

# IDP information mechanisms: challenges from Angola, Colombia and Sri Lanka

by Jan Olav Baarøy

*Guesstimates of IDP populations in conflict-affected countries vary enormously as many different humanitarian actors gather and present data.*

**H**ow can data collection mechanisms be standardised and improved in order to obtain information on IDPs and better meet their needs with appropriate levels of assistance?

In 2001 UNICEF's Division of Policy and Planning launched a pilot project to assess the accuracy of data collection mechanisms for children affected by armed conflict. Field visits to Angola, Colombia and Sri Lanka have highlighted challenges in plugging gaps in our knowledge of how to collect information on IDPs.

There are established systems of registering IDPs in all three countries. Angola has a single registration system with aggregated numbers, whereas in Sri Lanka the government and the UN have a joint project to register all displaced persons and to gather disaggregated information. In Colombia there are various systems of registration by supply and demand of services and by means of various socio-demographic characteristics.

Quantitative estimates of total IDP numbers are generally formulated from multiple sources. In Colombia, one organisation uses a system of verified sources to estimate the magnitude of forced displacement caused by the armed conflict. In Angola, the UN monitors population movements and IDP influxes down to the communal level on a monthly basis.

In Sri Lanka UNHCR has conducted a number of assessments and small-scale household surveys. Data are collected on the number of families and individuals, their place of origin, condition of shelter and land, water and sanitation facilities, their prob-

lems and needs. In Colombia there are commissioned household surveys for IDPs in conflict zones. In Angola, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey provides disaggregated data on a wide range of demographic and health indicators.

As there is no designated organisation responsible for the coordination of assistance to IDPs, it is inevitable that where there are large numbers of displaced people there is a multiplicity of agencies and statistics. There is no standard reporting format. Each agency has its own system of data collection and may have an organisational interest in how it quantifies and presents numerical data. International databases on population movements such as OCHA's are compiled from a variety of sources of highly variable quality.

Data may continue to be cited even though dynamic security situations may have rendered it out of date. Multiple registration systems with incompatible criteria make compilation and comparisons difficult. Health and social indicators gathered from small samples may not necessarily be representative of entire IDP populations. There is no coordinated procedure for data collection, verification, assessment and analysis. How can we work towards a better system and improved data collection infrastructure? UNICEF calls on states, UN agencies and NGOs to:

- do more to counteract risks of over- and under-estimation
- ensure that estimation is based on multiple sources, including governmental, national and international humanitarian organisations



- recognise that governments should be the main actors in registration and estimation - with support from the UN if necessary
- develop standardised reporting formats with disaggregation of data - at least by gender and age and ideally additionally by displacement history, location and living conditions, education, employment and resettlement/relocation preferences
- identify and cooperate with a lead agency responsible for coordination of data collection, management and dissemination
- strive towards distinct data on IDPs where household surveys cover areas of mixed IDPs and non-IDPs
- develop strict guidelines for accepting and analysing secondary data in consolidated databases.

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The full texts of the articles summarised in this report are available online at: [www.idp.ntnu.no/conference/](http://www.idp.ntnu.no/conference/)