Internal Displacement – A Global Challenge
IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

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Why Focus on Displacement?

By Pasquale Lupoli, Director of Operations Support, IOM

It has been two decades since the international community began to wake up to the issue of internal displacement. Following the end of the cold war with the breakdown of borders, power struggles and civil wars, the number of “visible” internally displaced persons grew. Although not a new phenomena, the humanitarian crises within countries such as Sudan, Angola and Colombia could no longer be ignored by the international community. However, despite the visibility of such internal displacement crises, responses remain under-funded and over-neglected.

Why after all these years are we, the international community, still faced with inadequate responses to internal displacement crises as Darfur and northern Uganda? Why are we still confronted with statements such as “we failed these people too long?” It certainly isn’t because those working daily on behalf of the displaced aren’t trying to do enough.

A truer answer lies in a multitude of reasons. Not least is the definition of an internally displaced person (IDP). According to the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, a group of 30 principles to serve as an international standard on providing assistance and protection to IDPs, displaced people 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”.

Their work is hampered by a lack of adequate data on IDP numbers. The Norwegian Refugee Council’s Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimates 23.7 million people are displaced as a result of conflict and human rights violations. However, there is no monitoring of those affected by natural disasters, environmental degradation and development projects. Although we know through the international responses in Pakistan and tsunami-affected countries that the real figure for IDPs is much higher than the 23.7 million, we do not have an estimate of all the internally displaced if the full definition of IDPs in the Guiding Principles is applied.

What is needed is for the definition of IDPs to be put into practice systematically. This would allow the humanitarian community to provide a proper response, especially in countries where people are forced to flee for different reasons in different regions.

These are all great challenges for us all. But they do not compare to the challenges faced by the displaced on a daily basis. The word “persons” in IDPs must not be forgotten. Often without prior warning, people are forced to flee into the unknown. Regardless of whether one, two or all of these factors are present, IDPs experience all the same issues that the displaced must confront.

It is for this reason that this edition of Migration focuses exclusively on internal displacement and IOM’s own response to it. The tragedies of human displacement must no longer be neglected.

For thousands of Sri Lankan families, displacement has become a way of life and the term “internal displacement” has become “eternal displacement.” No sooner than a family settles in a new place, with relatives, friends or understanding neighbours, they have to move on. Constantly uprooted, they lose sight of peace and normality as the ongoing conflict pursues them from one district to the next.

By Christopher Gascon, IOM Sri Lanka

For the past 20 years, Sri Lanka has suffered from an ethnic divide whose death toll hovers around 64,000. Hundreds of thousands have been forced to flee for their lives as the battle rages on. Entire communities have been evacuated when the Sri Lankan Army has appropriated land to establish defence perimeters.

By the height of the conflict in 1995/1996, caught between two warring parties, shellings and armed combat at their doorstep, thousands of families gathered their belongings and stole away in the middle of the night to become internally displaced persons or IDPs.

Despite all this, human nature often prevails. Survival promotes the strongest coping mechanisms. Children still want to play, new families are born and hope is often found in the most unlikely of places.

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fishing in the lagoon. Our life is so much better*

But among Sri Lanka’s thousands of displaced families, many have yet to find the means to return. Nationwide the government estimates that 310,000 people are still displaced as a result of the ever-present conflict, which continues despite the ceasefire.

It is this conflict, however, which presents the greatest challenge to organizations assisting IDPs in Sri Lanka. Insecurity means humanitarian organizations such as IOM cannot always go about their business in reaching the displaced or simply being able to routinely carry out their operations in any one area.

For the same reasons over security that IDPs left their community in the first place, they can also often find that after a period of calm following their return, new tensions arise, poising renewed security concerns.

In such an environment, finding skilled labour willing to work on programmes such as the construction of shelters becomes more difficult. The other knock-on effect is that the cost of materials increases on the local market, which means in the end that fewer people can be helped from a defined budget.

But paradoxically, the greatest natural disaster in the island’s history also brought new hope as well as despair. International donors reacted with unprecedented generosity and humanitarian agencies found themselves able to help most of the tsunami victims with new homes and new livelihoods.

But in the initial race to help the tsunami victims, people displaced by the war were astonishingly marginalized. Several months would elapse before the concept of equal treatment would resurface in the humanitarian community.

The conflict IDPs, many of them living next door to tsunami IDPs, looked on as the victims of the natural disaster got help and support that far exceeded anything that they had received.

For example, tsunami victims received temporary shelters with a 200 square foot cement base, bordered by three-foot-high brick walls and roofed with tin sheets. Conflict IDPs had considered themselves fortunate to live in much more basic accommodation.

Livelihood support, once difficult to come by, was now promptly distributed to those who had lost their income-generating assets in the towering waves.

Ironically, the nature of the funding itself was a contributing factor. Under the rules of humanitarian aid, tsunami funding was only for the tsunami-affected.

But a growing awareness of the problem is now resulting in the first steps towards a more even-handed approach.

“You cannot build on a peace process without a stable population base. You can’t build on the quicksand of displaced populations,” observes Dennis McNamara, head of the UN’s Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) internal displacement division.

“Money cannot simply be ripped from the tsunami aid programme... and given to conflict victims. But in some cases, it can be spent in a way that helps both war and tsunami victims,” he adds.

The solution, adopted by the Sri Lankan government and humanitarian agencies, has been to shift the focus onto tsunami-affected districts, rather than simply looking at tsunami-affected populations.

IOM has moved quickly to capitalize on the new approach, reaching out to conflict-affected segments of the population to include them in livelihood support and training programmes originally set up for tsunami-affected populations.

The standards and norms applied to shelters for tsunami victims are also now increasingly being applied to conflict-affected populations, who can now look forward to sturdier temporary housing with concrete floors and tin roofs.

For humanitarian agencies, adopting the principle of equal treatment has also helped to shift the focus from emergency aid and relief to longer-term development. And it is only long-term development that will generate the confidence and stability needed to end Sri Lanka’s apparently endless cycle of population displacement.

A family stays in a temporary camp provided by IOM. (Photo: Natalie Behring © IOM 2005)
Rachel’s father had been proud of his herd of around 30 cattle and had been considered quite prosperous. But the cattle were looted by pro-government forces that overran his village and the family was left with nothing. Nevertheless, he took the decision to make the nearly 500-km walk north to relative safety in South Darfur. Rachel does not remember the walk nor the brother who died on the journey. She does not know her age – she’s in her mid-twenties but looks much older. And she doesn’t know her birthday either. With no parents alive, there is no one to ask.

Many Dinka made some sort of a life in South Darfur after the first flight of the mid-eighties. They had a traditional relationship with the farmers and landowners of a comparatively rich South Darfur for whom they provided agricultural labour. But when violence broke out in Darfur in 2003, they had to flee again, once more losing all they owned. Whilst not directly involved in the violence, the African Christian Dinka became a target of ethnic hatred from all sides and fled from rural areas to towns such as Nyala, which became the main concentration of Dinka in the state.

Some fled to Beleil, which lies next to the railway. In recent months, the numbers in Beleil camp have fluctuated as more Dinka seek refuge from inter-tribal fighting while others move on. The fighting between government and rebel forces and between different tribes and factions of the immature Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the consequent violence against the civilian population is the worst since the Darfur conflict first broke out in 2003.

Many like Rachel, once a resident of Beleil, have decided to return home. Whilst they know that whatever infrastructure of their home state of Bahr el Ghazal there was has been entirely shattered by the conflict they once escaped, many prefer the safety away from the increasing violence in Darfur.

Rachel’s story as a single mother and head of a household comprising three children is not unusual. In the beginning, after her husband died, life was possible. She was young, strong and able to walk large distances to gather firewood to sell to charcoal burners or other IDPs. But a year and a half ago, while gathering firewood by herself some kilometres away from Beleil, she came across three men loading their belongings on to IOM trucks which will transport them to the River Kiir. IDPs loading their belongings on to IOM trucks which will transport them to the River Kiir.

The fire sits a blackened aluminium pot in which bubbles a thin sorghum porridge. The shelter is not much more than a metre high made in the local style of bent sticks driven into the ground and covered in a mixture of branches, grasses and discarded plastic bags. The discarded plastic bags which have become an icon of 21st century Africa are ripped and torn and flap in the breeze. Their red blue and yellow stripes add a macabre air of carnival to the scene of relentless poverty that is the Khor Omer IDP camp. The day is on the outside of the main IDP gathering and lacks the security of the more established shelters nearer the centre. The covering of the shelter provides some respite from the hot sun of the early afternoon but there will be no protection from the heavy rains between May and October.

Two of her three children take advantage of the shade having spent the morning sifting the sand in the shelter in an attempt to eradicate the local black beetles which have a mildly poisonous bite and cause painful infected swellings. Her third child, a boy of about a year, bags at a distended breast in a listless and disinterested manner while she continues poking the fire.

Rachel was born sometime in the mid-80s in a satellite village just to the south of Marreil-Bai in Northern Bahr el Ghazal province and before she could walk, was forced to flee with her parents to avoid the inter-ethnic fighting of that time between an Islamic government, their proxies and largely Christian tribes including Rachel’s own Dinka.

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IOM has provided technical support for the registration of more than 2 million vulnerable people in Darfur, mostly internally displaced people. Registration enables ration cards to be issued enabling vulnerable people to access food and non-food items that are essential to their survival. The registration database also provides a wealth of statistical data that will assist substantially in planning the return of displaced people to their former homes. It will also enable humanitarian agencies to provide assistance and protection during and following the return process.

Return in Darfur. The current situation in Darfur is not considered conducive for the return of displaced people except for the Dinka population in South Darfur who are moving from Darfur to Northern Bahr el Ghazal. IOM’s current role is to support the spontaneous return of the Dinka and also to assist the formal return of a limited number in this return season (February to May). In the meantime, IOM has established itself as the lead actor for returns for North and South Darfur and leads the planning process in anticipation of the situation becoming more conducive to return within Darfur in the future.

Preventing forced returns. In August 2004, IOM signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Sudanese government whereby Khartoum devolved a large element of its sovereignty to IOM in the matter of returning and relocating people within Darfur. As a result of IOM’s verification and monitoring activities under the MoU, forced returns of displaced people was entirely eliminated in North and South Darfur. The MoU is a unique tool for the protection of internally displaced people, nothing like it exists anywhere else in the world.

Material assistance and capacity building. IOM provided the majority of non-food items that were distributed in Darfur in 2005. IOM also provides capacity building to local Sudanese entities in addition to coordinating camp managers in North and South Darfur so as to avoid duplications and gaps in the provision of assistance. Other assistance includes IOM engineers carrying out substantial flood prevention work in Abu Shouk and Kalma camps as well as the building of more than 1,000 latrines.

Rachel had seen people in white cars driving into the camps and the sheikhs had been talking of return to her homeland. Some said there was nothing there, but others said there would be food and maybe a small plot of land to grow things.

It was then that Rachel decided to return to a homeland that she did not remember, that she did not really know where it was and with which she had very few connections.

Whilst not directly involved in the violence, the African Christian Dinka became a target of ethnic hatred from all sides and fled from rural areas to towns such as Nyala, which became the main concentration of Dinka in the state.

If Rachel does not leave Khor Omar by the beginning of May, the opportunity to return to her homeland this year will be lost. Seasonal rains make the route from South Darfur to Bahr el Ghazal over the River Kiir that flows close to the border between the two provinces impassable from mid-May to early February. It’s another hurdle to overcome on the long journey home, but what choice does Rachel have?
While millions of Afghans fled abroad to become refugees during the conflicts and droughts of the 1980s and 1990s, as many as a million left their homes to become internally displaced people in their own country.

By Rahilla Zafar, IOM Afghanistan

In December 2000, within two months of the fall of the Taliban, IOM began the daunting task of helping them to return home, trucking hundreds of families down from the snow-covered Panjir Valley to the Shomali plain bordering Kabul.

In the spring of 2002, thousands of displaced families began to register to join IOM convoys leaving Herat’s giant Maslakh displacement camp and the dozens of smaller camps bordering the northern city of Mazaw-i-Sharif.

In the intervening years, IOM, UNHCR and the Afghan Ministry of Refugee and Repatriation (MoRR) have worked closely together to help some 400,000 internally displaced Afghans to return home to their towns and villages all over Afghanistan.

They were also given a small reintegration package consisting of items such as blankets, sleeping mats, soap, seeds and fertiliser provided by both IOM and UNHCR.

But while male returnees can often return to work the land or find jobs associated with the country’s reconstruction, uneducated women face a far more uncertain future, particularly if they are among Afghanistan’s estimated 1.5 million war widows.

“Afghan women suffered tremendously due to their homes being destroyed and losing their husbands and family support,” says Nooria Banwal, Director of Women Economic Empowerment at the Afghan Ministry of Women’s Affairs.

While infrastructure, access to health care, and education remain huge challenges for the Afghan authorities, the country still has not fully solved the problem of the remaining internally displaced population.

An estimated 153,000 remain and as many as 38,500 are expected to need help to return home in 2006. “The lack of donor funding and the ending of WFP food deliveries to the camps means that there is serious concern as to what will happen to these people,” says Alex Cossiac, who manages IOM’s IDP programme.
IDP WORLD FIGURES

Quick Facts

- In Uganda, 75% of the IDP women are victims of torture resulting from abduction, rape, hard labour, unwanted pregnancies and victims of HIV/AIDS.

- In Afghanistan, almost 80% of the entire IDP population is living in just four camps in the south.

- In Colombia, the Luz y Vida Artisan Women’s Association is a group of 57 internally displaced women who, through the production and commercialization of craft works and baked goods, seek to motivate displaced women to begin enterprise projects.

Source for figures: Norwegian Refugee Council
The difficulties of returning home soon after a major natural disaster can be just as daunting as returning many years to a homeland torn apart by conflict. The memories are more vivid, the destruction probably more immediate and the emotions still very raw. This is something that millions of people displaced by last year’s earthquake in Pakistan are now facing.

When the Short Road Is a Long Way to Go

By Darren Boisvert, IOM Pakistan

Almost six months after he left his destroyed village in the mountain, Khushal stands in the middle of controlled chaos – scattered belongings, collapsed tents and children running around yelling at the top of their lungs.

But Khushal insists he’s happier than he’s been in months. He’s watching IOM officials pack his belongings and load them onto a waiting rugged 4x4 jeep. The road to Khushal’s village of Dub Gali, a mere 14 km north of Muzzafarabad city in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, is one of the few routes unblocked by landslides, and

By Darren Boisvert, IOM Pakistan

A family (left) looks on as their belongings are packed for transportation (right). (Photos: Darren Boisvert/© IOM 2006)

The earthquake on 8 October 2005 hit Dub Gali hard. By the time the 7.6 Richter scale quake subsided, all 40 houses were destroyed. Twenty-one people died, including Khushal’s brother, sister, nephew and uncle. Khushal, a woodcutting scheme, Khusal paid off his debts and plans to use the milk to help feed his two boys, eight-year-old Afzal and four-year-old Bilal, as well as his toddler daughter Lubna and his wife, Saleem Jan.

“I feel good – but worried,” says Khushal. “What will we do if there is another earthquake?”

Such fears are common among those returning home. There have been more than 1,800 aftershocks in the region since last October and many roads remain blocked. According to UN road assessment teams, entire valleys, such as the Leepa Valley to the east of Muzzafarabad city, will remain

Life has been tolerable for Khushal and his family of five in the Lower Bab-e-Neelum camp in Muzaffarabad city. Run by the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) association, 113 families waited out the harsh winter with donated food and blankets. But for the past few months, Khushal’s mind has been on his village that nestles between two mountain peaks at the base of the Himalayas.

The authorities told me that those people who still had land should go back and we should return willingly,” says Khushal. “Two weeks ago, I walked home to start to rebuild my house, and now that the weather is warmer, I am taking my family back.”

Since 20 March, IOM has been providing free medical screening and transportation to anyone who wishes to return home to their villages. By the end of October 2006, IOM officials estimate that they will assist over 40,000 people, thanks to funding from the UN’s refugee agency, UNHCR. There is much uncertainty in the tent villages being closed down by the government from the end of March, but also the first stirrings of hope.

Naseer gives instructions to the driver to help him negotiate a difficult and dangerous switchback. (Photo: Darren Boisvert/© IOM 2006)

IOM vehicles head out of the Lower Bab-e-Neelum camp in Muzaffarabad city, en route to Dub Gali, 14 km away. (Photo: Darren Boisvert/© IOM 2006)
The moment of return to former homes is perhaps the only happy chapter of the displacement story. Here, Jean Philippe Chauzy accompanies a group of vulnerable Dinkas helped by IOM to return to their ancestral homes in southern Sudan. After decades of conflict, the country is host to the world’s largest internally displaced population, standing at 6 million people. After so many years away, the long-anticipated return is an emotionally charged event.

From Darkness to Light

Displaced Dinkas Return Home

Isolated for years to come. Kilometres of painstakingly constructed roads have simply slid off the mountainside and into the deep ravines below.

Along the road to the village of Dabkhan (north of Muzaffarabad city), farmland carved out of the mountainsides as terraces is riddled with crevasses and where once there were rows of maize, rocks and boulders sprout like deformed weeds. Tattered clothing and broken beams litter the roadside as people gathered more than valuables before fleeing the mountains.

As well as the fear of further earthquakes, those returning to destroyed homes will also have to deal with other more immediate issues such as how to stay dry during the approaching monsoon and a few months down the road, winter will bring a freezing reality. For those who have lost their land, rebuilding a home is a distant dream and all seasons bring their own hazards.

For Mariam Abdul, who is returning to her village of Dabkhan with a few precious acquisitions, having land to rebuild on is not so much of an issue. Her husband Abdul Rashid, a local school teacher, stayed on in the village to guard their land while Mariam migrated to the Lower Bab-e-Neelum tent camp. Here, as well as looking after two of her three surviving children, she took care of an orphaned girl and a widowed neighbour.

“They will stay with us until we can figure out what to do,” says Mariam. “But I’m afraid we’re going to need some help.”

Over the winter, IOM had provided tents and shelter material for Dabkhan, along with those on the adjoining mountainsides. It was a challenging programme as the post-earthquake migration of survivors to other cities and towns in the region made it more difficult to locate families in need.

Many villagers in the region have two houses, one during the summer at upper elevations, and one for the winter much lower down the mountain. Mariam’s family had already moved into their lower “winter house” when the earthquake struck, but can never return as that land is now separated from the mountain by a new 15ft crevasse. In effect, they lost half their land, and she says next winter will be cold and difficult.

Packed into a 4x4 jeep, this “new” family is jostled by the rocky road that is little more than a mountain track. The roar of the motor competes with the low rumble of the Jhelum river rapids over 5000ft below, as the vehicle inches its way back and forth to transverse tight switchbacks.

A few kilometres away from Dabkhan, the road ends abruptly, and Mariam and her family start the 1½-hour walk to their village. Mariam will find her husband and a few other relatives in order to return to the road’s end, gather the bags of food and the tent, and begin the reconstruction of their lives next to the debris of the old ones. It’s going to be far from easy.

Newly rebuilt bridges help the IOM truck and family make it home. (Photo: Darren Boisvert® IOM 2006)

Mariam and her new adopted daughter Alia. (Photo: Darren Boisvert® IOM 2006)

After many years away from their homes, displaced Dinkas wait at a way station in Juba for the journey home on an IOM barge to Bor in Southern Sudan.
There is a definite buzz in the air this morning at the Lologo way station, a few kilometres outside the town of Juba, in Sudan’s Bar Al Jebel province. For months now, Lologo’s residents, internally displaced Bor Dinkas, had been waiting for the moment when they could finally pack their belongings and go home.

“I am so happy, I could fly,” says Martha Nyanwut Wal, who plans to return with her three children to her home village of Baidi, after stocking up at a UNHCR-run way station. At the facility, she will receive food from the World Food Programme, and medical assistance, plastic sheeting, jerry cans, mosquito nets and other non-food items from UNICEF and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency International (ADRA).

“Their reintegration prospects are excellent, mainly because the group returned with its cattle – the mainstay of their economy,” says IOM Operations Officer, Louis Hoffmann. “The Dinkas showed great courage and determination in coming home. IOM and its partners just stepped in at the ... return. One of the very few happy stories out of South Sudan – we certainly hope there will be many more to come.”

Preparing Home

Forty Dinkas arrive today.

“Baba! Baba!” shouts a young woman today are about to begin the last leg of their long journey home. Excited children run around bundles of luggage and sleeping mats, pushing toys made of bamboo and tin. Women holding wooden crosses close to their hearts stand in front of tents while old men sit on the polished wooden seats that symbolize their status as community elders.

Their journey through Western Equatoria was fraught with danger every step of the way. They walked through mined areas and were repeatedly ambushed by cattle rustlers. The group scattered and many of the elderly, disabled, the young and expectant mothers were left behind at the mercy of the marauders.

In December 2005, at the request of the government of South Sudan and in coordination with the UN, IOM stepped in to provide ground transportation to help the most vulnerable reach the safety of Juba, where they stayed.

The decision to return to their ancestral land was also motivated by tensions over land and grazing rights and by a general feeling among host Moro and Zandi communities that the Dinkas had outstayed their welcome.

Their departure Dinkas have swept clean the newly vacated tents – other displaced families will soon move in from a derelict warehouse nearby. They have completed an IOM medical examination to ensure they are fit to travel, and their names have been registered on a passenger manifest. Boarding passes and luggage receipts are carefully wrapped in plastic bags to protect them during the long river journey home.

As the ferry zigzags along the river, more feeling among host Moro and Zandi communities that the Dinkas had outstayed their welcome.

The scenery gradually changes with the sound of hymns comes from the decks, accompanied by rhythmic drumming. It is Sunday and the Dinkas want to express their gratitude for their imminent home-coming. The Bible verses tell the story of a people coming from the darkness into the light.

“I’m so happy to go home,” says 28-year-old Samuel Chol. “My father died in 1992, but I hope to find my mother in Bor. She must be very old now, at least fifty.”

Excitement grows as the ferry, pushed by a powerful motorboat, begins its 150-km, 18-hour journey up the White Nile. On the decks, the Dinkas have huddled together to say goodbye to Juba, but apart from IOM staff, there is no one to send them on their way.

Travelling north from Juba, the White Nile meanders through lush marshlands. Then wide stretches of grassland open up, dotted with herds of scrawny, hump-backed, long-haired cattle – a welcome sign for the Dinkas, who hold them in great esteem.

Midday under a scorching sun and the ferry bounces off the soft sandbanks as the river narrows to a width of just 20 metres. Despite the expertise of the pilot, who has navigated the channel for more than 30 years, the ferry occasionally grinds to a halt in the shallows, forcing the pusher boat to manoeuvre frantically to inch it back into deeper water.

The shores of the river are lined with palm trees, mangroves and maize and mango plantations. The scenery gradually changes with the increasing number of cattle camps on both banks of the river. Groups of people from the Mundari tribe wave and cheer as the ferry passes. Despite past tensions between the Mundaris and the Dinkas, mowers and mazes are thrown onto the barge as a welcoming sign.

After nine hours, the ferry moors a few miles north of Terakeka, a medium-sized mud and thatch village. Its arrival immediately draws a crowd.

Dozens of ebullient young Mundaris, who live in a nearby cattle camp, are on the scene. Their bodies are covered in ash and their foreheads and matted hair are smothered in ox blood. In the late afternoon sun, they perform dances and brandish sticks to the sound of a drum to the amusement of the returning Dinkas. As night falls, they drift back to the cattle camp and the day ends as it started – with hymns about coming home from darkness into light.
In northern Uganda, these questions are not hypothetical, but a daily reality for many of the 1.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) spread out in various districts in the north and north-east of the country.

The answer for some is the need to sell sex in order to buy food or protection just to stay alive.

There is general awareness of HIV and AIDS, which in Uganda have affected nearly a million people and currently affect 40 million worldwide. But among Uganda’s IDPs, contraception is not easily available and its use is limited. Fertility rates are high as is the likelihood of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. People don’t just have few options for HIV prevention but also limited possibilities for assistance.

Uganda, formerly one of the world’s most affected countries, is often seen as a success story in terms of fighting HIV and AIDS. By 2003, national HIV prevalence rates had fallen according to the Ministry of Health. The trend continues today when seen at the national level, but with exceptions. One such exception is the north, the region worst affected by the conflict between government soldiers and militia affiliated to the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). Some districts such as Gulu...
with significant numbers of IDPs, also have higher rates of HIV.

But why are the conflict-affected areas in Uganda and displaced people the world over vulnerable to HIV and AIDS?

Displacement itself – being away from the normal home environment – can lead to people having to adopt more risky behaviour to survive. A recent IOM study funded by UNAIDS among IDP populations in four districts in northern Uganda assessed their perceptions of vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections and HIV and AIDS. The study found issues such as poverty, hunger, lack of income generating opportunities and idleness as reasons why some women and girls engage in transactional sex. Worryingly, only one in five people in the IOM study had ever used a condom.

Displaced children who’ve lost parents and who’ve been left to care for younger siblings are even more vulnerable to HIV. Lacking in protection or guidance, they may have few other choices than to resort to transactional sex as a strategy for survival. An IOM programme that provided educational support to orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV and AIDS in IDP camps in northern Uganda helped to minimize their vulnerability. But the programme ended last December and is awaiting new funds to ensure such support can be extended to other children.

HIV and AIDS are also not the only health issues facing IDPs. Depending on the circumstances that made them flee their homes, they often have other urgent health concerns such as the physical effects of violence and sickness from lack of food, clean water or proper sanitation. These more immediate ills may push HIV to the back burner and little thought or concern will be given to the possibility of contracting a disease people may know little about, and in any case whose symptoms may not even show for five to ten years down the road. The problem is another lifetime away when the struggle to survive is being fought on a daily basis.

Small chance then under these circumstances of being voluntarily tested for the virus. Even if there is an opportunity to be tested and basic health services and information is available to those with the virus on how to take good care of themselves, the stigma and discrimination that both displacement and the disease carry means people may hesitate to take up any services that are offered. Because of that stigma, nine out of ten people in the world with HIV don’t know they have the virus.

Although internal displacement worldwide is now slowly starting to gain recognition among the international community, resources to address the issues surrounding the disease are often pushed aside in favour of the more immediately pressing needs of shelter, food, clean water or proper sanitation. It’s a short-sighted approach.

Among mobile and displaced populations operating outside their usual behavioural norms and who are very vulnerable to violence and abuse from many sides, the consequences of contracting HIV and AIDS are additional tragedies they have to bear. What little social fabric that remains among the displaced is lost as parents, children and siblings are lost to a disease that is entirely avoidable. As a displaced person, you have to hold on to the few things in life you still have – family and a few meagre possessions. If you lose that, what is left?

COLOMBIA

The country’s 50-year conflict has created the world’s second largest internally displaced population of at least 1.7 million, according to government figures, though some sources put the figure much higher at more than 3 million. The IOM office in the country is currently working on a two-year programme funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, which provides HIV prevention information and assistance to displaced adolescents and young people. This is achieved through the development of a sexual and reproductive health tool kit and other community outreach strategies and the strengthening of the health sector. Working together with government partners, non-governmental organizations, international agencies and academic institutions, more than 1,200 health and education workers have been trained to use the tool kit in order to pass on their knowledge to young IDPs. At the end of the first phase of the programme this month, more than 200,000 young IDPs will have been given access to sexual and reproductive health information and services including HIV prevention. The greenlight for a second phase has been given which means that by the end of March 2008, IOM will have reached many more hundreds of thousands of young IDPs.

ZIMBABWE

With access to HIV and AIDS prevention, care and treatment not readily available to mobile and vulnerable populations in Zimbabwe, IOM’s mission in Zimbabwe established a Migration Health Unit in 2004. It was to ensure such groups would receive comprehensive information on HIV prevention, as well as care and support services for those amongst them living with HIV/AIDS.

Based on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on working in emergency situations against HIV and AIDS and gender-based violence, IOM, in collaboration with UNFPA and Population Services International (PSI), is working through the Migration Health Unit to improve access to and availability of male and female condoms; to increase knowledge on HIV; to produce and disseminate information materials targeted at affected populations and to facilitate access to voluntary counselling and testing, gender-based violence referrals, post-exposure prophylaxis and emergency contraception.

As IOM carries out food distributions and other humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe’s displaced, HIV and AIDS prevention and care assistance is given at distribution sites. Such assistance includes awareness-raising through dramas and the distribution of condoms and information, education and communication materials on HIV and AIDS.

For those chronically ill from AIDS, workshops on nutrition and gender issues are held at distribution sites and at health clinics. Supplementary food packs are also provided. So far, nearly 120,000 displaced people have benefited from IOM’s Migration Health Unit’s programmes addressing displacement and HIV and AIDS.
Official statistics published by the Colombian government confirm a total of 1,784,626 internally displaced persons (IDPs) at the end of March 2006. This figure represents nearly 5 per cent of Colombia’s population of 43 million. Colombia has the world’s largest internal displacement crisis after Sudan. But those displaced in Colombia are perhaps less visible than those in Africa or Asia because, rather than living in refugee camps, they melt into slums or shanty towns on the fringes of cities and of society.

Forced displacement is both a tactic and a strategy, adopted by the illegal armed groups, mainly for territorial control. The displacement pattern in Colombia continues to be from rural areas to larger villages, then to departmental capitals and, finally, if IDPs have not found resettlement opportunities, they arrive in large cities such as Bogotá, Medellín or Cali, where they join the already vulnerable populations of the shanty towns. In some cases, armed actors continue to threaten the displaced in these areas causing intra-urban displacement.

The Guiding Principles for Internal Displacement call on states to safeguard the liberty and personal security of IDPs, guarantee equal treatment, ensure primary education for children and offer necessary assistance to all among other safeguards. States should promote the return of IDPs to their home communities only when such returns are voluntary and can be accomplished in safety and dignity. Colombia’s Law 38 of 1997 is meant to guarantee many of these safeguards. IOM’s mission in Colombia has been to bring together and coordinate institutional efforts in order to implement and develop solutions for Colombia’s mobile population by engaging all actors including international cooperation, the private sector, civil organizations and the Colombian government. With this approach, the IOM programme has sought to build sustainable development strategies, trained in market opportunities that generate social and economic profitability for the entities related as well as for the beneficiaries.

The Programme

The main objective of IOM’s Post-Emergency Assistance to Displaced, Host and Vulnerable Populations Programme has been to restore the rights of victims of forced migration, provide assistance to the geographic areas to promote further displacement and measures to protect affected populations.

The IOM programme, which began in October 2000 and is due to end in June 2006, has provided assistance to 750 projects in nine departments with a budget of nearly US$ 5 million fully funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Working in the areas of health, education, and co-habitation, infrastructure and housing, institutional capacity building and income generation, the programme has provided support to the Colombian government and civil society to strengthen the assistance provided to IDPs, especially as they arrive in new communities and are needed to settle.

In 2005, a new alliance between IOM and the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF), also funded by USAID, allowed these efforts to continue for the next five years. Lessons learnt from the past six years will help the Colombian government and civil society to adapt their assistance provided to IDPs, especially as they arrive in new communities and are needed to settle.

Through four project areas: family health, sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial assistance and institutional capacity building, IOM has been supporting additional prevention activities to promote health, nutrition, and vaccination, and to extend coverage of the basic assistance plan and provide access to the services offered by the National Health System to more IDPs. The programme assisted 322,568 persons under this component, while at the same time working on consolidating a Ministry of Social Protection and strengthening the coordination with government institutions and United Nations agencies working with internally displaced communities.

Education. Acquiring basic skills is a priority for the social reintegration of displaced populations. The programme component which has provided support to the Colombian government and civil society to strengthen the assistance provided to IDPs, especially as they arrived in new communities and are needed to settle.

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By Rocio Sanz, IOM Colombia

Luz y Vida, or Light and Hope, is the name of the artisan Women’s Association created by internally displaced Colombian women. And that is just what their successful business endeavour has given them.

At 46, Orlando says her life experiences have provided a lot of stories that she is eager to share. In 1994, an illegal armed group went to her home town and she was forced to flee with her family, and ever since they have been living in Buenaventura, the capital of Santander, some 18 km from there.

Four years later, Orlando met the coordinator of Luz y Vida, who invited her to join the association and encouraged her to learn to make leather products. Orlando accepted the offer and began to learn the art of making items in leather and paper. Eight years have gone by and she has never looked back.

All 57 members of Luz y Vida are internally displaced women heads of household. Luz y Vida was created in 1998 in the settlement now known as Ciudadela, Cauca, Medellín. Its mission is to provide skills training for displaced and homeless women, encourage women to start and manage small businesses, and improve children’s living conditions and education. Luz y Vida receives technical support from IOM and financial support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The Association also teaches the members’ children to work on leather and paper, to operate the machines, and provide marketing training. “I am very happy with my life. My husband and I hope to continue to live in this town so that they can have a better future. We’re far away from our home town but perhaps one day we can go back and tell everyone about this part of our lives.”

by IOM, 2006

Post-Emergency Assistance Programme for Internally Displaced Populations, Receptor Communities and Other Vulnerable Groups

By Emilia Kantau and Fernando Calado, IOM Colombia

The programme has provided direct assistance to 128,906 people.

Infrastructure and Housing. This part of the programme is presented with two main objectives: the prevention and in prevention in areas considered as priority for the government. The projects developed aimed at finding solutions to overcrowding in small communities were IDPs had settled and lack of infrastructure in the cities. The programme provided assistance to populations who wanted to return to their places of origin and to those who did not have the option or the desire to return.

This segment also concentrated on the development of schools, school communities, community libraries, etc. A total of 170,482 beneficiaries were able to access housing loans, including loans for the construction or improvement of small community buildings and lack of information and awareness about the IDPs.

Income Generation. Income generation activities are vital to the successful settlement of displaced populations. IOM has been working with partners to find sustainable employment for the displaced and vulnerable heads of households, to provide support to those involved in farming, petty trade and work in the creation of micro-enterprises.

The main objective of the programme has been to recover the work skills lost by the displaced by supporting sustainable activities including micro-credit schemes.

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