

The Internal Displacement Unit – OCHA

The proliferation of internal conflicts in the 1990s gave rise to new interest in the phenomenon of internal displacement. At the beginning of the new millennium, an estimated 25 million people were internally displaced as a result of armed conflict and human rights violations. An additional 20-25 million were said to be displaced as a result of natural disasters.

During the course of the last decade, in response to the gravity and increasing seriousness of the problem, the international community has responded with the development of new legal and institutional frameworks. In the absence of express legal or normative standards applicable to the internally displaced, Dr Francis Deng, the UN Secretary-General's Representative on Internally Displaced Persons, developed the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, based on international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law. Although not a binding instrument, the Guiding Principles have become an essential reference for all those dealing with the issue of internal displacement.

At the institutional level, rather than creating a new agency for the internally displaced or assigning responsibility to an existing agency, the international community opted instead for a collaborative approach to internal displacement which would draw upon the mandates and expertise of the UN's humanitarian and development agencies and other organisations in responding to the protection and assistance needs of the internally displaced. Concerns as to the effectiveness of this approach led to the creation in July 2000 of the Senior Inter-Agency Network on Internal Displacement charged with identifying ways in which the collaborative approach could be made to work more effectively. Among its recommendations was the establishment of the Internal Displacement Unit within the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The Unit's aim is to ensure a predictable and concerted response among all concerned actors to the problem of internal displacement. Taking into account the variety of needs of IDPs, the Unit identifies and highlights gaps in the humanitarian response to displacement situations. Within this mandate there is a broad range of activities required to address IDPs' assistance and protection needs. In 2003 the Unit undertook two studies which sought to analyse, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the effectiveness of the international response to the IDP problem.

- A **Protection Survey**, undertaken collaboratively by the Unit and the Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement, undertook field visits and interviews in nine countries. It examined the ways in which UN Country Teams and other relevant actors have sought to encourage and support states in discharging their primary responsibility for the protection of IDPs.
- The **IDP Response Matrix** aimed to map the involvement of humanitarian actors with regard to IDPs and their awareness of inter-agency policy instruments and guidelines¹.

Between them, the studies identified a serious failure and lack of commitment on the part of UN agencies to implement the collaborative approach, due in part to a lack of awareness and understanding of the collaborative approach.

Also during 2003, an evaluation of the Unit was undertaken to assess its relevance, efficiency and effectiveness.² As the Unit operates in a broader context, it soon became obvious that its work could not be analysed without reference to the response of the UN system as a whole to internal displacement. As such, the evaluation of the Unit became also an evaluation of the collaborative approach. As well as identifying ways in which the Unit could work more effectively, the eval-

uation also underlined similar deficiencies in the collaborative approach as had been identified by the Survey and Matrix.

Based on the findings of the Survey, Matrix and the evaluation, and following consultations with the UN Senior Inter-Agency Network on Internal Displacement, the Unit has redefined its objectives and activities for 2004, identifying four key goals:

- improve predictability and transparency in international response to internal displacement
- increase system-wide accountability for IDPs
- improve confidence in and implementation of the collaborative approach at the field level
- increase protection of IDPs

For further information about the Unit, see: www.reliefweb.int/idp or email: idpunit@un.org

1. Available online at: www.reliefweb.int/idp/docs/references/IDPMatrixPreOct03.pdf
2. Available online at: www.reliefweb.int/idp/docs/references/UnitEvaluationJan2004.pdf

OCHA's Internal Displacement Unit and UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery are collaborating with the Editors on the feature section of the next issue of FMR – the return and reintegration of IDPs.