

# OCHA on Message: Internal Displacement

## What is internal displacement?

When people are forced from their homes but remain within their own country, they are known as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The key characteristics of internal displacement are its coercive nature and the fact that affected populations do not cross an internationally recognized border.

The United Nations Secretary-General has cited displacement as one of the world's greatest humanitarian challenges.

### Internally Displaced Persons: definition

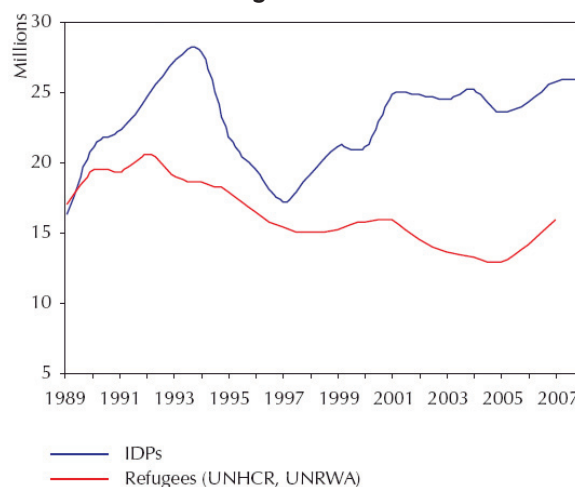
According to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, IDPs are "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border".

*United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*

Unlike refugees, who have fled across a border and are therefore no longer under the protection of their country of origin, IDPs are still citizens of their country. Their Government is legally responsible for their protection and welfare.

IDPs do not always end up in camps – the majority are taken in by host families, some find temporary shelter on the move and others may settle in urban areas. IDPs often move several times during their displacement. These varied and dynamic patterns create challenges for tracking IDPs. As a result, figures are based on estimates. The Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre<sup>1</sup> estimates that in 2008 there were at least 26 million IDPs worldwide due to conflict. Many more millions were displaced as a result of natural disasters, including in the context of climate change, or large-scale development projects such as dams. What is known is that the number of IDPs around the world is rising.

Global numbers of conflict-related IDPs and refugees since 1989<sup>2</sup>



Having fled their home without time to pack food, belongings or identity papers, and often in circumstances of serious trauma and violence, displaced people can be particularly vulnerable and in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. National authorities are at the core of any response to internal displacement, yet they may be unable or unwilling to meet IDPs' needs. In such circumstances, the international community supports and complements national authorities' efforts, at their request.

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998), as recognized by Member States, is the international framework that outlines IDPs' rights. It provides guidance to national and international actors on responding to IDPs' needs, such as food, shelter and safety. Published in 1998, the 30 principles set out the rights and guarantees relevant to the protection of IDPs in all phases of displacement. The principles provide protection against arbitrary displacement; protection and assistance during displacement; and protection relating to return, local integration or settlement elsewhere in the country. These options for ending a period of displacement are referred to as 'durable solutions'.

<sup>1</sup> [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

<sup>2</sup> Graph from IDMC, NRC, 2008. UNHCR/UNRWA on refugees and IDMC on IDPs



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OCHA on Message is a reference product to enable staff to communicate OCHA's position on key issues. For more information contact the Reporting Unit at [ochareporting@un.org](mailto:ochareporting@un.org)

## What is OCHA's role?

In 1996, the United Nations General Assembly tasked the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) with "a central role in the inter-agency coordination of protection of and assistance to IDPs" (General Assembly Resolution 51/950, 1996). This mandate was reinforced by the ERC's responsibility as Chair of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to support an effective internal displacement response in the field. This aspect of the ERC's role is particularly important, as no single agency is charged with a formal responsibility for IDPs.

OCHA provides the ERC with support to fulfill these responsibilities in a number of ways, including advocacy, information management, policy development and coordination activities.

At a headquarters level, OCHA advocates IDP issues to Member States, donors and the media, ensures displacement issues are included in ERC briefings to the Security Council for its action, and works with the IASC to address gaps in IDP policy and institutional arrangements.

At a field level, OCHA supports the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator in responding to internal displacement through advocacy (to governments, media and humanitarian actors), technical guidance, information management and operational inter-cluster coordination.

To prevent forced displacement, OCHA advocates respect for and adherence to international humanitarian law and human rights law. OCHA supports and advocates incorporating risks of displacement in preparedness and contingency planning.

OCHA also takes the lead in addressing challenges in accessing IDPs, including negotiating with relevant parties in order to secure humanitarian access. OCHA supports monitoring and reporting on IDP issues, advocates principled responses to internal displacement from all stakeholders and actively participates in the Protection Cluster.

In the context of durable solutions, OCHA facilitates planning and advocates an effective transition from emergency response to early recovery, recovery and development.

*Khartoum, Sudan: Since before 1980, around 2 million IDPs have taken shelter in four official camps and numerous slum areas in and around Khartoum. In 2005, violent confrontations erupted between the Sudanese police and the IDPs when the Sudanese police attempted to forcibly relocate IDPs. The Sudanese police attempted forced evictions of IDPs, during which a number of police and IDPs were killed. Those who were relocated had urgent humanitarian needs: they had been forced out with few possessions, subjected to violence en route and abandoned in empty wasteland in the desert. They lacked access to any basic services.*

*OCHA led the coordinated emergency response to those most affected. It facilitated dialogue among the IDPs, the humanitarian and development community, and the state authorities. It also advocated with state authorities for a rights-based policy to relocations. The Government agreed to halt forced relocations and to ensure consultation with IDPs on planning and preparedness of alternative sites, with support from OCHA and the international community. OCHA also brokered an agreement among development partners, donors and the Government on a longer-term strategy to address issues relating to urban planning, service delivery and livelihood opportunities in key areas of the city.*

(Victoria Metcalfe, former Head of Sub-Office for Khartoum state, Sudan)

## What does OCHA say?

- OCHA calls on states to prevent forced displacement and to assume their responsibilities to protect their populations as required under international law.
- People who are displaced by natural disasters have the same rights and often the same needs as those displaced by violence, and yet they are more often neglected.
- IDPs have the right to a durable solution. This includes settling elsewhere in the country, integrating into the community where they are currently based, or returning home.
- OCHA calls for decisions taken by people to end their period of displacement to be voluntary, informed and carried out in safety and with dignity. Ensuring that the process to end displacement is voluntary, safe and dignified will also contribute to longer-term national peace and stability.

## To find out more

- [http://ochanet.unocha.org/TI/Internal\\_Displacement/Pages/default.aspx](http://ochanet.unocha.org/TI/Internal_Displacement/Pages/default.aspx)
- United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/idp/standards.htm>

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