NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH

Ignored Displaced Persons:
the plight of IDPs in urban areas

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Introduction

UNHCR describes internally displaced persons (IDPs) as "probably the largest group of vulnerable people in the world."[1] Although it is nearly impossible to estimate the global number of urban IDPs, the figures that do exist would put the total at nearly four million.[2] Yet this group remains silent, largely ignored, and without hope for durable solutions to their plight.

Urban IDPs are often denied basic human rights; living in squalor and lacking physical security and freedom of movement. Without documentation urban IDPs are left unprotected by their national government and suffer as a result of insufficient food, water, healthcare and education. Women and children displaced in urban areas are vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence. Moreover, urban IDPs are unable to improve their situation, since limited access to livelihoods prevents them from becoming self-reliant.

There exist a number of obstacles to finding solutions for urban IDPs. Firstly, the difficulty in identifying this group hinders accurate data collection, thorough research and effective policy making. Secondly, the dynamics of displacement are particularly complex and interconnected, and can have many phases. Thirdly, urban IDPs have specific and often unidentified capacities and needs. Finally, their situation is complicated by political concerns regarding sovereignty and international jurisdiction. Urban IDPs have therefore been categorized as a 'messy' beneficiary; receiving little attention from donors and international aid agencies preferring to focus initiatives on more visible and attainable targets.

These factors have conspired to create a vacuum of protection for this particularly vulnerable group, who are without access to the safeguards and assistance available to most other persons of concern. The predicament of ignored urban IDPs thus requires the immediate attention of national authorities, international organizations and civil society.

Visibility and definitions

The issue of urban IDPs suffers from the lack of a clear definition. Without a clarification of the actual target for new policy, it is impossible to design and implement effective durable solutions. Although it is often difficult to analytically distinguish rural areas from urban areas, and the forced internally displaced from regular rural-to-urban migrants, these distinctions are crucial for national and international authorities to be able to provide measured and effective assistance to millions of urban IDPs.

Historically, there has been a wide-ranging misunderstanding and misuse of the term 'urban IDP'. Confusion exists mainly in respect to whether the 'urban' aspect of the label applies to the place of departure or the place of destination. Indeed, the term 'urban IDP' has been applied to city dwellers displaced into the countryside, as well as

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[1] UNHCR, (2007). *Internally Displaced Persons: Questions and Answers*. (UNHCR: Geneva), p. 4. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/basics/BASICS/405ef8c64.pdf>.

[2] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, (2007). *Addressing Urban Displacement - A Project Description*. (IDMC, Norwegian Refugee Council: Geneva), p. 2.

to returning refugees who have become urbanized during their time spent in a host country. To clarify, an 'urban IDP' is a person displaced from their place of habitual residence (be it rural or urban, at home or abroad) into an urban environment in their own country.

Urban IDPs are very difficult to identify, however. Unlike IDPs in rural camps, urban IDPs are not formally separated from the local community or housed in easily recognizable regions. In reality, they are found scattered across urban areas, or residing with host families. Even in instances where urban IDPs inhabit designated buildings or areas, they usually rely on local markets and social services. Thus they are *de facto* integrated in urban areas, making it difficult to distinguish them from economic migrants and the urban poor. The actions of urban IDPs may further hinder efforts to locate them; urban IDPs are unlikely to reveal themselves in cases where their security is threatened.

IDPs in urban environments are less photogenic and less visible than those in camps. The plight of urban IDPs therefore goes largely ignored by an international media flooded with other compelling images. Effective protection is further limited by the fact that both host governments and donors are not generally keen on assisting IDPs in urban environments because many assume that those who make it to cities can support themselves.

What is 'urban'?

Firstly, the word 'urban' is a broad and subjective term of reference, with widely varying definitions. According to the Oxford English dictionary, it is an adjective relating to a town or a city and derives from the Latin *urbanus*, from *urbs* meaning 'city', but the term is also often applied to conurbations and metropolitan areas. Even cities themselves have differing scales. For example, Tokyo accommodates over 30 million people, whereas the city of Ferdania in Saudi Arabia has only one police station, one school, one market, one gas station, one health centre, and about 10 houses.[3]

Official records may in theory provide guidance in demarcating an urban area, but this also has associated risks. Many peri-urban or squatter settlements are excluded from official statistics and do not appear on city maps.[4] Urban sprawl is also a complicating factor; the tendency for a city and its suburbs to spread into the surrounding rural areas makes it impossible to define the border of an urban region that is constantly changing.

For the purposes of this paper, 'urban' areas will include surrounding suburbs, in order to incorporate urban IDP camps located on the outskirts of cities, or along peripheral city roads.

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[3] Information available at <http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_the_smallest_city_in_the_world>

[4] Loren B. Landau, (2004). *Forced Migration Online Research Guide: Urban Refugees*. Available at < http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo024/fmo024.pdf>, p. 12.

What is an 'IDP'?

Another complexity lies in the precise definition of IDPs; an acronym lamented a "soulless shorthand of bureaucracy" by UNHCR.[5] According to the agency, "UNHCR has an interest in the protection and welfare of persons who have been displaced by persecution, situations of general violence, conflict or massive violations of human rights: in other words, all those, who, had they crossed an international frontier, would have had a claim to international protection."[6] Notably, this description does not include IDPs displaced as a result of natural disasters or development activities. Nonetheless, the subsequent 'overriding' consensus is that these persons are also worthy of attention, since they can also be subject to discrimination and human rights violations in the course of their displacement.[7]

The term IDP is a descriptive, not a legal definition, since the legal rights of IDPs are upheld by their local government.[8] As such, a difficulty arises in categorizing children born to IDPs, as the child has never actually been displaced from their habitual residence. This is another problem with the UNHCR definition of IDPs, and represents a significant protection gap for children of concern. Moreover, there is no agreement on when internal displacement ends.[9] Confounding the problem of definition further is the fact that the internally displaced are often lazily referred to as "refugees", despite remaining within their national borders.

For the purposes of this paper, urban IDPs will thus be defined more broadly, in line with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. That is, an urban IDP lives outside of a rural setting, and fulfils the following criteria:

> persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.[10]

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[5] UNHCR, (2007). *Internally Displaced Persons: Questions and Answers*. (UNHCR: Geneva), p. 4. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/basics/BASICS/405ef8c64.pdf>.

[6] UNHCR, (2000). *Internally Displaced Persons: The Role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. (UNHCR: Geneva), p. 3. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/excom/EXCOM/3ae68d150.pdf>

[7] Roberta Cohen, (2004). 'The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: An Innovation in International Standard Setting,' *Global Governance,* Vol. 10 (2004), p. 466.

[8] Walter Kälin, (2000). 'Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: Annotations,' *Studies in Transnational Legal Policy*, No. 32 (Washington, D.C.: American Society of International Law and the Brookings Institution Project on Internal Displacement)*,* pp. 13-19.

[9] See *Forced Migration Review Special Issue*, (2003). 'When does internal displacement end?' *FMR No. 17*, May 2003. (Oxford: University of Oxford).

[10] United Nations Commission on Human Rights, (1998). *Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons: Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,* UN doc. E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2 (11 February 1998).

Dynamics of displacement

Urban IDPs are a unique and understudied vulnerable population. The complex dynamics of their displacement motivates further research whilst simultaneously being a hindrance to the methodological process. The causes of displacement are many and varied within and between countries, as well as over different time periods.[11] The process of displacement of an urban IDP is not simply a one-off movement from rural to urban areas, nor is urban settlement a permanent or static state of affairs. Urban IDPs often reach towns and cities having been displaced more than once before, and usually having found refuge somewhere along the way.

Furthermore, the situation of urban IDPs continues to change and evolve once they have arrived in the urban environment. Urban IDPs move within towns and cities as they seek to improve their living conditions and livelihood opportunities. The urban displaced also structure social networks and geographical proximity within urban areas to form urban IDP communities, such as 'Acholi Town' in Kampala. Some of these areas have subsequently been the target of forced government evictions, resulting in the secondary displacement of already uprooted individuals or groups. The situation of urban IDPs is thus extremely insecure and volatile, even following their settlement in a new urban environment.

Causes of displacement

A narrow conception of urban IDPs being displaced by armed conflict is insufficient to describe and understand the motivations and needs of this diverse group. In reality, a sole cause for forced internal displacement and the subsequent formation of an urban IDP population can be difficult to identify. Although there is usually a short-term catalyst, it is common for a number of contributory factors to convince people that migration to urban areas will provide a better life for themselves and/or their family. Moreover, the short-term and long-term factors are inextricably linked. It must be recognized that the causes of internal displacement cannot be treated as independent variables - there are complex linkages between them.

The causes for the displacement of the populations that become urban IDPs also vary across genders, ages and ethnic groups. For example, certain individuals may seek physical safety in urban areas, such as the children in danger of abduction in Ugandan rural IDP camps, or women at risk of sexual and gender based violence. Thousands of young men who lack employment opportunities in rural IDP camps have become urban

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[11] The question as to weather a nomad can become an urban IDP is another definitional ambiguity. The existing definition of an IDP would indeed include a nomad displaced to an urban area, since the definition of displacement is from a place of habitual residence. For example, nomads in Somalia have been displaced from their land as a result of droughts, with some migrating to urban areas. This is a noteworthy, yet hitherto underreported dynamic of internal displacement in urban areas. A parallel issue, that this paper does not seek to address, is the sedentarization of nomads; a policy utilized by a number of governments to forcibly keep nomads in a single location. In a sense, these groups are internally displaced from the lands that they are prevented from reaching if they so desire. This is an issue with no clear consensus, but certainly seems to constitute an aspect of protection of IDPs that requires discussion and clarification.

IDPs in Baku, Azerbaijan to seek remunerated work.[12] This group thus holds urban IDP status as well as being *de facto* economic migrants, frustrating attempts by most international aid agencies to distinguish between the two.

It is thus impracticable to try to define a single reason for urban forced displacement since no urban IDP population is homogenous. Nonetheless, despite the complexities in attempting to compare the relative importance of causal factors amongst different population groups, it is possible to categorize a few broad themes and similarities between case studies.

Conflict and primary movements

Often the most immediate and visible cause of rural to urban forced migration is conflict. Global trends show a dramatic increase in societal conflict, with intrastate conflicts having been the most prevalent form of armed conflict between 1950 and 2005.[13] The changing nature of warfare has resulted in millions of people being internally displaced, as local battles spill over into civilian areas. In Liberia, the tangible threat of advancing rebels caused a mass influx of people into Monrovia, the capital city, in 2003. Monrovia's IDP population of up to 200,000 people is composed of rural Liberians as well as those displaced from rural IDP camps.[14]

Some urban IDP populations are the product of deliberate acts. There have been cases where military action has been instigated with the specific intent of displacing local populations. This has been evident, for example, in the oil-rich areas of Southern Sudan, where the agro-pastoral Nuer and Dinka people were displaced from their traditional lands.[15]

Secessionist movements have produced urban IDP populations, particularly in the countries of Eastern Europe. Separatist conflict in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia produced thousands of protracted urban IDPs in Georgia. According to the Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) there are approximately 247,000 IDPs in the country, the majority of whom live in the urban centres of Tbilisi, Zugdidi and Kutaisi.[16] In Kosovo, the actions of the international community also caused significant internal displacement. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombing campaign and the subsequent arrival of international peacekeepers allowed the return of Kosovo Albanians, whilst many non-ethnic Albanians, mostly Serbians, were forced to flee to urban areas to escape violence.

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[12] Asen Balikci, (2004). 'IDPs in Baku: A Qualitative Approach,' *Report prepared for World Bank*. (University of Montreal, Canada), p. 3.

[13] Human Security Center, (2006). *Human Security Brief 2006*. (University of British Colombia, Canada), p. 8.

[14] Damian Lilly, (2007). *Camp management in IDP Collective Centres: The development of best practice*. (Camp Coordination Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster), p. 22. "There are no official figures for how many IDPs occupied public buildings at this time, but according to local sources it could have been as many as 150-200,000 people. There were 30,000 people congregated alone in the national football stadium, which became an epicenter of the crisis."

[15] Human Rights Watch, (2003). *Sudan, Oil and Human Rights*. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/sudan1103/sudanprint.pdf>.

[16] Damian Lilly, (2007). *Camp management in IDP Collective Centres: The development of best practice*. (Camp Coordination Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster), p. 34.

Conflict and other types of movement

Rural to urban forced displacement is sometimes a secondary internal displacement. People living in the rural IDP camps of Northern Uganda have been defined as among the most vulnerable in the world because of the high frequency of murders, rapes and mutilations in the camps.[17] Every evening at dusk there used to be a mass exodus of children, who congregated in urban areas to try to prevent their abduction or recruitment as child soldiers. Many other IDPs decided to leave the camps for urban areas, after having weighed up the relative safety of the two. The cities of Kampala and Jinja now host large populations of urban IDPs that have fled from rural IDP camps.[18]

Temporary urban IDPs became common in East Timor during 2006, when many people travelled to sleep overnight in churches and schools in urban locations to escape the violence, and returned to their villages during the daytime. Similarly, many Nepalese have become transitory urban IDPs. They travel long distances to come down from the mountains to find safety overnight in villages and towns.

Circular rural-to-urban forced displacement is found amongst the inhabitants of Casamance villages in Senegal. Residents of Boutoute have been displaced into Ziguinchor town by rebel attacks on three occasions, returning after a few months when the situation is deemed safer.[19] A World Food Programme study of 2003 claimed that there were more than 38,000 IDPs in the town.[20]

Intra-urban displacement

Somalia provides a good example of complex multiple urban displacements. Fighting within Mogadishu initially displaced thousands to other parts of the city. Many families residing in urban IDP camps in Mogadishu have also been repeatedly displaced, for some, it is their second or third displacement in the capital.[21]

Urban IDPs in Colombia, who make up more than half of all IDPs in the country, also experience intra-urban displacement. According to the Project Counselling Service, "social and political leaders are regular targets of threats and intimidations, and an unprecedented number…have been murdered during the past years (24 displaced people were killed during 2003). The urbanization of war puts Cucuta's displaced population at huge risk, contributing to the increase in intra-urban displacement."[22]

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[17] Sandra I. Sohne, (2006). *Coping with Displacement: The Case of Internally Displaced Persons in Jinja, Uganda*. Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis, The Fletcher School.

[18] See the work of The Refugee Law Project (RLP) within the Faculty of Law of Makerere University in Uganda. Numerous research and advocacy papers available at <www.refugeelawproject.org>.

[19] Martin Evans, (2007). 'The Suffering is Too Great: Urban Internally Displaced Persons in the Casamance Conflict, Senegal,' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2007; 20: 60-85, p. 63.

[20] World Food Programme, (2004). *Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation - Senegal 10188.1: Post conflict Relief and Rehabilitation in the Casamance.* Projects for Executive Board Approval, document WFP/EB.3/2004/8-B/1, (Rome: World Food Programme).

[21] Integrated Regional Information Network for Central and Eastern Africa (IRIN – CEA), 27 April 1999, *Somalia revisited - IRIN special report on Mogadishu* (Part 1 of 2).

[22] Project Counselling Service (PCS), (2004). PCS Internal, April-May 2004-05-24. Available at <http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpDocuments)/6AF43E99B98E0372802570B7005904FB/$file/PCS+Internal+April-May+04+13May04.pdf>.

Inter-urban displacement

Inter-urban displacement is another complicated trend in urban IDPs' movement. The search for assistance often takes the urban internally displaced from town to town. In Colombia, after having moved between several urban areas, the majority finally end up in the slums of Bogotá, Barranquilla, Medellín, Cali and Cartagena.[23]

International inter-urban displacement is seen in several regions of Somalia, as returning refugees choose to return to urban centres. This often takes place amongst urbanized returnees who fled rural areas to urban centres abroad, and would thus find it difficult to reintegrate in their original agricultural community. For example, Hargeisa town hosts about 60% of the Somali returnee population, most of whom repatriated spontaneously between 1991 and 1997.[24] Similarly, a large proportion of the millions of returning Afghan refugees have returned to Kabul.[25] This trend puts additional pressure on already stretched services in urban areas, leaving returning refugees, urban IDPs and the urban poor in precarious situations.

Economic opportunities

IDPs housed in rural camps sometimes engage in secondary movements to urban areas to seek employment, which exemplifies the absence of a clear distinction between forced and voluntary economic migrants in urban IDP situations. The boundary is particularly hazy in protracted IDP camp situations where livelihood opportunities are negligible.

In Azerbaijan for example, although no immediate threat of violence is posed to rural IDP camp inhabitants, there is an acute scarcity of resources, lack of education and health care. The dearth of employment opportunities has prevented the majority of Azerbaijan's urban IDPs from becoming self-reliant and from finding a durable solution to their plight. This has led to secondary migration to urban areas such as the capital, Baku, to ensure the survival of IDP families and their livelihoods. Indeed, just over half of the IDPs in Azerbaijan are located in urban areas.[26] The dire living conditions in the rural IDP camps supports the argument that IDPs' secondary movement is also a type of forced migration, and further contributes to the complex and overlapping dynamics of forced and voluntary economic migration of urban IDPs.

In other parts of the world, however, the reverse trend can be observed. Urban to rural secondary forced displacement is evident amongst urban IDPs in the Casamance region of Senegal. Many urban IDPs return sporadically to their rural land to engage in agricultural activities as a means of sustaining livelihoods, whilst continuing to reside in the city for safety and security.

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[23] Grupo Temático de Desplazamiento (GTD), (2001). *Situation of displaced persons and challenges for 2001*. Available at <http://www.disaster-info.net/desplazados/informes/gtd/ene2001/defaulten.htm>.

[24] IGAD/UNDP/UNHCR, (June 2002). *Reintegration of Returnees and Displaced Persons in Somalia Planning and Assessment Process (Phase I)*, pp.22-23.

[25] DANIDA, (December 2004). *Preliminary Study of Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons in Afghanistan*. "much of the influx into Kabul was of people who had returned from Pakistan and Iran and decided to go to the capital rather than first attempt to survive in their villages of origin", p. 32.

[26] See OHCHR, (1999). *Country Report Azerbaijan*, Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons. *Azerbaijan E/CN.4/1999/79/Add.1,* para 33.

Environmentally displaced persons

The environmentally displaced form a group that is in danger of being left without protection as their plight is tangled up with regular migration, voluntary environmental migration, and climate change migration. The distinctions that need to be drawn are the actual causal links between the environmental factors and migration and the extent to which the migration is forced. This is a particularly complex task because of the myriad factors that play a role in forced and indeed voluntary migration in the world today. The task is important, however, as a large proportion of environmentally internally displaced persons become urban IDPs.

The very existence of environmentally displaced persons is not universally acknowledged. Indeed, a UNHCR Working Paper by Richard Black outlines his view that the concept is a myth.[27] Black argues that other economic and political factors play a role in these displacements. On the other hand, Norman Myers posits that environmental factors are forcing millions of people to flee their homes. He does not hold the view that environmental factors always lead directly to displacement, however. He suggests that environmental factors can cause political and ethnic conflicts, violence and war, resulting in forced displacement.[28] What is clear, nonetheless, is an emerging consensus that environmental factors at the very least contribute to more direct causes of forced displacement, and thus are worthy of further research and clarification.

At present, the problem of definition exists in attempts to form a typology of environmentally displaced persons. Included in a 2008 IDMC Report are: natural disasters, gradual environmental degradation, environmental conflicts, environmental destruction, environment conservation, development projects and industrial accidents.[29]

Recent examples of mass forced displacement as a direct result of environmental factors are found across the globe. In Japan, the Kobe earthquake displaced 300,000 people and the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines, hurricane Katrina and the tsunami in Sri Lanka all caused massive internal displacements.

In these cases, the role of the state is of utmost importance. A strong and efficient state should, at least in theory, be able to deal with environmental problems and environmentally displaced persons. Another aspect of the problem thus emerges – weak and/or corrupt states are not equipped to deal with the internally displaced, and thus require assistance from the international community. This in turn is closely linked to problems of underdevelopment and North-South relationships.[30]

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[27] R. Black, (2001). 'Environmental Refugees: Myth or Reality?', *UNHCR Working Paper No. 34.* (UNHCR: Geneva).

[28] N. Myers and J. Kent, (1995). *Environmental Exodus: An Emergent Crisis in the Global Arena.* (Washington DC: Climate Institute).

[29] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, (2008). *Future floods of refugees: A Comment on climate change, conflict and forced migration*, p. 8. Available at <http://www.nrc.no/arch/_img/9268480.pdf>.

[30] Stephen Castles, (2002). 'Environmental change and forced migration: making sense of the debate', *New Issues in Refugee Research, Paper No. 70.* (UNHCR: Geneva), p. 4.

Challenges facing urban IDPs

A mass influx of IDPs into an urban area places a significant burden on both the national and international bodies responsible for providing protection and assistance to the internally displaced. The difficult task of fulfilling the needs of new influxes of IDPs to urban areas is exacerbated by a lack of documentation and little or no accurate census data. Urban IDPs usually rely upon existing services that may be insufficient even for the local population. Moreover, the belief that urban IDPs are predominantly self-sufficient males not needing assistance further limits the wider services available to urban IDPs. In reality, the various subgroups of urban IDPs face a variety of challenges to their safety and wellbeing.

Accommodation

Finding adequate accommodation is one of the most immediate, and often most poorly met needs of the urban displaced. Urban IDPs are sometimes able to find shelter with family or friends in urban areas, but many others are forced to live in dire conditions in abandoned buildings. For example, in Baku, Azerbaijan, it has been documented that "IDPs basically live on top of a cesspool."[31] In other places, urban IDPs are forced to build their own makeshift shelter in slums and shanty towns in urban or peri-urban areas. A recent report found that at the beginning of November 2004, over 80% of IDP families in Khartoum were living in temporary shelters made out of plastic and paper and 90% were regularly flooded.[32]

Forced evictions

Secondary, or in some cases, tertiary forced displacement of urban IDPs occurs as a direct result of forced evictions in urban areas. This often occurs in the slum areas that are inhabited by urban IDPs. Examples are to be found in Angola, Kenya, Sudan and Zimbabwe.[33]

In Sudan, urban planning policies have led to the displacement of thousands of urban IDPs in and around Khartoum.[34] In August 2005, residents of Shikan camp were forcibly displaced to Fateh III. In 2004, more than 13,000 houses, schools and health facilities were demolished, forcing thousands of urban IDPs to seek shelter in temporary dwellings and creating a homelessness crisis in the capital.

The impact of forced evictions upon the lives of urban IDPs extends beyond the manifest issue of accommodation and homelessness. Urban IDPs that are subject to multiple displacements are exposed to physical danger during each displacement, as well as suffering from the negative impact that the transition has upon established livelihoods, social capital, education and health care.

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[31] Asen Balikci, (2004). 'IDPs in Baku: A Qualitative Approach,' *Report prepared for World Bank.* (University of Montreal, Canada), p. 6.

[32] F.A.R., IOM, IRC, Medair, MSF-F, OCHA, War Child, (19 January 2005). *Khartoum State Interagency Rapid Assessment Report*, p. 18.

[33] Amnesty International, (2006). *A Joint Appeal to African Ministers on urban housing*, AI Index: AFR 32/002/2006.

[34] Agnès de Geoffroy, (2007). From internal to international displacement in Sudan. Khartoum, 22nd to 25th October, 2007.

Education

The right to education is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, yet in the case of many urban IDPs, the state bureaucracy has failed to provide adequate education to IDPs. In Khartoum, teachers are scarce because they are paid so little and many schools have been bulldozed by the government.[35] Urban IDP children are often kept out of schools because families cannot afford the fees, children's labour is critical to family survival and the children are needed at home to guard the shelter. In 2006 approximately 48% of children of school age were not attending school in the Khartoum IDP camps.[36] Moreover, teachers in the Khartoum camps have complained of poor conditions with no desks or chairs, inadequate funding, lack of teaching materials and also of the fact that students often fainted in class because of a lack of food.[37]

Secondly, education is of primary importance in finding durable solutions to the plight of urban IDPs. Similarly to refugees, the education available to urban IDPs should ideally be designed to provide the knowledge and skills necessary to facilitate a smooth reintegration process if and when the urban displaced decide to return to their areas of origin. In the Khartoum camps, however, the limited education available to urban IDPs is Islamic-based and taught in Arabic. However, the majority of urban IDPs in Khartoum are the English-speaking Christian southern Sudanese. Thus, the education this group receives will not promote return or integration in southern Sudanese schools.

Food, health and nutrition

Food security is often a problem amongst IDP populations housed in rural camps and assisted by the local government and international agencies such as the World Food Programme. For urban IDPs without such assistance, access to food can be even more inconsistent. For example, a 2005 report of urban IDPs in Khartoum found that "less than 10 per cent of school age children reported eating three meals per day."[38]

Monrovia and its surrounds are today still host to thousands of urban IDPs, despite an inter-agency operation that has assisted over 326,990 IDPs to return to their places of origin.[39] The influx of IDPs has put immense pressure on the city's limited infrastructure. In particular the dramatic population increase has worsened the dire situation of waste management, resulting in widespread public health threats. "The heaps of garbage found in most parts of Monrovia continue to pose environmental and

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[35] Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, (2006). *Education in Darfur: A critical component of humanitarian response*. Available at <
http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2006.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/ACIO-6WLCFK-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf>. p. 7.

[36] Ibid., p. 7.

[37] Gina Bekker, (2002). *Report on the Situation of IDPs and Refugees in Northern Sudan: Findings of an exploratory study, 6 September 2002 - 19 September 2002*. (The American University in Cairo), p. 22.

[38] F.A.R., IOM, IRC, Medair, MSF-F, OCHA, War Child, (19 January 2005). *Khartoum State Interagency Rapid Assessment Report*, pp. 24-5.

[39] UNHCR, (July 2007). *Real-time evaluation of UNHCR's IDP operation in Liberia*. (UNHCR: Geneva), pp. 7 -10.

health problems to the citizens as they are constantly exposed to communicable diseases caused by the bio degradation of the waste."[40]

In Sudan, diarrhoea was the first cause of death among urban IDPs in Khartoum in 2004 (37% of deaths). Moreover, crude mortality rates in the urban IDP camps in Khartoum city (Mayo and Soba Arradi) were close to the emergency threshold of 1/10,000/day and 57% of households could not afford the cost of health care from the clinic.[41]

Women and children

Whilst it is difficult to provide accurate data on the age and gender of urban IDPs, it is recognized that the regions of the world with major populations of urban IDPs have relatively high fertility rates and young populations. Women and children thus constitute a significant proportion of urban IDPs, who are particularly vulnerable and have specific protection, health and education needs.

The dangerous situations that usually precede urban IDP settlement put women and children at heightened risk. During conflict, they are vulnerable to violence, rape and abduction. Whilst in transit, urban IDP women and children are exposed to exploitation and abuse, and having arrived in urban areas, women and girls can become the systematic target of sexual violence.

Although these are issues that also affect IDPs and refugees, urban IDPs are especially vulnerable. Concerns about reproductive health of urban IDPs are heightened as a result of the poor sanitation conditions often seen in urban centres as a result of increased pressure on existing infrastructure. The lack of income-generating activities for urban internally displaced women places them in a vulnerable position, subject to domestic violence or prostitution. Children are also vulnerable to similar threats.

Legal status and protection

Having outlined some of the immediate vulnerabilities and material requirements of urban IDPs, it is crucial not to conceptualize their needs purely in terms of assistance. Firstly, not all urban IDPs are in need of assistance. Indeed, DFID has pointed out that "[n]ot all displaced people are poor – although the great majority are – but their dislocation from physical, social, economic, financial and political capital makes them vulnerable."[42]

For many urban IDPs, it is their protection needs that are left unfulfilled.[43] The legal protection available to urban IDPs is significantly less than for refugees, despite being

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[40] International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), (December 2006). *Youth employment and reintegration in Liberia.* (ILO-UNHCR: Geneva), pp. 20-21.

[41] F.A.R. et al, (2005). p.21.

[42] Stephen Castles and Nicholas Van Hear, (2005). *Terms of Reference: Developing DFID's Policy Approach to Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Internally Displaced People*, (A Research Consultancy by the Refugee Studies Centre for the Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department, Department For International Development -UK), p. 153.

[43] Simon Bagshaw and Diane Paul, (2004). *Protect or Neglect: Toward a More Effective United Nations Approach to the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings-SAIS

protected in theory by their national laws and assistance programs. Many governments in reality are unwilling to protect their internally displaced people, or lack the capacity to do so. Moreover, urban IDPs are especially vulnerable because of their invisibility to national and international systems of protection.

Lack of documentation is often a problem for the urban internally displaced. Official documentation is frequently lost or destroyed fleeing emergency situations, or during subsequent displacements. In Sri Lanka it is estimated that more than 70 percent of survivors of the tsunami of December 2004 lost their documentation.[44]

Urban IDPs without documentation can be denied access to health care, education and other social services. For example, IDPs in Georgia have faced restrictions on their right to vote[45] and IDP children in Nepal have been prevented from registering at school due to a lack of documentation.[46] This highlights the fundamental importance of protection, as deficiencies can preclude the attainment of material needs as well as longer term durable solutions to the plight of urban IDPs.

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement provide an important legal framework for the protection of IDPs. The guidelines do not, however, sufficiently address the specific needs of urban IDPs, as their focus is on rural, camp-based IDPs. Moreover, the Principles are, in strict legal terms, not binding upon states. Thus, the responses of national governments and international aid agencies remain crucial to securing the status and protection of urban IDPs.

When does internal displacement end?

The subject of when internal displacement ends was addressed in a 2003 special issue of Forced Migration Review.[47] Firstly, lack of clarity in determining the end of internal displacement makes definitions difficult. Accurate statistics cannot be obtained when it is not clear who to count and for how long, making programming and budgeting impossible for international agencies such as UNHCR. The end of internal displacement for *urban* IDPs is even more difficult to define, since durable solutions are no more visible than the displacement itself.

Secondly, asking this question is useful for understanding the decisions that terminate national and international assistance on the ground and for knowing when and how

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Project on Internal Displacement and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division).

[44] OHCHR, (2005). *Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters*, A Working Visit to Asia by the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons Walter Kälin, 27 February to 5 March 2005. (OHCHR: Geneva), pp. 19-20.

[45] Erin Mooney and Balkees Jarrah, (2005). 'Safeguarding IDP Voting Rights', *Forced Migration Review23* (May 2005), p. 55 and also Erin Mooney and Balkees Jarrah, *The Voting Rights of Internally Displaced Persons: The OSCE Region* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, November 2004).

[46] OHCHR, (2005). *Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons: Mission to Nepal*, April 2005. (OHCHR: Geneva).

[47] Erin Mooney concisely enumerates this question's timeliness and significance - Erin Mooney, (2003). 'Introduction', *Forced Migration Review 17*, (April 2003). p. 5-6.

assistance should shift towards a more holistic approach. Most importantly, urban IDPs deserve to be fully apprised of the legal and physical aspects of their entitlements.

Although there are numerous ways to define when internal displacement ends, there currently exists no real consensus. What is accepted, however, is the importance of ending internal displacement by shifting the focus from emergency assistance to creating real and lasting solutions for urban IDPs.

According to UNHCR, the durable solutions available to urban IDPs are: voluntary return to the place of origin, local settlement in the areas to which they have been displaced, and voluntary relocation to another part of their own country.[48] The preferred durable solution is when the original causes of the displacement are removed and urban IDPs can return safely to their original dwelling places, taking up their former livelihoods. This is becoming an increasingly rare resolution for urban IDPs, however.

The intractable and protracted conflicts that pervade modern society today are not conducive to this solution. Even in cases where a protracted conflict is brought to a close, extended displacement weakens prospects for return and reintegration. Returning urban IDPs may find their homes and communities destroyed or inhabited by other residents, may find livelihoods destroyed, and have little or no income-generating prospects without access to land. Social reintegration can also be challenging following a prolonged urban displacement. Especially affected are young people, who may have lost years of education, become assimilated in their region of displacement and thus find it difficult to reintegrate in areas of return.

When return and reintegration is not a viable solution, it is thus crucial to look to the other two durable solutions to end the plight of internally displaced persons in urban areas. These solutions provide opportunities for urban IDPs to integrate in the places where they are or to help them to find alternative places to live and work. Even in cases where urban IDPs may eventually return home, there is no reason for them to remain 'in limbo' whilst displaced in urban areas. It is crucial to access the urban displaced and to provide them with opportunities and projects to improve their conditions and viability of self-sufficiency.

In some cases, IDPs may choose to leave the urban area they have been displaced to for a third location. Many resettle in other urban locations because they lack the skills necessary to work as farmers after years of living in towns or cities. Others have little interest in returning to the agro-pastoralist lifestyle, which is especially true for youth. Urban migration is a trend seen more and more amongst returning refugees and IDPs in general, in line with broader economic migration trends. Urban IDPs choosing to move to another urban area may be able to best fulfill their needs in this way, and thus this course of action should not be viewed as a failure of the traditional solution of voluntary return.

Urban IDPs may also choose to return to rural areas other than their home. In most cases, it must be recognized that rural relocation has rarely proved to be durable,

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[48] UNHCR, (2007). *UNHCR's Role in Support of an Enhanced Humanitarian Response to Situations of Internal Displacement. Policy Framework and Implementation Strategy*, 4 June 2007. EC/58/SC/CRP.18. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=4693775c2>.

however. Large influxes of IDPs puts strain on existing local livelihoods, in turn exacerbating tensions between new arrivals and the local population. (e.g. Angola, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Guatemala).[49]

Livelihoods for urban IDPs are vital to their survival, since this group is only very rarely supported in food or shelter (compared to IDPs in rural camps). Some urban IDPs make a small income from informal activities such as retailing, house cleaning, tea selling, and alcohol brewing. Nonetheless, a 2004 assessment in Khartoum IDP camps indicated that only 39% of the heads of households had a regular source of income.[50]

Local integration may not always be a popular solution for governments seeking to curb urbanization.[51] Moreover, extending or maintaining urban IDP populations living in terrible conditions in shanty towns on the outskirts of cities may not be beneficial to the population. Thus, it is important to obtain accurate data about the urban IDP population's needs and wishes before decisions are taken about how best to find durable solutions.

In any case, international assistance is essential to finding durable solutions to the plight of urban IDPs. Until the focus of international assistance to urban IDPs is shifted towards long-term solutions, national governments will continue to rely upon these agencies to provide interim assistance that does not aim to, nor achieve an actual end to displacement in urban environments.

National responses

National responses towards urban IDPs vary immensely. Clearly those countries with weak governments and poor urban infrastructure will be less well equipped to deal with urban IDP populations. That being said, the world saw thousands of internally displaced persons in New Orleans left without sufficient assistance following the effects of hurricane Katrina. Evidently the plight of urban IDPs is not confined to the developing world.

In Colombia, urban IDPs may register for government-provided emergency assistance, but this is only available for a three-month period. After this time, IDPs are considered to have moved to a 'stabilization phase' and are not afforded any additional assistance. The state has proved unable to provide either the protection needed to prevent initial displacement, or sufficient security within urban IDP settlements.

In addition to existing capacities and effectiveness of implementation of urban IDP initiatives, there also exist other factors that affect the national response to urban IDPs. Firstly, the ethnicity of of urban IDPs can play a role in determining how they are treated by their government.

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[49] Patricia Weiss Fagen, (2003). 'Looking beyond emergency response,' *Forced Migration Review 17*, May 2003, p. 19-20.
[50] F.A.R. et al, (2005). p. 16.
[51] See Alexandra Fielden, (2008). 'Local integration: capitalizing on the potential of a solution to protracted refugee situations'. *UNHCR Working Paper* (UNHCR: Geneva).

Political considerations have also affected national responses to the plight of urban IDPs. Government initiatives towards urban IDPs in Peru have focused upon curbing urbanization. Consequently, the single agency that deals with IDPs assists returnees and IDPs who agree to return to rural areas, but not IDPs in urban areas. Moreover, it has even pressured some urban IDP communities to return to rural areas despite precarious conditions.[52]

Urban IDPs in Baku, Azerbaijan receive a monthly allowance of 25,000 manats and their power, gas and water is paid for by the state.[53] Although urban IDPs are provided assistance for their basic needs, they are afforded few wider opportunities. By deterring solutions other than return, the government is able to promote claims over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Several countries with significant urban IDP populations – in particular Angola, Liberia, Peru and Turkey – have all made explicit references to the Principles in their official laws and initiatives for the internally displaced. Nonetheless, it must be recognized that many states with significant urban IDP populations are unlikely to possess the capacity to provide these people with adequate protection and assistance, regardless of their recognition of the Guiding Principles. It is thus important for international organizations to aim to strengthen national instruments to allow governments to assume immediate and effective responsibility for its urban IDPs.

International responses

National governments have the primary responsibility in the protection and assistance of its citizens and residents. When the state is unwilling or unable to fulfill its obligations, however, responsibility falls to the international community to protect those in need. Internally displaced persons no longer fall between the gaps of international protection to the extent they used to. Several developments have encouraged and enabled the international community to play a bigger role in protecting and assisting IDPs. International attention on urban IDPs remains limited, however.

In 1992 the UN appointed Francis M. Deng as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of internal displacement, who was succeeded by Walter Kälin in September 2004. The Representatives have undertaken numerous visits and reported on the situation of IDPs in many countries hosting large urban IDP populations.[54] They have thus been able to develop and disseminate a normative framework for protection and assistance of IDPs, raise the profile of IDPs on the international stage, and foster further research into the plight of IDPs globally.

The Special Representative was responsible for shaping the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. International and intergovernmental organizations have been very positive towards the Principles. The African Union, ECOWAS, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Organisation for Security

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[52] M. Stavropoulou, (1998). 'Will Peru's displaced return?' in Cohen & Deng (eds.), (1998). *The forsaken people: Case studies of the internally displaced*, (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution).

[53] Asen Balikci, (2004). 'IDPs in Baku: A Qualitative Approach,' *Report prepared for World Bank*. (University of Montreal, Canada), p. 25.

[54] Reports available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/idp/visits.htm>.

and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have all shown strong support. Furthermore, the United Nations has also called on states to respect the Principles.[55]

It is the urban IDPs who have been largely ignored, however. Almost 70% of IDPs in the south of Cote d'Ivoire are found in the urban area of Abidjan.[56] In reference to this situation, UNHCR recently acknowledged that "the fact that most IDPs are not in camps has made their plight less visible to the humanitarian community and has made it more difficult to reach them and assess their situation."[57]

Similarly in Mogadishu, international humanitarian organizations have had very limited access to urban IDPs as a result of serious outbreaks of violence in the city. In addition, the large proportion of urban IDPs who are housed with host families and their resulting social integration makes them almost completely invisible to international agencies. This dramatically hinders international attempts to help urban IDPs, and has on the whole resulted in urban IDPs being left to fend for themselves.

In the 1998 book *Masses in Flight*, Roberta Cohen and Francis Deng highlighted the deficiencies of the international response to IDPs.[58] There has since been significant improvement in inter-agency coordination, institutional responsibility and response to the needs of IDPs, but still the plight of urban IDPs receives less attention than IDPs in camps.

Institutional and international responses to IDPs have indeed been strengthened over the past decade, with a collaborative approach allowing input from various UN agencies and NGOs working together and with governments. In 1997 the UN assigned overall responsibility to the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and soon afterwards IDPs were also being monitored by the UN's Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). In January 2002 OCHA established an Internal Displacement Unit, recently renamed the Internal Displacement Division.

In 2006, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (part of the Norwegian Refugee Council) began three pilot studies of urban IDPs in Sudan (Khartoum), Cote d'Ivoire (Abidjan) and Colombia (Santa Maria). The research was designed to estimate the number of urban IDPs, identify the humanitarian needs and protection concerns of these populations and generate concrete recommendations for improved intervention on for urban IDPs. The final report should be disseminated in 2008.

UNHCR's role

UNHCR's involvement in IDP operations dates back to engagement in Sudan in 1972, despite the fact that its original 1951 mandate makes no explicit reference to IDPs. The

[55] Walter Kälin, (2006). 'The future of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement', *Forced Migration Review Special Issue* (December 2006), p. 5.

[56] Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Statistique et d'Economie Appliquée (ENSEA), (31 March 2006). *Enquete sur les personnes déplacées internes (PDIs) dans cinq départements de la Cote d'Ivoire.*

[57] UNHCR, (23 March 2007). *Supplementary Appeal for Côte d'Ivoire: protection and assistance to internally displaced persons*, p. 4. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/partners/PARTNERS/4603eb472.pdf>.

[58] Roberta Cohen and Francis Deng, (2001). *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internally Displaced Persons*. (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, D.C.).

principal criteria governing UNHCR's involvement with IDPs are set out in Resolution 53/125 (December 1998). This resolution effectively extended the mandate of the agency in "providing humanitarian assistance and protection to internally displaced persons…with the consent of the State concerned." In relation to IDP situations, UNHCR has made a commitment to act as 'cluster lead' in the areas of protection, camp management and coordination and emergency shelter.

But the exact scope of UNHCR role with IDPs is debated; some organizations do not consider the UNHCR engagement to be wide ranging enough, whereas others argue that UNHCR should focus its efforts solely on refugees. UNHCR openly acknowledges its concern over whether or not donors will provide the necessary funding to enable UNHCR and its partners to fulfill their responsibilities for both IDPs and refugees.[59] Moreover, it is impossible to know what slice of the pie will be given to urban IDPs, whose numbers and needs remain unidentified.

Despite its evolving mandate, UNHCR has generally ignored urban IDPs. The agency has recently undertaken a review of its urban refugee policy, although there exists no such initiative for urban IDPs. It is clear that the ability and readiness for UNHCR to provide protection and assistance to urban IDPs has thus far been limited by political and physical capacities. Nonetheless, there still exists a real opportunity for UNHCR to take the lead in the protection of urban IDPs.

Conclusion

Internally displaced persons in urban environments often find themselves in very precarious situations, with little or no hope for a durable solution to their plight. Limited information about urban IDP demographics, coping strategies and needs have hitherto prevented effective policy responses on both the national and international levels. Furthermore, it is the invisibility of urban IDPs that reduces opportunities for their assistance.

It needs to be widely recognized and acknowledged by governments, international agencies and civil society that urban IDP populations are worthy of protection. Firstly, in terms of numbers, IDPs outnumber refugees two-to-one, but receive far less international attention.

Secondly, urban IDPs have an important role to play in contributing to, and solidifying peace building, security and development, particularly in post-conflict situations. It is only through their protection and by finding lasting long term solutions that this group will be able to become self-reliant and productive citizens. It must of course be noted that not all urban IDPs are in need of protection or assistance, and the needs of the urban poor, local hosts and national development strategies need all be taken into account when designing and implementing initiatives for the urban displaced.

Through effective coordination, co-operation with governments and the beneficiaries themselves, there is a significant opportunity to assist and protect the millions of urban IDPs currently scattered across at least 27 countries of the world. Advocacy will also

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[59] UNHCR, (2007). *Internally Displaced Persons: Questions and Answers*. (UNHCR: Geneva), p. 13. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/basics/BASICS/405ef8c64.pdf>.

prove an important aspect in raising awareness about a population that has thus far been largely ignored.

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