



Norwegian Refugee Council

Global IDP Survey



Norwegian Refugee Council

The Directorate

The Global IDP Survey, as a project of the Norwegian Refugee Council, is administered through its Geneva office. It has an academic Advisory Board of 15 leading experts in the field of forced migration.

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Website

The Global IDP Survey website includes a full IDP bibliography and can be accessed on <http://www.nrc.no/idp.htm>

For more information

If you would like more information about the project, or would like to receive Global IDP Survey publications and are not a subscriber to *Forced Migration Review*, please contact:

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Not just another database

The Global IDP database and the role of information

"... many decisions are still taken in emergencies with very little information beyond that in people's heads."

In a world of instant communication, Internet, satellite phones and CNN, this comment, found in the *World Disasters Report 1997*,¹ is initially surprising until one reflects on the realities of field work.

Field officers from humanitarian organisations spend a vast amount of time gathering data, writing reports and transmitting information to senior officers further up the hierarchy. Attempts at analysis are often frustrated by a lack of context. In other words, from the perspective of a field officer in an isolated duty station it is difficult to know what is going on further afield which in turn makes it hard to identify and define patterns: something akin to not seeing the forest for the trees. Furthermore, field officers are frequently called upon to make immediate decisions on something of local importance but need to fit their decisions into a national or regional strategy; this too can be hampered by organisational information flows. Information almost invariably flows up, sometimes down and rarely laterally.

Among a plethora of NGOs and UN organisations working towards common goals in both humanitarian emergencies and long-term development, it inevitably emerges that some organisations are conducting similar projects or gathering the same information without either sharing or comparing information, and sometimes without even being aware of each other's activities. It is the age-old problem of field coordination. In the case of internal displacement, to make matters more complicated, there is no single responsible institution. Agencies are involved with internally displaced people (IDPs) on a more or less *ad hoc* basis and must try to coordinate their activities themselves.

This is why the Global IDP database is so important.

The Global IDP Survey's proposal for a database devoted exclusively to IDPs has been endorsed by the IASC-WG (Inter-Agency Standing Committee - Working Group).² In the first year, a comprehensive information-gathering programme will be undertaken for countries experiencing crises of internal displacement. In the short term, the project will take information currently available in the public domain and organise it into country profiles and themes. Much of the information will be gathered through Internet access although existing focal points within relevant NGOs, UN agencies and research institutions, plus interested individuals, will be encouraged to submit information.

In the long term, the Norwegian Refugee Council/Global IDP Survey hopes to make the database the central component of an expanding information network on internal displacement including IDP focal points within national and international NGOs, UN agencies, academic institutions and regional organisations. Eventually, it is expected that focal points within organisations dealing with IDPs will regularly provide and validate database information. Government authorities, where possible, will be included in the information network. The database will be posted on the World Wide Web.

At the international level the database will assist decision making and coordination for the IASC and will support the work of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, who chairs the IASC and is the UN focal point for IDP issues, by providing an overview of the activities of various organisations. The database will also support the work of the UN Secretary-General's Representative on IDPs through the provision of up-to-date, accurate information on internal displacement in a standardised and organised format that will allow cross-country comparison.

Articles in Forced Migration Review can be accessed and downloaded from FMR pages at the Global IDP Survey's website: <http://www.nrc.no/idp.htm> and at the RSP's website <http://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/rsp/>

But more importantly the database will centralise information on internal displacement. As anyone who has researched crises of internal displacement knows, information on IDPs is scattered, fragmented and insufficient. Surprisingly a lot of the information does exist if one knows where to look or who to ask. The centralisation and compilation of IDP information was one of the original aims of the Global IDP Survey. While *Internally Displaced People: A Global Survey* has accomplished this to a certain extent much remains to be done and it is clear that a bi-annual survey is not enough; situations of internal displacement change too quickly. The database will enable the accumulation in one place of diverse and pertinent information, regular update of this information and its general accessibility to anyone wishing to use it. For the individual humanitarian worker in the field, it will not replace information networks of individual organisations but it will be an important resource. Whilst it will not offer instant operational information, it will present a national profile of internal displacement and place it in a context that will assist the individual worker in analysis.

Perhaps the most meaningful question is how the database will help IDPs themselves. It has been said that the best protection against human rights abuse is an informed population. Information is protection. Information is empowerment. The database will provide valuable information for the advocacy efforts of IDPs themselves and national NGOs working with them. It will provide, for example, access to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, electronic links to relevant organisations and training manuals online.

In order to be successful, the database must contain information and in a world with shrinking budgets and fewer staff there is a risk that the information needs of the database may not be met. It requires interested people to participate in the process, to encourage their respective organisations to support the project and contribute information... and, most importantly, when the database is up and running, to use it!

Marc Vincent
Coordinator, Global IDP Survey

¹ *World Disasters Report 1997*, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, p37, OUP

² The IASC is a principle coordinating body of the UN, made up of heads of agencies, and is part of Kofi Annan's reform and streamlining of the UN system.

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- Lutheran World Federation
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Erratum

In *FMR 2*, the information on ECHO (sponsor of *FMR 2*) should have stated: 'In 1997, it donated funding of almost 442m ECU, not including aid that the EU's 15 Member States gave separately.' The date 1996, rather than 1997, was printed by mistake. We regret any resulting inconvenience to ECHO.