

International Dialogue on Migration 2012
Moving to Safety: Migration Consequences of Complex Crises

Session I: Internal Displacement – Immediate responses
IDMC presentation, 23 April 2012

I have been asked to review issues related to responses to internal displacement which may be relevant from a migration / mobility perspective, including putting forwards some lessons learnt

Internal displacement from a migration / mobility perspective

What is internal displacement?

- An “internally displaced person” is defined in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, but does not constitute a legal status, as it is the case for a refugee under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Rather, an IDP is determined by two characteristics of his or her movement, namely its forced character and the fact that he or she hasn’t crossed a border;
- IDPs by virtue of their displacement, have special protection and assistance needs, that are often distinct from the needs of refugees who have crossed a border;
- The main duty bearers responsible for assisting and protecting IDPs are national authorities, who bear the primary responsibility as a matter of state sovereignty. In situations where national authorities are unable or unwilling to take on this role towards IDPs, this puts them at increased protection risks. In the case of refugees, they enjoy international protection in the absence of national protection.
- Displacement is a coping / protection strategy. People who are unable to move despite threats to their lives are unable to exercise their right to seek safety elsewhere in the country. Among those ‘trapped’ are often the most vulnerable, including older persons, persons with disabilities, chronically sick persons or very poor persons. Whilst these are not IDPs, we can argue that they are affected by displacement, as they have lost their social networks as a result of the displacement of the rest of their community.

Why are people displaced internally rather than externally, ie across a border?

There are three conceivable scenarios when persons become IDPs rather than cross a border:

- A person becomes / remains an IDP for lack of mobility alternatives, because they are too poor to move further away from the source of danger, or because they are unable to cross a border because of in-admission policies of neighboring states;
- A person becomes/remains an IDP because of a decision not to move abroad and seek safety there, because they prefer to stay close to their homes and lands, due

to fears to become extinct as a community, or because they serve as support basis for an insurgency;

- A person becomes/remains an IDP as part of a family strategy, with part of the family, often men, moving abroad to seek livelihood opportunities, while women and children remain behind as IDPs.

How could a migration management lens complement our understanding of internal displacement, and thereby inform responses?

- The inability to exercise the right to seek safety leads to population being trapped in areas that are exposed to conflict or natural hazards. There is significant evidence especially in situations of natural hazards, that the poorer populations, often living in areas which are most exposed, are unable to seek refuge in a safer location, whether prior to the hazard (evacuation) or after being hit by the disaster. For these 'trapped' populations, the main migration management imperative would be to ensure their right to leave and seek safety.
- Generally, we still have limited understanding of the interconnection between limitations on freedom of movement and resulting displacement:

How do limitations on freedom of movement for IDPs, for example, when they are held in remote locations away from urban areas, result in cross border displacement and increased asylum claims?

How do limitations on cross border freedom of movement result in internal displacement?

Can a migration management approach give us a better understanding of these dynamics and so help us develop responses which promote freedom of choice of movement as well as opportunities for durable solutions from the start?

- In Mali, in the midst of the current crisis, we see such clear linkages but have insufficient information and analysis to effectively factor them in when planning responses: the decrease in remittances and the forced return of large numbers of Malian migrant workers who lost their source of income as a result of conflict in Côte d'Ivoire or Libya has an impact on displacement in and out of the country.

Lessons learnt from responding to the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced populations which may be relevant when looking at cross border displacement (refugee and asylum seekers excluded):

Keeping in mind the fundamental difference between IDPs who are citizens of their own country and whose protection is under the primary responsibility of their national authorities, and people who have crossed a border:

- IDPs have distinct protection needs as a result of their displacement. These require specific responses (for example: in relation to housing, land and property rights; loss of documentation; etc.);

- Nevertheless, IDPs are not a homogenous group, and responses need to be developed based on the specific protection and assistance needs of each;
- Using push and pull factors as indicators of internal displacement does not adequately capture the complexity of internal displacement, which is usually multi-causal and dependant on multiple factors; each situation requires its own analysis;
- The majority of IDPs live outside of camps (with host families, in public buildings, in caves, in private rented accommodation, etc.). Their protection and assistance needs cannot be responded to in isolation, but must be integrated into a response which takes into account the needs of the population affected by displacement as a whole (this is often referred to as an 'area based approach');
- Proper data is required to inform responses, this can be challenging in situations of limited access, where IDPs want to remain anonymous for protection purposes. Hence the importance of ensuring that adequate information gathering methodologies are used, which protect their anonymity. In most such cases, registration for example is inappropriate. The inter- Agency Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) has been set up to offer technical support to governments and international agencies to carry out profiling of situations of internal displacement which provides data in such a way as to ensure that the protection concerns of IDPs are respected;
- IDPs must be involved in decisions which affect them, if durable solutions are to be found. Often return which tends to be prioritized by governments and international actors, is neither possible, nor the preferred settlement option for IDPs, especially in situations of protracted displacement. Increasingly, it is being recognized that support to local integration facilitates the re-establishment of IDPs dignity and independence, without necessarily precluding their return at a later stage.