



Profiling Internally Displaced Persons in urban settings



The project

IDMC managed the project in partnership with the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University in the United States. The team at Feinstein developed the research methodology, and worked with local and international consultants in Khartoum, Sudan, in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire and Santa Marta, Colombia between 2006 and 2008 to collect and analyse data and write case study reports. The methodology used made it possible to estimate the number of IDPs and compare their situation with those of other urban groups, and findings from these studies can be usefully applied to other protracted urban displacement situations.

Information on urban IDPs

There is little information about populations forcibly displaced to urban centres, although they are believed to be among the poorest and most vulnerable groups in many conflict-affected countries. Urban IDPs generally live beyond the reach of traditional humanitarian assessments and support. In the majority of cases, these IDPs are not registered with government assistance agencies, and little is known about their precise numbers, demographics or basic needs.

Hidden populations

The task of identifying and, where appropriate, assisting and protecting urban IDP populations has proven challenging. Underlying reasons for migration can include conflict, a failing rural economy, and rapid population growth. In these contexts, the involuntary flight of families from areas of conflict may coincide with their search for greater economic

security and better access to services. In some countries, IDPs find refuge and anonymity among other migrants in towns and cities, making them difficult to distinguish as a group.

Specific needs?

In situations of protracted conflict, urban IDPs may have accessed jobs and local services over time; their children may attend neighbourhood schools and consider the place of displacement as their "home". Governments and international onlookers alike often assume that these populations are sufficiently integrated and no longer have authentic assistance and protection needs. Yet the few indicators that can be gleaned from available data clearly refute this presumption. Reports from numerous countries over the years describe IDPs living in crowded and sub-standard housing - in the form of old railway carriages, factories, former public buildings and other makeshift shelters - often without electricity or plumbing. IDPs from rural areas are said to have great difficulty integrating and securing livelihoods as their skills do not transfer to urban labour markets. Reports have also suggested that host families have also become as destitute as the IDPs they are supporting.

Find out more

For more information about the pilot studies, contact the author karen.jacobsen@tufts.edu. IDMC's country pages have more on the IDP situations in [Sudan](#), [Côte d'Ivoire](#) and [Colombia](#).