



Global Internal Displacement in 2005

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[USCRI did not cover internal displacement in its country updates this year. For detailed information on such situations in specific countries please see www.internal-displacement.org.]

This contribution is based on: *Internal Displacement, Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2005*, Geneva 2006, published by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC] of the Norwegian Refugee Council. (IDMC and USCRI statistics vary slightly, particularly in situations of protracted internal displacement and mixed migration.)

In 2005, for the first time in nearly a decade, the number of people internally displaced by conflict went down by a considerable margin. We estimate some 23.7 million people were internally displaced as of December 2005, some 1.6 million fewer than the previous year. Despite this decrease in the global number of internally displaced people (IDPs), the scope of the worldwide internal displacement crisis remained alarming.

Conflict newly uprooted over two million people during the year. At the same time, close to 4 million IDPs were able to go back to their homes—in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Southern Sudan, Liberia, and elsewhere—but often these returns were not sustainable due to lack of basic services, infrastructure, and secu-

rity. Conflict-induced internal displacement affected some 50 countries across Africa, America, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East in 2005. Over 12 million people were displaced in Africa alone, more than in the rest of the world together.

With well over 5 million IDPs, Sudan remained the country with the world's largest IDP population. Other countries with more than 1 million IDPs include Colombia (up to 3.7 million), Uganda (2 million), DRC (1.7 million), and Iraq (1.3 million).

DRC and Zimbabwe were the countries with most people newly displaced in 2005. In Zimbabwe, the Government evicted some 570,000 people from their homes in a "clean-up" reportedly aimed at intimidating the urban poor and preventing mass protests and uprisings. In DRC, continued violence in the eastern provinces displaced at least half a million. In Colombia, fighting between right-wing paramilitaries and leftist guerrillas over control of drug trafficking routes uprooted many of the up to 250,000 people during the year. In Iraq, military operations by national and U.S.-led forces caused the often temporary displacement of an estimated 200,000 people. And in Sudan's Darfur region, brutal attacks on the civilian population by government-backed militias led to the displacement of tens of thousands of people.

*Photo: Internally displaced Karen at a makeshift home after the Myanmar army burned their village, January 2006.
Credit: Free Burma Rangers*

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Internal conflict was by far the most important cause of displacement in 2005. Civil wars generated roughly half of all IDP situations—and many of the worst—but other forms of internal strife played an important role, too. Attempts by governments to increase control over certain sections of the population through various forms of repression and human rights violations were a factor in about a third of all IDP situations and in nearly half of the new displacement.

National governments—responsible under international law for protecting the civilian population on their territories—were the main agents of displacement in 2005. In over two-thirds of all conflict situations generating displacement, national armies or other security forces as well as paramilitaries or militias with links to the government deliberately forced people out of their homes, including in Sudan (Darfur), Myanmar, Côte d’Ivoire, Colombia, Nepal, and Zimbabwe. Altogether, at least 16 governments or occupation authorities directly or indirectly, deliberately displaced people in 2005. Rebel groups and other non-state actors have also been responsible for attacks on civilians leading to their displacement.

More than half of the world’s IDPs—some 14 million people—were at high risk of life-threatening physical violence in 2005. Myanmar, Colombia, DRC, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan (Darfur), and northern Uganda were among the most dangerous places for displaced populations. Women and children were often particularly vulnerable to sexual or other forms of violence.

Although governments resolved to “take effective measures to increase the protection of internally displaced persons” at the 2005 UN World Summit, national responses to the challenge of internal displacement remained strikingly inadequate. In 80 percent of the situations where IDPs’ lives were in danger as a direct result of ongoing conflict, governments provided only partial protection or none at all. At least 13 governments, including those of Myanmar, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia (in Gambella), and Sudan, responded with indifference or outright hostility to the protection needs of IDPs, putting the lives of an estimated six million IDPs at risk. Governments were similarly unwilling to make genuine efforts to provide humanitarian aid to displaced populations. This also affected nearly six million IDPs. In a quarter of IDP situations, governments restricted international humanitarian access to the affected.

International responses remained insufficient as well. While international pressure helped end the civil wars in southern Sudan and Indonesia’s Aceh region, it made little progress on the conflicts in Darfur, northern Uganda and elsewhere. At the operational level, the UN did not fully implement the “Collaborative Response”—the inter-agency system to make up for the lack of a single dedicated organization responsible for IDPs—in most affected countries. Lack of leadership and accountability, the reluctance of UN agencies to divert resources from their core mandates, and

the failure of donor governments to provide coherent political and sufficient financial backing vis-à-vis UN agencies and host governments in effect rendered the system largely ineffective. In 16 countries, the UN did not provide aid or protection to IDPs at all.

Parties took a number of steps in 2005, as part of the broader UN reform process, to improve the existing humanitarian response system. By the end of the year, states and the UN agreed on a number of new arrangements which—if implemented—could amount to a major reform with positive implications for the international response to internal displacement situations. Central elements include the creation of an emergency response fund, the assignment of lead agencies for neglected humanitarian sectors or “clusters,” and the development of a stand-by team of protection experts.

Stepping up efforts to better protect IDPs against violence and human rights violations and provide them with sufficient food, shelter, and health services so that they



IDPs in northern Uganda, February 2005. The Government placed them in camps, sometimes forcibly, in the ongoing civil conflict. Credit: IRIN

can survive and rebuild their lives remains an urgent priority. However, humanitarian aid cannot be a substitute for genuine political efforts—at both the national and international levels—to end the conflicts leading to displacement and address their causes. Ultimately, only sustained and concerted investments in conflict prevention, peace building, and post-conflict recovery in affected countries will lead to a tangible reduction of worldwide internal displacement.