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25m INTERNALLY DISPLACED BY CONFLICT

Most of the world's refugees are uprooted by warfare but never cross an international border, says a survey published today. Some 25 million people are now internally displaced people (IDPs) due to conflicts that have spread since the Cold War. IDPs now outnumber conventional refugees by two-to-one and nearly always receive less protection, says the four-year survey by the Global IDP Project.

“The 2002 Global IDP Survey confirms two worrying trends: first, that large numbers of innocent civilians are being forced from their homes by increased insecurity in the world; and secondly, that many of these people remain officially neglected by government authorities,” said Elisabeth Rasmusson, the project's head.

More than half of the world's displaced people are in Africa, the survey finds, most of them (10m of 13.5m) concentrated in Sudan, Angola and Congo. Afghanistan, Indonesia, Turkey and Colombia have over a million each. Iraq, Azerbaijan, Sri Lanka, Burma and India have over half-a-million. In Burundi and Lebanon, IDPs make about 10% of the population. Though smaller in number, IDPs in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Chechnya (the Russian Federation) have faced widespread human rights abuses. Only patchy information exists about IDPs in Algeria, Iraq, Kenya and India.

The global IDP crisis is one of the great humanitarian challenges of our time, states the survey, noting that in most of the 48 countries covered, IDPs struggle to survive with inadequate shelter, few resources and no protection. Warring parties often block humanitarian aid, unnecessarily worsening malnutrition and disease. Moreover IDPs – mainly women and children – have no one to protect them from multiple human rights violations: including attacks, torture, forced labour and sexual exploitation.

National governments do little to protect IDPs because they lack resources or political will; most IDPs are from minority groups. The international community and donor governments, meanwhile, also pay little attention to protection needs and underfund humanitarian programmes.

While IDPs have received more attention recently within the United Nations, and legal guidelines exist to protect them; these efforts will have to be greatly enhanced to improve the lives of IDPs, some of the world's most insecure people, or respond adequately to this global crisis.

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Global IDP PROJECT

Notes to the editor

1. The Global IDP Project, based in Geneva, is mandated by the United Nations to monitor internal displacement worldwide. It is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council, an organization that has assisted refugees worldwide since 1953.
2. The Global IDP Survey 2002 is published by Earthscan Publications London, and is based on four years' work monitoring of displacement worldwide. See the Global IDP Database www.idpproject.org
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4. To order copies of the book, contact andrew.lawday@nrc.ch

