

Protracted internal displacement in Europe

CURRENT TRENDS AND WAYS FORWARD

Summary and recommendations



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The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) was established by the Norwegian Refugee Council following the request of the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee to set up an IDP database in 1998. The Geneva-based Centre has since evolved into the leading international body monitoring internal displacement caused by conflict and violence in some 50 countries worldwide. IDMC is funded by a wide range of institutional donors and foundations.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre focuses on the following activities:

- monitoring internal displacement worldwide and maintaining an online database on conflict and violence related internal displacement;
- increasing visibility and awareness of internal displacement and advocating for the rights of internally displaced people;
- providing training on the protection of IDPs;
- contributing to the development of guides and standards for the provision of assistance and protection to internally displaced people.

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Cover photo: Displaced child in Leposavic collective centre, North Kosovo (Christophe Quirion, 2007).

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The full version of this report can be accessed and downloaded at www.internal-displacement.org/publications. It is based on a paper prepared for a seminar entitled Protracted Internal Displacement in Europe: Perspectives and Solutions organised by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population in Geneva, on 26 November 2008.

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Executive summary

Some 2.5 million people are internally displaced in Europe in 2009. They are in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Turkey. Most fled their homes more than 15 years ago as a result of violence and armed conflict, and are living in situations of protracted displacement. Over time, many have become marginalised and have been unable to improve their situation. While the vulnerabilities of these internally displaced people (IDPs) are sometimes the same as the local population, many IDPs still need assistance to overcome problems related to their displacement, concerning housing, jobs, documents and property, as well as access to psychosocial support.

Governments throughout the region have promoted the return of IDPs to their places of origin since the beginning of displacement. However, only about 25 per cent of IDPs have returned to their homes. The percentage may be even lower since some people returned to areas of origin and then had to leave again due to the lack of jobs, adequate housing and re-integration assistance there. In some countries where IDPs have been blocked from returning home because there has been no political resolution to the conflict, governments nevertheless continue to promote return as the preferred durable solution. Given these political obstacles, return processes which have slowed, the profile of the populations still displaced and the emergence of a generation who may have never visited their parents' place of origin, other durable solutions such as local integration in the area of displacement and settlement elsewhere in the countries concerned should be pursued.

Local integration and settlement elsewhere in the country are not necessarily incompatible with return. IDPs are entitled to enjoy their right to an adequate standard of living now, regardless of whether they plan one day to return, stay where they are or settle elsewhere. Local integration is not actively encouraged in most countries, seemingly to ensure IDPs will return, and where governments have supported settlement elsewhere in the country, it has mostly been promoted as a temporary solution until return becomes possible.

The challenge of integrating the IDPs who have moved progressively to towns and cities has been great, since much social housing has been privatised; meanwhile the continued occupation of collective centres often conflicts with governments' privatisation policies, leading to the eviction and further displacement of residents. The influx of IDPs into urban areas has also put pressure on services and infrastructure which have not always been able to meet the increase in demand. Experience has shown that these IDPs are unlikely to return to predominantly agricultural areas when they have a chance to do so, but IDPs will be more able to make a truly voluntary choice about whether to return if they are able to live a normal life now.

The lack of basic information about IDPs seeking durable solutions other than return is a serious impediment to resolving protracted internal displacement situations in Europe. As protracted situations of displacement are usually characterised by an IDP population whose numbers and locations are relatively stable, attempts should be made to consult and involve IDPs in the design of policies and programmes addressing their needs and preferences for durable solutions. Monitoring of IDPs' achievement of durable solutions is also needed since they may still have problems related to their displacement despite having chosen to return or settle elsewhere. Internal displacement in Europe is a large-scale problem that requires further discussion, analysis and action, and involving IDPs would help move the search for solutions in the right direction.

Recommendations

Recommendations to responsible authorities

On durable solutions:

- Ensure that in addition to return local integration and settlement elsewhere in the country are supported, and that IDPs are able to make a free choice between these options;
- Undertake a comprehensive profiling exercise to determine the achievement of durable solutions and the obstacles facing the remaining IDPs in private and government-provided accommodation in rural and urban areas;
- Design and implement programmes to adequately respond to the outstanding protection and assistance needs determined through a comprehensive profiling exercise;
- Seek the advice of international experts such as the Representative of the UN Secretary General on the human rights of IDPs and the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing on how to address the outstanding issues facing IDPs;
- Ensure the views of IDPs, including women, children, elderly and the disabled, are sought and taken into account in the development of policies which affect them and in ongoing peace processes;
- Take measures to facilitate reconciliation between communities involved in and affected by the conflict.

On access to documents:

- Establish effective systems for issuing or reissuing essential documentation to IDPs, including by using official records and alternative forms of evidence available to IDPs.

On housing and other social rights:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive livelihoods strategy to create income-generation opportunities for IDPs and other vulnerable groups in their current place of residence through a consultative process;
- Take measures to improve security of tenure for IDPs, particularly those residing in collective centres or in informal settlements in order to protect them from eviction;

- Ensure IDPs in need of assistance can access national social welfare systems, and in particular those promoting access to housing and livelihoods opportunities.

On general protection of human rights:

- Support accessible legal assistance programmes;
- Allow civil society organisations that promote the protection of human rights to function freely, with the possibility to receive funding from abroad and without excessive reporting requirements;
- Implement Council of Europe, UN Treaty Body and UN Universal Periodic Review recommendations pertaining to IDPs.

Recommendations to UN agencies and international NGOs

- Facilitate sharing of experiences and best practices among responsible authorities in the region, including on housing and education of IDPs;
- Continue to provide assistance to IDPs who do not enjoy their rights on par with their non-displaced neighbours, as well as to their most vulnerable non-displaced neighbours;
- Determine the outstanding issues facing IDPs living in private accommodation in urban areas;
- Monitor the achievement of durable solutions for IDPs;
- Advocate for the establishment of reconciliation mechanisms;
- Continue to advocate for peaceful and lasting resolutions to the conflicts where relevant.

Recommendations to the Council of Europe

On durable solutions:

- Conduct research on spontaneous and organised local integration and settlement of IDPs in Europe with the purpose of exploring the possibility of these durable solutions in the region;
- Identify the remaining obstacles for securing durable solutions for IDPs in collective centres and makeshift housing.

On access to documents:

- Support access to rights and justice for IDPs by ensuring issues of documentation and rule of law are included in the training and monitoring activities of the relevant bodies of the Council of Europe;
- Conduct research on the impact of the lack of documentation and non-recognition of documents and legislation in countries with competing legal systems on IDPs' access to rights, with a view to identifying ways to limit the negative impact of this situation on IDPs;
- Encourage governments to initiate civil registration campaigns targeting groups of IDPs particularly affected by the lack of documentation, such as Roma people.

On general protection of human rights:

- Support national human rights institutions in their capacity to encourage governments to address the limited access of IDPs to their rights;
- Continue to advocate for reconciliation mechanisms;
- Lobby the European Commission to more comprehensively reflect issues facing IDPs and access to their rights in EU progress reports, and to assess progress in the accession process against improvement of the situation of IDPs.

Recommendations to donors

- Consider funding comprehensive IDP profiling exercises to document the whereabouts and needs of the remaining IDPs and develop programmes to address their outstanding problems;
- Consider funding programmes that help IDPs resolve their outstanding problems related to their displacement and monitor their achievement of durable solutions, as well as assist their most vulnerable non-displaced neighbours.