Support to Refugees and the Internally Displaced

This report was published by the World Bank Group in Washington, DC, in 2004. This independent review assesses the performance of seventeen post-conflict fund grants relating to IDPs and refugees.

Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, Switzerland and New York, US
The representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of IDPs was appointed to engage in dialogue and advocacy with governments and other entities concerning this issue. His activities include promoting and disseminating the rights articulated in the “Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement” and undertaking country visits. This website provides reports and documents.

Workshop and Policy Forum on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement
This workshop paper was published by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs together with other humanitarian organizations working to assist IDPs. This paper summarizes the workshop's findings on how to address the problem of IDPs in Ethiopia.

IRIN Web Special on Internal Displacement, by the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)

This web special includes detailed reports on internal displacement in Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Sudan, and Uganda. The website also provides background articles, key documents, as well as latest refugee and IDPs reports. IRIN is part of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Action (OCHA) and is tasked with providing news and analysis about sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

1.4 Non-governmental organizations

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons and International Humanitarian Law, by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Geneva, Switzerland
This website provides links to the essential legal texts covering the protection of refugees and IDPs. Furthermore there are links to official documents and statements by the ICRC and information on the ICRC's role in connection to internally displaced refugees and refugees in general.

Refugees and Displaced Persons, by Human Rights Watch, New York, US
This website provides general information on IDPs and refugees as well as country analyses and reports.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Geneva
The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre is an international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide. Through its work, the center contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people who have become IDPs as a result of conflicts or human rights violations. At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based IDMC runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries. Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the center advocates for solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

Internally Displaced Persons: Learning Module, by the Norwegian Refugee Council, Oslo, Norway
This module explores the UN definition of IDPs and examines the differences between this definition and that of refugees. In a second part, the roles and responsibilities in relation to IDPs are

examined. Finally the genesis, structure, and status of the UN's Guiding Principles on international displacement are outlined.

Protecting and Assisting the Internally Displaced

This supplement issue of the Forced Migration Review was published by the Refugees Studies Centre in Oxford, UK, in October 2005. It provides a collection of articles by humanitarian community decision-makers, presenting different views on the future of IDP regime.

Food Security Report: Internally Displaced Persons, by Action Contre la Faim, Paris, France

This report was published by Action Contre la Faim in 2005. This report is based on regular monitoring and evaluation of the food security situation of IDPs in Liberia. This document relates the observations regarding the food security situation and formulates recommendations for the humanitarian community to efficiently address the needs of internally displaced Liberians.

Internal Displacement Research Guide, by Forced Migration Online, Oxford, UK

The aim of this research guide is to give an introduction to the main debates on internal displacement. This guide provides texts and overviews connected with links to research texts providing further illustrations of the topics discussed.

Dilemmas of Development-Induced Displacement, by Forced Migration Online, Oxford, UK

This supplement issue was published by Refugees Studies Centre in Oxford, UK, in 2002. The articles discuss legal, ethical, social, and political aspects of development-induced displacement.

1.5 Research and academia

The Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, by the Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, US

The Project on Internal Displacement was created to promote a more effective national, regional, and international response to the global problem of IDPs and to support the work of the representative of the UN Secretary-General in carrying out the responsibilities of his mandate. This website provides crucial documents as well as commentary and analyses.

Orphans of Conflict: Caring for the Internally Displaced

This report by the United States Institute of Peace examines the crisis of IDPs. The report proposes five steps to improve the global response to internal displacement. The author says that it is essential to build ownership of IDPs by affected governments and foreign donors, using the concept of the "responsibility to protect" instead of an ill-defined concept of sovereignty as non-interference in internal affairs. Additionally, he suggests ways on how to implement rules and standards governing the response to IDPs, reform the response of the UN and the US, and create a permanent advocacy constituency for IDPs.

Refugee Studies Centre at the Department of International Development, University of Oxford, UK

The Refugee Studies Centre is a multidisciplinary center for research and teaching on the causes and consequences of forced migration. Besides research reports, articles, and working papers, the website provides access to the center's journals Forced Migration Review and Journal of Refugee

Studies and to the book series *Studies in Forced Migration*. The center also hosts and coordinates the Forced Migration Online, an electronic platform for online resources dealing with the situation of forced migrants worldwide. This website also features the FMO research guide *Internal Displacement*, which aims to give an insight into the main debates regarding internal displacement.

Selected Bibliography on the Global Crisis of Internal Displacement, by the Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, US

This bibliography released by the Brookings-CUNY Project on Internal Displacement includes more than 800 items on the global crisis of internal displacement. The thematic categories encompass basic texts and sources of information, web resources, early writings on internal displacement, and a general overview of displacement caused by conflict and human rights violations. Also covered are displacement caused by development projects, legal framework, institutional framework, vulnerable groups, protection strategies, return, resettlement and reintegration, and development strategies. The aim was to compile and catalog the substantial materials on the study of internal displacement for scholars and practitioners.

A National Responsibility Framework for Situations of Internal Displacement, by the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, Washington, DC, US

This publication focuses on the national responsibility of governments for protecting and assisting IDPs in their countries, as set forth in the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. The framework outlined in this publication aims to provide guidance to assist governments in addressing internal displacement in their countries. Furthermore, it is intended to be a tool for evaluating the extent to which national responsibility is being effectively exercised.

No Power to Protect: The African Union Mission in Sudan, by Refugees International, Washington, DC, US

This report was published by Refugees International in Washington, DC, US, in 2005. The report analyzes the African Union's Mission in Sudan (AMIS), arguing that the operation can only successfully carry out its duties if the US and the UN take active measures to provide support. The authors consider the strengthening of the mandate and the provision of more funding, weapons, and equipment as essential to allow AMIS to pro-actively protect civilians in Darfur. Refugees International is an organization assessing humanitarian problems and acting on behalf of refugees and IDPs. The organization's website on IDPs provides policy recommendations as well as news, information on missions, and photo reports.