

Background note on internal displacement and protection concerns in Côte d'Ivoire

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1. Scope of the note

When Côte d'Ivoire's 2010 post-electoral crisis broke out, the country had been trying to secure peace and stability since civil war erupted in September 2002. While a number of the humanitarian problems from that period had been addressed by the end of 2010, there were still populations with outstanding protection needs. The present note aims to provide a brief description of the situation in Côte d'Ivoire leading up to the current violence. This may be relevant in the planning of a new humanitarian response.

More detailed information is available at IDMC's Côte d'Ivoire country page, at www.internal-displacement.org/countries/cotedivoire. This includes the most recent overview of the country profile, published in September 2010 in English and French. IDMC's 2009 report on housing, land and property issues in western Côte d'Ivoire is also available, at www.internal-displacement.org/publications/cotedivoire, again in English and French.

2. Background

Civil war from 2002

A failed coup by disaffected soldiers set off Côte d'Ivoire's civil war in September 2002. The insurgent soldiers took control of the northern part of the country. It was estimated that at least 200,000 people fled the rebel-held northern town of Bouaké, and several thousand were made homeless in the economic capital Abidjan by a government demolition policy. The main targets of the demolitions were immigrants whom the authorities accused of supporting the rebellion. Many Ivorians were displaced, as well as refugees from neighbouring countries, causing population movements that threatened the stability of the entire region.

Under the leadership of former student leader Guillaume Soro, the rebel groups formed under the umbrella of the *Forces Nouvelles* (FN) articulated the grievances of northerners, who considered that they were treated as second class citizens. The Ivorian government was primarily composed of officials from the south and west.

International efforts to end the civil war had limited success. Three peace agreements brokered between 2003 and 2005 failed, notwithstanding the deployment in 2004 of a

6,000-strong UN peacekeeping mission (UNOCI) in addition to an established contingent of 4,000 French troops. The war continued sporadically until the signing in March 2007 of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement, which considerably calmed the situation. From mid-2009, however, tensions rose again over the electoral process and the question of Ivorian identity and nationality.

Ethnic tensions in the west

In the west, ethnic tensions predated the civil war. The country's political stability from 1960 to 1980 depended on both the political pragmatism of its leaders and a favourable economic environment. The key to the country's economic success was the development of the coffee and cocoa sectors, through policies encouraging the migration of a national and international workforce, particularly to the western forest area. The population census performed in 1998 found that four million non-Ivorians were residing in the country, or nearly 27 per cent of the population.

A sharp fall in the value of coffee and cocoa on international commodities markets, coupled with an economic recession at the end of the 1980s, had a significant impact on quality of life and also heightened tensions between indigenous inhabitants and migrant workers from abroad or from other areas of Côte d'Ivoire. One of the underlying causes of the 2002 crisis across the country was the resentment against the access to land of migrants, whether or not they were Ivorian citizens. This had a particularly strong impact in the west of the country, with its ties to export agriculture and its many migrants.

Regardless of the status of the peace process, tensions remained high in the west between indigenous groups and the Ivorian and West African migrants who for decades had worked on the local cocoa plantations. Such tensions have been exploited and heightened by politicians and military leaders preaching xenophobic Ivorian nationalism based on *Ivoirité*, which reframed certain rights to nationality and the ownership of land. They cited *Ivoirité* both to exclude political opponents and to mobilise political support against people of foreign origin among an increasingly impoverished population. In the presidential elections in 2000, which were eventually won by Laurent Gbagbo, opposition leader Alassane Ouattara was excluded from running due to his alleged Burkinabé nationality.

Though it was one of the conditions for the holding of elections, disarmament has not taken place in the north while pro-government militia have maintained a climate of fear and insecurity in the west.

3. Profile of IDPs prior to November 2010

Numbers

More than one million people were estimated to be displaced at the height of the conflict in 2003. A UNFPA-funded study published in March 2006, the only comprehensive IDP profiling exercise carried out, put the total number of IDPs at 709,000 in five government-held zones in the south and west (Abidjan, Daloa, Duékoué, Toulépleu and Yamoussoukro). The total number of IDPs included some 24,000 civil servants who had

left their posts in areas controlled by the FN and fled to government-held areas. By mid-2010, UNHCR estimated that some 519,000 people remained internally displaced, with all civil servants having regained their posts in FN-controlled areas. However, available statistics on the number of remaining IDPs have consistently only referred to the west and no data has been available on IDPs who fled to other areas.

Moreover, there have been no comprehensive mechanisms monitoring the achievement of durable solutions. Inter-communal violence continued to displace civilians in 2010, especially in the western regions of Moyen Cavally and Dix-Huit Montagnes, where property disputes in cocoa-growing areas and the proliferation of small arms have contributed to the ongoing tensions.

Breakdown by age and sex

The UNFPA-funded study found that the majority of IDPs were children aged up to four years old or between the ages of 15 and 19. In 2010, UNHCR estimated that the majority of the 519,000 IDPs were women.

Location

Some 120,000 people were estimated to be displaced in the western regions of Moyen Cavally and Dix-huit Montagnes in 2002-2003. By mid-2010, some 30,000 IDPs continued to live with host families, primarily in the departments of Bloléquin and Guiglo.

Almost 70 per cent of the IDPs in the government-held south fled to Abidjan. A profiling exercise carried out in 2007 found that between 300,000 and 440,000 IDPs were still living in the city. IDPs were found in all of the communes of Abidjan except in Treichville, with higher proportions in Yopougon and Abobo. IDPs in Abidjan tended to be Baoule (from central Côte d'Ivoire), Guere (west-central regions), Yacouba (west-central regions, mostly around Man), Bete (west-central regions, within the triangle between Daloa, Soubre and Gagnoa) and Agni (eastern regions).

4. Patterns of displacement

Of the identified IDPs, only a small number were in camps (approximately 1,000 people in Yamoussoukro and 7,000 in Guiglo until 2008). The vast majority have continued to live with host families or communities. This has made it more difficult to assess their situation but it has also put a considerable strain on host families. The 2007 survey in Abidjan found that host households had welcomed three IDPs each on average.

IDPs' movements have mainly been around conflict areas, and they have settled in villages and towns near their areas of origin. In the west, Duékoué and Toulépleu have sheltered the majority of the IDPs from the western regions (97 per cent and 83 per cent respectively). Daloa has mainly welcomed IDPs from the west and from Haut Sassandra region. Yamoussoukro has mostly sheltered people coming from the Vallée du Bandama region (78 per cent in urban areas and 64 per cent in rural areas). In general, displaced men from 'Vallée du Bandama' relocated to urban areas while those from 'Haut

Sassandra' preferred to remain in rural areas. The main areas of transit before IDPs reached their final destination were Vallée du Bandama, Dix-huit Montagnes, Moyen Cavally and Savanes.

In the Moyen Cavally and Dix-huit Montagnes region, chain displacements have occurred, as one population group has chased away another and has been then itself chased away. In the district of Zouan, for example, the people chased out of Zou occupied villages belonging to communities that had to flee their homes. The new arrivals were later also attacked.

5. Protection concerns

Physical security

Ambushes and armed robberies have been consistently occurring in the west, especially between Duékoué and Bangolo. Human rights violations and abuses against IDPs and returning populations, especially those non-indigenous to the area, have also been common in Moyen Cavally and Dix-huit Montagnes regions.

The presence of armed newly-arrived migrants in state-owned protected forests (e.g. Mont Peko-Bangolo and Mont Tia-Kouibly areas) has constituted a threat to the populations living in neighbouring areas. The joint command (*Commandement Intégré*) has not been able to disarm these groups. Some local populations, for example in Phing Beoua in the Zou area, have enlisted traditional hunters for protection, due to the increase in the circulation of arms.

Sexual and gender-based violence

The rate of reported cases of rape has increased since 2007, especially in the west and in the former “zone of confidence” between the government-controlled south and the FN-controlled north. Sexual assault cases against children have also increased in the west. Incidents of harassment and rape have been common at checkpoints run by government security forces and FN members. Sexual violence has been reportedly taking on more and more an ethnic dimension. Displacement has fuelled an increase in prostitution, sexual violence and sexual exploitation of women and girls, especially in urban areas such as Abidjan.

Freedom of movement

Roadblocks in both government and rebel-controlled areas continued to impede freedom of movement into 2010, limiting the provision of basic supplies to the north and barring the economic recovery of the country. Although checkpoints remained throughout the country, extortion was most severe in the north where, according to Human Rights Watch, FN members extorted the equivalent of millions of US dollars annually through checkpoints and other rackets.

Côte d'Ivoire is primarily a country of destination for trafficked children and women, specifically for forced labour and forced prostitution, but it is also a country of transit and origin. Trafficking within the country's borders is more prevalent, with victims primarily

trafficked from the north to the more prosperous south.

Access to education

Due to the massive displacement caused by the civil war that broke out in 2002, the education system across the country, from primary schools to university, has experienced severe problems. It was estimated in 2004 that some 700,000 children had not been able to access education since the beginning of the crisis. School buildings were destroyed in both the central and northern regions, especially in the west, and in Abidjan in riots against the French force in November 2004. Rebuilding of school facilities was one of the priorities following the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement in 2007. Schools in the south have overcrowded due to the large number of internally displaced children who continued their education there.

Education in the north has been impacted by the shortage of qualified teachers: the Ministry of Education estimated that only 20 per cent of the government-paid teachers stayed at their posts in the north during and right after the conflict. The return of teachers was slowed down by the lack of security and the occupation and destruction of education infrastructure.

Housing, land and property

The 2002 armed conflict exacerbated existing land ownership disputes, due to the displacement it caused and to the increase in deaths and inter-communal disputes relating to succession. Several types of conflicts have been linked to land: conflicts among autochthonous communities (*autochtones*), inter-generational conflicts, conflicts between autochthonous communities and migrant workers (both Ivorian citizens or *allochtones*, and foreigners or *allogènes*).

In northern Côte d'Ivoire, where rebels had been occupying the houses of the IDPs, property restitution remained a major issue. In the west, disputes often broke out when displaced individuals attempted to reclaim their plantations and realised that their plots had been occupied in their absence, or allocated to new migrants for exploitation without taking into account previous agreements or contracts, or without the authorisation of the rightful owners.

The 2002 conflict and displacement may have impaired the operation of the customary authorities, and so undermined their legitimacy. Following the displacement of most of the people indigenous to the areas, several villages have remained without traditional land authorities. Furthermore, the legitimacy of new customary leaders, whether self-proclaimed or conferred by the groups that remained following the displacement or death of the previous leader, has in some cases been violently rejected by the returning indigenous population, preventing the traditional resolution of land disputes.

In the absence of the knowledge of the demarcation of plots or the identity of their farmers, the groups who have remained have sometimes encroached upon displaced people's plots or transferred them to third parties, without the possibility of effective intervention by a customary authority. In this context, the gradual return of the displaced

autochtones has led to confrontations with the *allochtones* and *allogènes* who have remained.

Rural land is governed by the 1998 Rural Land Act, the prime purposes of which were to clarify land rights by providing a legal framework and to modernise customary land rights. Under article 1 of the Act, only public authorities and individual Côte d'Ivoire nationals can own rural land. This provision represents a break with the past policy, under which the land belonged to the person cultivating it.

Against a background of political tension linked to the power struggle, the Act aroused a sense of injustice in many non-Ivorian owners, some of whom had been cultivating the land for several generations. They were especially worried that their non-Ivorian descendants would not be able to become owners of the land. In response to their fears, the 1998 Act was modified in 2004, so that rights to rural land ownership acquired before 2004 could be transmitted to descendants.

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