

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS





Displaced women wait in the rain during a food distribution in conflict-ridden northern Uganda.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Cover:

**Internally
displaced
children,
near Bogota,
Colombia.**



UNHCR/B. HEGER/COI-2006

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UNHCR/HESEMANN/CCO-2006

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OR DECADES THEY WERE LARGELY IGNORED and forgotten, but together they probably comprise the world's largest group of vulnerable people.

Currently, there are an estimated 23.7 million of them in at least 50 countries living amidst war and persecution. They have little legal or physical protection and a very uncertain future – outcasts in their own countries.

Bureaucratically, they are described as IDPs – or ‘internally displaced persons.’ In the real world, they are civilians, mostly women and children, who have been forced to abandon their homes because of conflict or persecution to seek safety elsewhere. *(Another 25 million people, also labelled as IDPs, are victims of natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods rather than war and other forms of persecution).*

GER?



A camp for displaced people in Ituri, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

When civilians cross an international frontier into a second state in an effort to escape persecution, they are generally given food and shelter by the host country, protected by international laws and legally are classified as refugees.

Others in similar circumstances but who, for whatever reason, remain in their own states become IDPs with few, if any, of the safeguards and assistance afforded to refugees. They remain under the 'protection' of often antagonistic governments or prey to rebel militias.

UNHCR's mandate does not specifically cover IDPs. But internally displaced civilians are often caught up in the same conflicts and face the same problems as refugees. And because of the agency's expertise, it has for years helped some of these people, currently an estimated 6.6 million.

In recent years the international community began to debate major IDP issues more vigorously: the question of the sanctity of state sovereignty versus human rights, how better to help these vulnerable people and what organizations should fulfill what roles. In 2005, a more coordinated and cohesive approach to tackle the problem was agreed.

Under the general umbrella of the office of the UN emergency relief coordinator, for instance, the refugee agency has been given the 'lead' role in overseeing the protection and shelter needs of IDPs as well as the coordination and management of any camps which are established. Other UN agencies have adopted similar roles in the areas of water, nutrition, health, logistics and telecommunications.

By August 2006, this approach was being applied in DR Congo, Uganda, Liberia, Somalia, Lebanon, and Chad. One of the remaining concerns for UNHCR is ensuring reliable funding for both IDPs and refugees, given the likely increase in the number of people for whom the agency will be providing support.



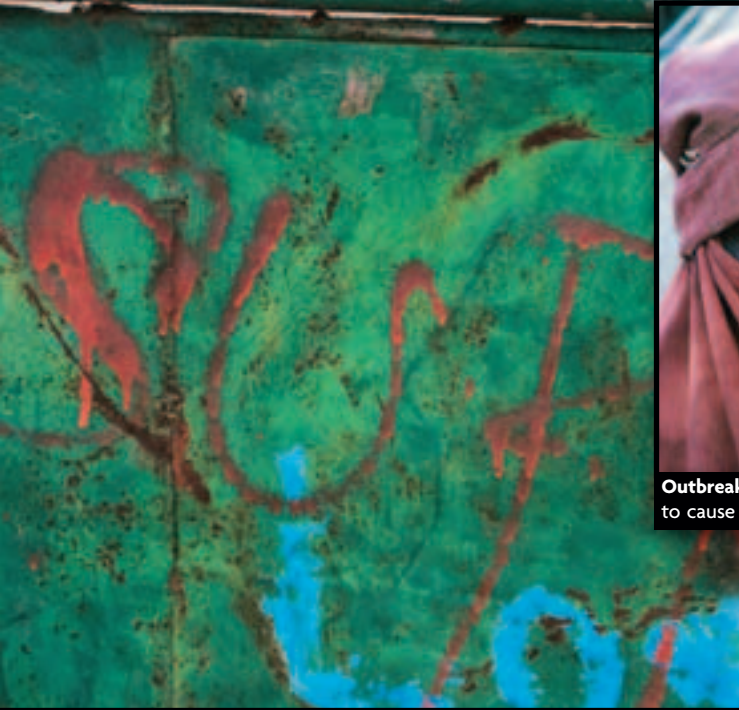
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■ Who are the world's internally displaced people?

They are individuals or groups of people who have been forced to flee their homes to escape armed conflict, generalized violence and human rights abuses. Millions of other civilians who have survived natural disasters such as floods are also generally classified as IDPs, but, except in exceptional circumstances, do not fall within the operational capabilities of UNHCR.



Acts of looting and arson in the Timor-Leste capital Dili led to new displacements in 2006.



UNHCR/L. TAYLOR/SONW/2002

Outbreaks of violence continue to cause displacement in Somalia.

UNHCR/N. NG/TLS*2006

■ **How many persons displaced internally by persecution are there?**

The United Nations estimates that, in all, there are around 23.7 million in 52 countries, half of them in Africa. UNHCR currently helps care for 6.6 million people from this group, in addition to some 8.4 million refugees.

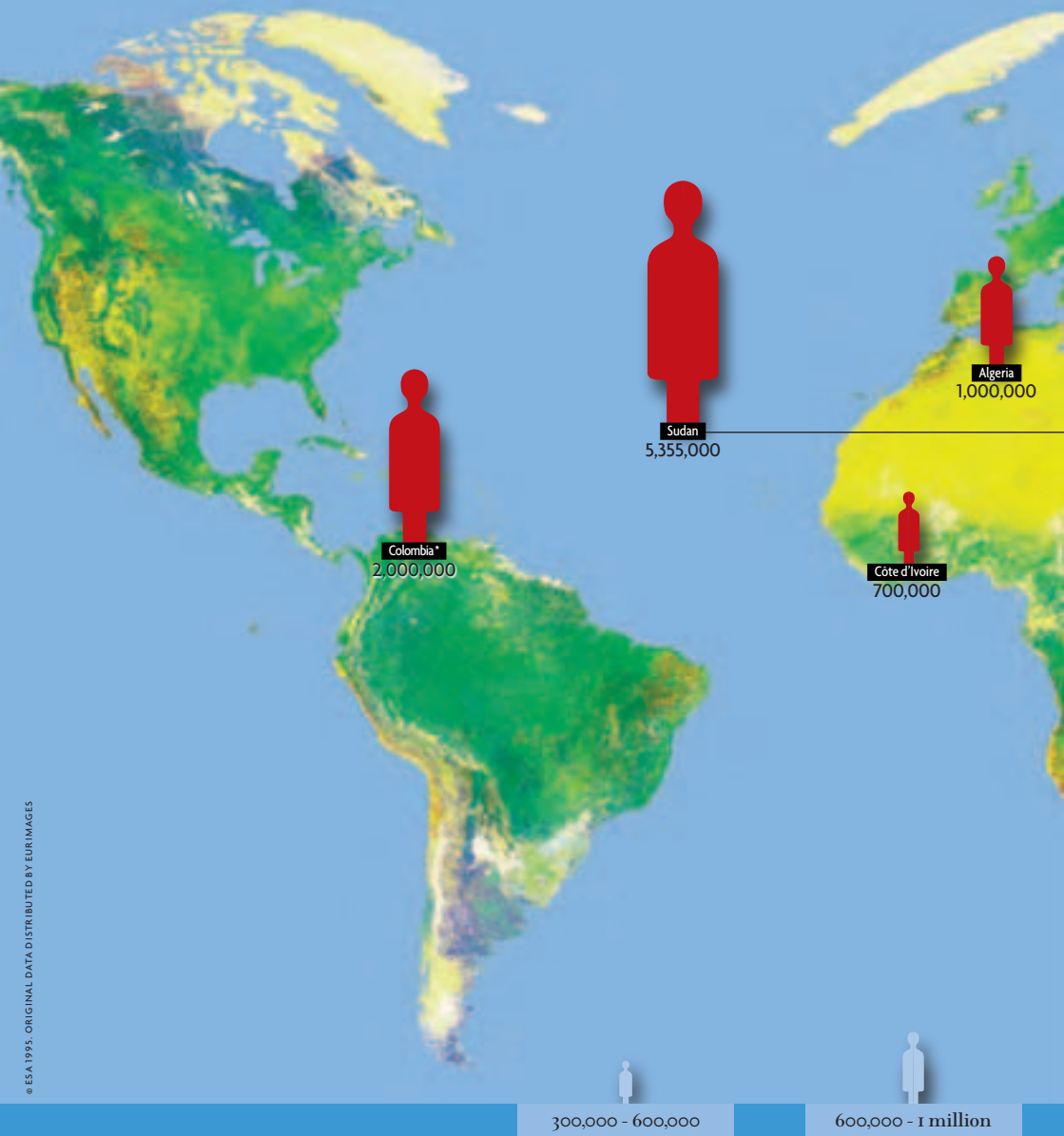
■ **How do IDPs differ from refugees?**

Both groups often leave their homes for similar reasons. Civilians are recognized as 'refugees' when they cross an international frontier to seek sanctuary in another country. The internally displaced, for whatever reason, remain in their own states.

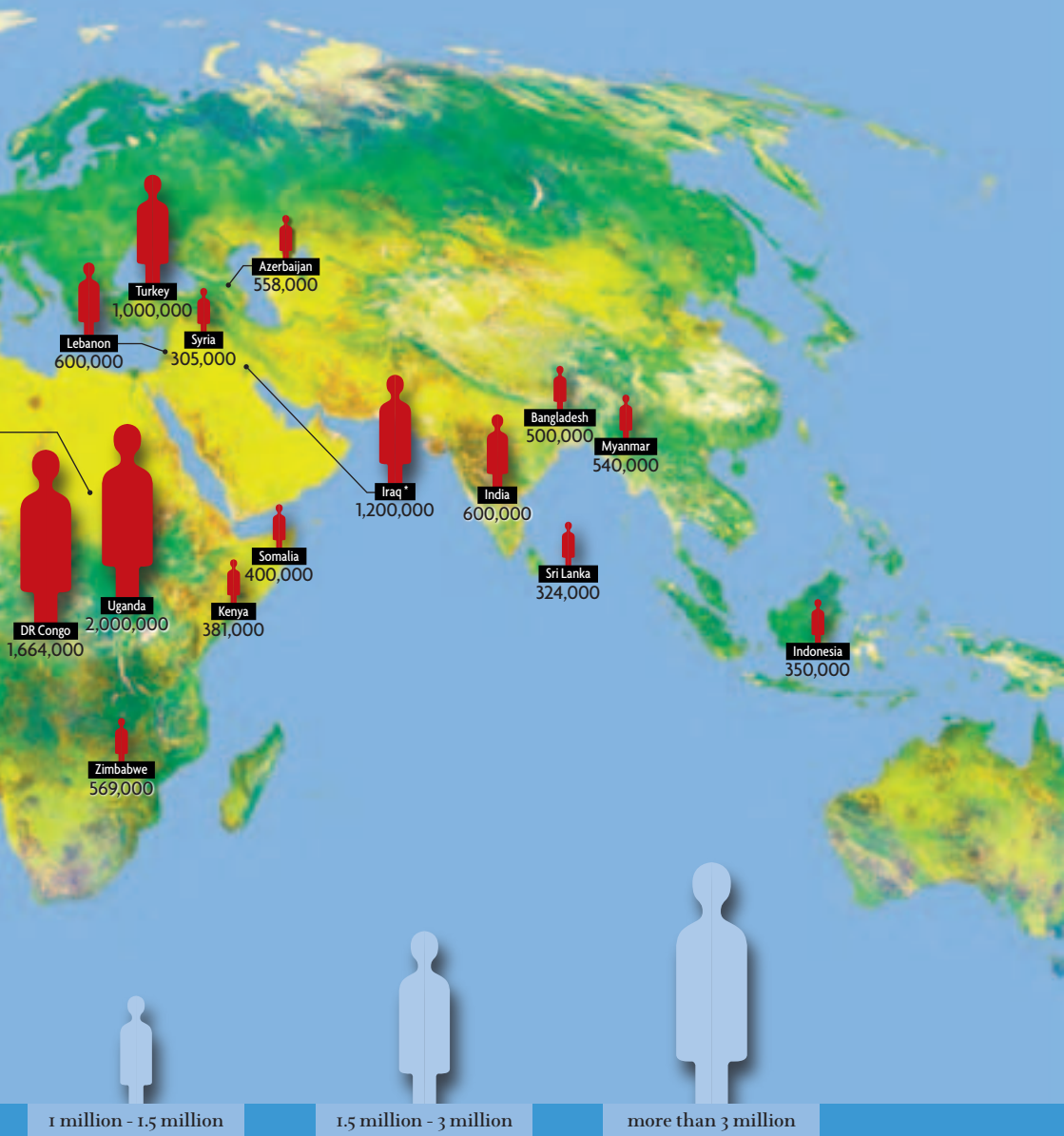
The World's Maj

Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, July 2006

*UNHCR figures, end-2005



or IDP Populations





Many of Colombia's 2 million displaced people live in great poverty on the fringes of the main cities.

■ How are the two groups treated?

Newly arrived refugees normally receive food, shelter and a place of safety from the host country. They are protected by a well-defined body of international laws and conventions. The UN refugee agency and other humanitarian organizations work within this legal framework to help refugees restart their lives in a new state or eventually return home.

■ And IDPs?

The internally displaced often face a more difficult future. They may be trapped in an ongoing internal conflict. The domestic government, which may view the uprooted people as 'enemies of the state,' retains ultimate control of their fate. There are no specific international legal instruments covering the internally displaced, and general agreements such as the Geneva Conventions are often difficult to apply. Donors are sometimes reluctant to intervene in internal conflicts or offer sustained assistance.

■ The IDP problem recently became more widely debated. Why?

In the wake of World War II, the international community focused its attention principally on helping the most obvious victims of conflict – refugees. In the immediate post-war years, UNHCR was established to further that goal and an

international legal framework for refugees was created. As the cold war ended, the nature of conflict began to change from superpower confrontation to smaller, internal struggles. These wars helped produce far larger numbers of internally displaced victims.

■ How has the international community reacted?

These civilians received limited assistance in the past. The International Committee of the Red Cross, as the guardian of the Geneva Conventions, has been active in this field for many decades. Other agencies and governments began a wider debate in the

last few years and in 2005, acknowledging a widespread failure to adequately help internally displaced civilians, they adopted what they described as a more coordinated, expansive and ‘predictable’ approach to tackle the problem.



UNHCR/H. CAUX/SDN+2005

Some Sudanese women have suffered assaults on their way to work in this brick factory, which is located close to their IDP camp in Darfur.

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■ **What is UNHCR's position vis-à-vis the internally displaced?**

The agency's mandate specifically covers refugees, but in the last 30 years it has assisted in more than 30 IDP operations around the world, from Colombia to Liberia to Afghanistan. A comprehensive agreement reached in 2005 reinforced and made more explicit the roles of the international community and specialist agencies in helping internally displaced people. Under this agreement, UNHCR will assume the lead responsibility for protection, emergency shelter and camp management for internally displaced people. As of January 2006, UNHCR took on this role in several countries, with the possibility to further expand its functions if performed effectively.

■ **With this extra attention, is the number of IDPs decreasing?**

The overall number of internally displaced has remained relatively stable at around 23-25 million in the first years of the new millennium. The refugee agency currently cares for around 6.6 million people in this group, a 22 percent increase compared with 2005. This rise is largely explained by the inclusion of 1.2 million Iraqi IDPs and 400,000 Somalis in the 2005 figure of IDPs of concern to UNHCR.



UNHCR assists some IDPs, such as this Chechen family in Ingushetia, with their housing or with income generation projects.

UNHCR/T. MAKEEVA/RUS-2005



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The 14-page booklet, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* contains 30

pointers for governments and humanitarian organizations to help the displaced.

The definition of the internally displaced “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.”

The 30 principles include:

- **Principle 2 (2):** These Principles shall not be interpreted as restricting, modifying or impairing the provisions of any international human rights or international humanitarian law instrument or rights granted to persons under domestic law. In particular, these Principles are without prejudice to the right to seek and enjoy asylum in other countries.

- **Principle 5:** All authorities and international actors shall respect and ensure respect for their obligations under international law, including human rights and humanitarian law, in all circumstances, so as to prevent and avoid conditions that might lead to displacement of persons.

- **Principle 6 (1):** Every human being shall have the right to be protected against being arbitrarily displaced from his or her home or place of habitual residence.

- **Principle 15: Internally displaced persons have:**

- a. The right to seek safety in another part of the country;
- b. The right to leave their country;
- c. The right to seek asylum in another country; and
- d. The right to be protected against forcible return to or resettlement in any place where their life, safety, liberty and/or health would be at risk.

- **Principle 28 (1):** Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country. Such authorities shall endeavor to facilitate the reintegration of returned or resettled internally displaced persons.

■ Guiding Principles

The *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* are a set of 30 recommendations, which define who IDPs are, outline a large body of existing international law protecting a person’s basic rights and describe the responsibility of states. Although not legally binding, they constitute a comprehensive minimum standard for the treatment of IDPs and are being applied by a growing number of states and institutions. They also contribute to the empowerment of IDPs and their representatives.

■ Operationally, how does UNHCR respond?

The plight of refugees and IDPs often overlaps and sometimes a single coordinated operation has been the most sensible solution, especially during repatriation operations when IDPs are often in the same geographical locations. Under the new regime, UNHCR will take a specific ‘lead’ role in the areas where it can bring widespread expertise to bear – protection, shelter and camp management. Other agencies will undertake similar roles in water, sanitation, health, food and logistics. It is hoped that donors will provide the necessary funding to enable UNHCR and its partners to fulfill their responsibilities for both IDPs and refugees.

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UNHCR/K. MCKINSEY/SDN+2006

A displaced child facing a very uncertain future in Somalia.

■ Is there any friction between UNHCR's role with refugees and IDPs?

The organization's Statute has been interpreted flexibly to allow it to work with IDPs and the new cooperation will strengthen this. However, there have been restraints in the past including a lack of security and refusal of access to the displaced by governments

or insurgents. There have also been difficulties at times in helping refugees and IDPs simultaneously. Programs designed to help IDPs may, by their very nature, complicate asylum procedures for those who have fled to neighbouring countries.

■ Have there been other problem areas in the past?

In the former Yugoslavia, Timor and more recently during the crisis in Lebanon, UNHCR decided to provide protection and assistance to all uprooted peoples on the basis of humanitarian needs rather than refugee status. Refugees are sometimes a relatively small component in a displacement that is largely contained inside a

country's borders – Colombia and DR Congo being current examples. Effective reintegration of returning refugees may also require assistance to be extended to the internally displaced – as happened last year in Liberia, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Togo – in order not to create potentially provocative disparities between groups living next to each other.



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Back cover:

Roma children kill
time in a makeshift
camp in Kosovo.

UNHCR/V. WINTER/SCG-2005

A displaced Sudanese woman weaving baskets in Darfur.

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