

Profiling IDP populations: new guidelines

by Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer and Tom Delrue

The lack of reliable IDP information has long hindered effective responses to internal displacement situations. The 'Guidance on Profiling Internally Displaced Persons' is a new tool designed to assist humanitarian actors in conducting IDP surveys.

Obtaining reliable data on IDPs is challenging. In most countries affected by internal displacement, existing data on IDPs and the conditions of their displacement is incomplete, unreliable, out of date or inaccurate. This presents a serious obstacle to effective advocacy, improved IDP protection and the design of targeted assistance programmes.

In recognition of this, in June 2004 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Working Group agreed on the need to develop an inter-agency framework of system-wide collection and analysis of IDP-related information. It later became clear that guidance in data collection methodologies was also required in order to systematise data collection in the field.

In summer 2007, the Global Protection Working Group endorsed the Guidance on Profiling Internally Displaced Persons developed by NRC's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and OCHA's Displacement and Protection Support Section with the support of UNHCR. The process leading to the finalisation of the Guidance included a series of broad consultations with stakeholders at the headquarters levels and practitioners in the field.

IDP profiling

Profiling IDPs is an important means of improving the availability and quality of information on IDPs in order to obtain a figure through a collaborative process that can be used both for country operations and global statistics. Timely and reliable data can lead to a better understanding of an IDP situation in a particular country or area within a country. This should improve the

quality of advocacy and programming on their behalf, in turn leading to better resourced and more targeted means to protect and assist them.

An IDP profile is an overview of an IDP population that shows, at a minimum:

- the number of displaced persons, disaggregated by age and sex (even if only estimates)
- their location/s .

Wherever possible, additional information could include but is not limited to: cause(s) of displacement; patterns of displacement; protection concerns; humanitarian needs; and potential solutions for the group/individual, if available.

Who is the Guidance designed for?

This Guidance is primarily designed for senior technical-level UN and NGO decision makers at the country and sub-regional levels. It is also designed to help those tasked with conducting a profiling exercise who, although they may be experts in conducting demographic surveys, may not necessarily know much about IDPs or their salient characteristics. They will need to understand whom they are profiling and be aware of possible pitfalls. In addition, this Guidance will be useful for government officials, civil society groups and others who work to advocate, raise awareness and mobilise resources on behalf of IDPs.

National authorities have primary responsibility for providing protection and assistance to IDPs within their jurisdiction. As such, wherever appropriate, the national authorities

should lead a profiling exercise, with international agencies playing a supporting role if necessary. Where the national government is unable or unwilling to assume this responsibility, it is the role of the UN Resident and/or Humanitarian Coordinator to initiate a profiling exercise, in consultation with the Country Team. The main point is that profiling should be a commonly agreed process among the various actors involved, although this does not rule out conducting separate needs assessments by different agencies for their particular purposes.

Steps forward

A core group of UN and non-UN agencies engaged in IDP profiling was formed in 2007 to support IDP profiling exercises in the field and to promote the implementation of the Guidance. Based on recommendations made after consultation with UN agencies, NGOs, academic institutions and donors in March this year, the group is currently exploring possibilities for establishing an inter-agency IDP profiling support service. An international workshop is planned for April 2008 in Yaoundé, Cameroon, to take stock of recent profiling exercises and discuss best practices. It is also planned to establish a broader network of organisations and institutions working on profiling-related issues.

Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer (jens.eschenbaecher@nrc.ch) works for the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (www.internal-displacement.org) and Tom Delrue (delrue@un.org) for the Displacement and Protection Support Section of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (http://ochaonline.un.org).

The IDP Profiling Guidance is available free of charge in print from IDMC (address on p72) and online at www.internal-displacement.org/profiling. A French version will also be available in 2008.