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Internal displacement in Côte d'Ivoire: a protection crisis



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Cover photo: Girls in Guiglo IDP camp
(McGoldrick/Global IDP Project, September 2005)

MAP OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE



Executive summary

With the deepening political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire raising fears of a return to all-out conflict, the country's estimated 500,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) face an increasingly precarious future. While South Africa's mediation efforts have failed to narrow the gap between the government of President Laurent Gbagbo and the rebel Forces Nouvelles, and the transition period after the collapsed October 2005 elections giving particular cause for concern, many UN agencies and NGOs in the country have been finalising contingency plans for the "worst case scenario" entailing massive displacement and refugee flows into neighbouring countries.

But while humanitarian agencies may be preparing for new and visible displacements on a large scale, existing IDPs are generally neglected and in an extremely vulnerable situation. Less than 10,000 IDPs live in established camps or centres; the rest are effectively hidden in desperately overburdened host communities, mostly in the government-controlled south of the country. The economic capital Abidjan hosts an estimated 120,000 vulnerable IDPs, many living in deplorable conditions in shanty towns. In the west and north of the country IDPs and other vulnerable groups are severely affected by poor access to basic social services, particularly health care, water/sanitation and education. Malnutrition rates remain high especially among children under five, and waterborne diseases are rife. In rebel-held areas public services are virtually non-existent, and many schools have not been functioning since the outbreak of the crisis in 2002, not least because large numbers of teachers (and other civil servants) remain displaced in major towns in the south.

At the heart of the conflict, long-standing tensions between indigenous communities and settlers from neighbouring countries including Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (as well as Ivoirians from northern ethnic groups) – essentially over land – remain particularly acute in the volatile western region. Here, inter-community attacks and low level displacement have been continuing unabated. These tensions, exploited and exaggerated into a form of xenophobic hatred by politicians at the highest level, hold the key both to the country's destruction and, if properly addressed, its possible reconstruction.

Grave human rights abuses, including killings, disappearances, torture and destruction, continue to be committed against civilians in both the government-held south (particularly by pro-government youth militia) and in the rebel-held north, as well as in the Zone of Confidence controlled by the "impartial forces" of both UN and French peacekeepers. Extortion and racketeering are rampant throughout the country. Sexual and gender-based violence is of major concern (including the exploitation of internally displaced girls by peacekeeping troops). Crimes have been committed with impunity on all sides, reinforced in part by the UN's failure to impose sanctions against individuals under Security Council resolution 1572, and the continuing failure to publish the report of the latest UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights abuses committed since 2002.

Response to the situation of internal displacement in Côte d'Ivoire has been wholly inadequate, both at the national and international level. There is no central government coordination mechanism for humanitarian response and no state body with overall responsibility for IDPs. The attitude of the state was amply demonstrated in September 2005, when the military authorities in the western town of Duékoué gave four days' notice to the 2,700 IDPs sheltering at the Catholic Mission that they would be forcefully expelled.

At the international level the de facto policy has also been to limit assistance in areas of displacement and encourage return. But so far this has only been happening spontaneously and on a very small scale, not least because of continuing security fears and a lack of durable solutions in areas of origin. UN pilot return projects such as that in the starkly divided village of Fengolo, on the edge of the Zone of Confidence, have at best questionable sustainability. As a result, IDPs have been left in an impossible situation – stuck between an acute lack of assistance on the one hand and the often frightening prospect of return on the other. Yet the recent UN OCHA initiative of bringing together international humanitarian actors in a Protection and IDP Network may – potentially -- make the international response more effective.

One fundamental obstacle to effective IDP response to date has been the lack of information on the numbers, locations and needs of the displaced. A UNFPA-funded IDP survey currently underway in the government zone should help clarify the situation somewhat, but will still fall far short of a comprehensive IDP registration. Leading on from this, there must be a proper assessment of return and resettlement possibilities in all the key localities in line with the UN Guiding Principles. IDPs must be provided with a full and impartial view of conditions in their areas of origin – including shelter, infrastructure, security conditions and possibilities for community reconciliation – allowing them to make informed decisions about whether or not to return. And where IDPs are unwilling or unable to return in safety and dignity, the international community should be ready to provide appropriate protection and assistance, and encourage the national authorities to fulfil their responsibilities in this respect.

This may be a tall order: over the past three years, Côte d'Ivoire's politicians on all sides have repeatedly demonstrated a lack of good faith in genuinely advancing the peace process. Even as the date for scheduled elections drew near, rights organisations reported the ongoing recruitment in Côte d'Ivoire of ex-combatants from Liberia. Yet a return to all-out conflict in Côte d'Ivoire would have disastrous consequences for the entire sub-region, causing massive displacement not only inside the country but also affecting the populations of Liberia, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Mali. This would ensure the suffering of possibly millions of vulnerable civilians and cost the international community much more in the long run.

Key recommendations

To the government of Côte d'Ivoire

- Develop a partnership between the newly appointed IDP focal point at the national level and the international community in Côte d'Ivoire to liaise and coordinate on issues relating to IDP protection and assistance
- seek assistance from the international community to develop a National IDP Policy, including clear return and resettlement strategies that are in line with the UN Guiding Principles
- through the IDP focal point, seek technical support and training in contingency planning as well as improved emergency preparedness and response to conflict-induced internal displacement
- allow national and international organisations full and unconditional access to IDPs in their places of refuge
- issue clear orders to security services and civilian militias to respect international humanitarian and human rights law, and to end attacks and abuses against Burkinabé and other “foreign” groups (comprising large numbers of IDPs)
- support peace and reconciliation efforts particularly in areas of return by promoting awareness campaigns, through local radio (including UNOCI FM) and other media, that focus on commonalities rather than differences between ethnic and religious groups
- help put an effective end to impunity and further aid the reconciliation process by ensuring that perpetrators of violence and human rights abuses are identified, including members of the security forces and pro-government militia, and brought to justice

To the *Forces Nouvelles*

- Allow IDPs to move freely and to return to home areas without fear of harassment or reprisal, in particular members of the Baoulé ethnic group wishing to return to Bouaké
- issue clear orders to all combatants to respect international humanitarian and human rights law, and to end abuses against civilians that have been a major cause of internal displacement
- allow national and international organisations full and unconditional access to IDPs both in their places of refuge and in areas of return

To the United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI)

- Ensure that UNOCI forces have the necessary resources to provide protection to civilians at risk of violence from communities or from military forces, within their mandate, thereby helping both to prevent internal displacement and to mitigate the vulnerability of civilians during flight
- further strengthen the capacity of UNOCI's Human Rights Division to collect IDP-specific information and to advocate for IDPs' rights at various levels

To UNOCI and French *Licorne* peacekeeping forces

- Investigate fully all allegations of sexual abuse or exploitation of internally displaced women and girls, including in IDP centres, taking appropriate action against those found guilty of abuses and taking firm measures to prevent future abuses

To UN agencies and international NGOs in Côte d'Ivoire

- Embrace UN OCHA's Protection Network initiative, i.e. work in an open and collaborative manner to share and act upon protection-related information, including that pertaining to IDPs
- facilitate further protection training for humanitarian organisations (building on the WFP initiative in October 2005), including specific training on operationalising the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement
- extend and expand the UNFPA-funded IDP survey to cover all regions in the country to give a more comprehensive picture of IDP numbers, needs, locations and possibilities for return
- carry out proper assessments of possibilities for sustainable IDP return or resettlement in key localities, in line with the UN Guiding Principles, including "go and see" visits with IDP leaders
- facilitate and support initiatives by IDPs and local populations to establish truth and reconciliation committees and/or conflict resolution mechanisms (build upon expertise of NGOs such as Care International in this sector)
- where return or resettlement is feasible, ensure appropriate longer-term support in terms of income generation activities and community development projects closely linked to ongoing reconciliation activities
- where durable return or resettlement is not possible, ensure appropriate protection and assistance for IDPs in areas of refuge, while urging the national authorities to fulfil their responsibilities in this regard

To donors

- Support projects initiated by UN OCHA's Protection Network that aim to improve the protection of IDPs (and other vulnerable groups) and ultimately prevent renewed displacement
- beyond emergency IDP response, support projects particularly within the framework of the Consolidated Appeals Process that focus more on longer-term needs, including conflict prevention/resolution and reconciliation in potential areas of return

“Ivoirité” at the heart of the conflict

For more than three decades after independence from France in 1960, Côte d'Ivoire was a beacon of peace and stability in West Africa. The autocratic but tactical rule of the country's first President, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, ensured religious and ethnic harmony as well as relative economic prosperity until his death in 1993. Like the French before him, Houphouët-Boigny's policy of encouraging the immigration of workers from the Sahel helped Côte d'Ivoire become the world's biggest cocoa producer. Whoever worked the land, he declared, owned it. As a result, about one quarter of Côte d'Ivoire's population of 16 million are immigrants, or descended from immigrants, many from neighbouring Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana and Niger. But when economic recession struck in the early 1990s as a result of slumps in the cocoa and coffee markets, relations between indigenous Ivoirians and immigrants started to deteriorate.

Houphouët-Boigny's successor, Henri Konan Bédié, fanned the flames of ethnic discord in 1995 when he introduced the concept of “Ivoirité”, or “Ivorian-ness”. This was used to deny Ivorian citizenship to his main political rival, Alassane Ouattara, a Muslim from the north of Côte d'Ivoire, on the grounds that one of his parents came from Burkina Faso. This effectively excluded him from running in elections held that year. At the same time there were an increasing number of attacks on people of foreign descent (HRW, August 2001).

The start of protracted political crisis was assured when the military, under the leadership of General Robert Gueï, overthrew the elected government of Konan Bédié in the country's first ever coup d'état, staged on Christmas Eve 1999. Although the coup was ostensibly prompted by soldiers' unhappiness over pay and conditions, it soon became apparent that, like Bédié, General Gueï was also ready to incite ethnic and religious rivalries in order to remove political opposition. Continuing the theme of “Ivoirité”, Gueï introduced a new constitution in 2000 stipulating even stricter eligibility requirements for presidential elections held in October that year.

General Gueï was however forced to flee by a popular uprising after he fraudulently claimed that he had won these elections. This left Laurent Gbagbo as the winning candidate. But the elections were marred by violence against civilians by all sides, and by “state-sponsored human rights violations, with a clear ethnic and religious focus” (HRW, 20 December 2000). Victims of the violence were, initially, supporters of both Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) and Ouattara's Rally of the Republicans (RDR), but once Gueï had fled the country the main victims were suspected members of the RDR, foreigners and Muslims (HRW, August 2001). Gbagbo, just like his predecessors, made the issue of nationality central to his political agenda and effectively ensured the growth of ethnic and religious divisions across the country.

Then in September 2002, a failed coup by disaffected soldiers – the second attempt in just over a year – marked the beginning of the worst crisis in Côte d'Ivoire's post-independence history. Hundreds of thousands of Ivoirians were displaced by fighting which

left the *Mouvement Patriotique pour la Côte d'Ivoire* (MPCI) rebels in control of much of the predominantly Muslim north of the country, and government forces holding the largely Christian south. At least 200,000 people were estimated to have fled the rebel-held northern town of Bouaké, and several thousand were made homeless in the economic capital Abidjan by a government demolition policy aimed at rooting out alleged dissidents (UN OCHA, 15 October 2002; UNHCR, 8 October 2002). The main targets of the demolition policy were West African immigrants whom the authorities accused of supporting the rebellion, although many Ivoirians as well as refugees from neighbouring countries were also displaced, creating population movements that threatened the stability of the entire region.

At the end of November 2002 two new rebel factions emerged in western Côte d'Ivoire – the *Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix* (MJP) and the *Mouvement Populaire Ivoirienne du Grand Ouest* (MPIGO) – who said they were not linked with the MPCI rebels but were fighting to avenge the death of former junta leader, General Robert Gueï. These troops included both Liberians and Sierra Leoneans, providing a chilling “déjà vu” of the brutal civil wars that wrecked both of those countries (BBC, 30 November 2002). Fierce fighting between the rebel groups and government forces and systematic human rights abuses against civilians displaced more than one million people, including some 150,000 who fled to neighbouring countries (IRIN, 29 January 2003).

The conflict, in varying degrees, has so far eluded all military and diplomatic efforts to end it – including the deployment in 2004 of a 6,000-strong UN peacekeeping mission (UNOCI) on top of an existing contingent of 4,000 French peacekeepers, the French-brokered Linas-Marcoussis Accord signed by all parties to the conflict in January 2003 and, more recently, mediation efforts by South African president Thabo Mbeki.

Political tensions erupted into violence in March 2004, when at least 120 people were killed by government troops and their allied militia during an opposition march in Abidjan. A UN report blamed government security forces for indiscriminately killing innocent civilians, and for specially targeting individuals from the north of the country and immigrants from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (IRIN, 4 May 2004). Then in November 2004 government warplanes bombed the rebel stronghold of Bouaké in an operation to take the north, killing nine French peacekeepers. France responded by destroying Côte d'Ivoire's entire (albeit small) airforce, sparking widespread mob violence that spread to Abidjan, targeting mainly French citizens as well as opposition politicians and immigrants. Thousands of foreigners were subsequently evacuated (IRIN, 7 November 2004). The UN Security Council in turn imposed a 13-month arms embargo on Côte d'Ivoire (UN SC, 15 November 2004). Further ceasefire violations include the March 2005 attack by pro-government militia against rebel positions in the north-western town of Logoualé (IRIN, 2 March 2005). Inter-ethnic clashes, particularly in the cocoa-growing western region, have continued to cause death and displacement, notably around the town of Duékoué which saw a series of massacres in May and June 2005 (HRW, 3 June 2005).

The seemingly intractable political impasse deepened yet further when it became clear that elections scheduled for 30 October 2005 could not go ahead. Disarmament of both rebel forces and pro-government militia failed to get underway; the parties continued to wrangle over key legislative reforms relating to citizenship and land tenure (although President Gbagbo did issue a decree that would permit his main rival, Alassane Outtara, to stand against him in elections); and the opposition and rebel leaders rejected South African mediation on the grounds of bias towards the government (UN SC, 26 September 2005). Disagreement too on the transition period after 30 October further fuelled tension on the ground. The UN Security Council supported African Union proposals to allow Gbagbo to remain in power for up to 12 months beyond the end of his mandate, delegating certain powers to a new and more powerful prime minister – although by the end of October the parties had failed to reach consensus on this issue (BBC News, 30 October 2005).

Numbers guesswork

The estimated number of IDPs in Côte d'Ivoire remains at 500,000, the vast majority living in host communities in the government-controlled south (OCHA-CI, 11 August 2005). Some 7,000 live in the country's only purpose-built IDP camp, in the western town of Guiglo, and little over 3,000 more in centres in the capital Yamoussoukro and the Catholic Mission in Duékoué. An estimated 120,000 vulnerable IDPs live in the main city Abidjan, for the most part West African immigrants or northern Ivoirians, many of them living in deplorable conditions in shanty towns.

The lack of information on the numbers, locations and needs of the displaced has clearly been a fundamental obstacle to an effective response. Ongoing low-level displacement together with small-scale spontaneous return has made existing estimates less and less precise. A UNFPA-funded IDP survey, carried out in five key areas in the government zone, is expected to be finalised in November 2005. This should help provide a clearer picture of the situation, but would need to be extended and expanded to cover all regions of the country.

Urgent need for protection

The crisis in Côte d'Ivoire has, from the outset, been characterised by serious and widespread human rights abuses against civilians, committed by both government and rebel militia and youth groups, mostly with impunity (HRW, 27 November 2003).

There are continuing reports of violations by all parties to the conflict – including killings, disappearances, torture and destruction (UNOCI-HRD, August 2005). Extortion and racketeering are rampant throughout the country. Sexual and gender-based violence, particularly against displaced women and girls, is of major concern. Repeated displacement and lack of access to education has resulted in rising levels of prostitution and domestic slavery. Sexual exploitation of displaced girls by the “impartial forces” (covering both UNOCI and French peacekeepers) has also been reported by humanitarian agencies in Côte d'Ivoire. More than one reliable source has given detailed information

about the “procurement” of displaced girls for sex by peacekeeping troops, including inside IDP centres (Confidential interviews, Abidjan/Duékoué, September 2005).

Due to the ongoing inflammation of ethnic and religious tensions, displaced Ivorians have been particularly vulnerable to abuse at the hands of armed fighters as well as local communities, particularly in the cocoa-rich western region. There, UNOCI's Human Rights Division reports constant inter-community clashes and displacements, particularly where IDPs no longer have access to their plantations (Interview with UNOCI officials, Guiglo, 22 September 2005). Following the massacre of scores of ethnic Guéré by “allogènes” (settlers) near the western town of Duékoué in June 2005, and the ensuing series of revenge attacks, the security situation has stabilised somewhat with military reinforcements in the area. Yet human rights abuses remain rampant, according to UNOCI, despite the increased military and peacekeeping presence (indeed, the June 2005 massacre took place almost within view of a military checkpoint, and only about one kilometre away from a UNOCI checkpoint). Militant youth groups continue to be particularly active between Guiglo and Bolequin, towards the Liberian border, with the villages of Kaade and Guinkin as worrying trouble spots.



Displaced man in the Guiglo IDP camp (McGoldrick/ Global IDP Project, 2005)

Important protection issues have also been raised by the premature return of IDPs to their areas of residence in the western region. Although landowners have in some cases encouraged the return of IDPs to prepare for the start of the agricultural season, local populations have reportedly been alarmed and frightened by the return of “non-native” settlers. Likewise, some IDPs are unwilling to return before disarmament takes place (UN SC, 18 March 2005). In some cases where return has been encouraged, for example by the UN's pilot return project in the village of Fengolo (*see below*), returnees have found their plantations occupied, resulting in dangerous inter-community tensions and urgent calls for local peace and reconciliation work (Interviews with Guéré returnees, Fengolo, 23 September 2005).

As a result, some communities are effectively stuck in a situation of internal displacement: for example, many ethnic Baoulé from the northern town of Bouaké displaced in Yamoussoukro are unwilling or unable to return home because of security fears, likewise they fear targeting in the main city Abidjan. Without access to employment, IDPs have

thus become particularly vulnerable to recruitment by both government and rebel forces (Interview with UN official, Abidjan, 20 September 2005). In the rebel *Forces nouvelles* areas, for example around the north western town of Man, child soldiers (including girls) are widely in evidence particularly at checkpoints.

In Abidjan, the government policy of destroying shantytowns housing largely West African immigrants who were perceived to support the rebellion – at its height in late 2002 – has left an estimated 120,000 IDPs in the city, many of them in an extremely precarious state (OCHA-CI, 11 August 2005). With ethnic tensions never far from the surface, immigrants, northern Ivorians and Muslims – including the many internally displaced – remain particularly vulnerable to attacks by pro-government militia that are active in many areas of the city.

Human rights abuses have been committed with impunity, reinforced in part by the UN's failure to impose sanctions against individuals under Security Council resolution 1572, and the continuing failure to publish the report of the latest UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights abuses committed since 2002 (HRW, May 2005). The UN reportedly took this stance in order not to further hamper South African mediation efforts, and in view of the failure of this mediation the whole issue has become a "huge embarrassment" according to some within the UN in Côte d'Ivoire (Interview with representative of international organisation, Abidjan, 19 September 2005).

In terms of response, UNOCI's dynamic yet desperately overstretched human rights division is adamant that civilian protection should be at the centre of all humanitarian programmes right now, with particular focus on prevention activities, including community-based peace and reconciliation and conflict resolution projects (Interview with UNOCI official, Abidjan, 19 September 2005). Yet therein lies the problem particularly for some international NGOs in Côte d'Ivoire, who view the human rights/protection and humanitarian coordination components of the UN integrated mission as "uneasy partners" since they fall under the mandates of two different deputies to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), thereby increasing worries about the politicisation of humanitarian space (*see coordination section*).

Another fundamental flaw in the international response so far to what is essentially a protection crisis, according to UN OCHA, is the widespread lack of understanding among agencies of the meaning of protection – how to report and act on violations without negative repercussions. While WFP held a protection training workshop in Côte d'Ivoire in October 2005, some agencies have made clear that much more is needed in terms of training (including in the UN Guiding Principles) and capacity building.

UN OCHA's Protection Network, developed in July 2005 by their Protection and IDP Adviser in Côte d'Ivoire, remains the only initiative to date aimed at achieving a collaborative response to protection concerns, of which internal displacement is just one part. The network brings together various UN agencies and NGOs and essentially envisages the collection and sharing of protection-related information, followed by

appropriate preventive or responsive action. However, with an overall poor track record on collaboration and coordination (*see below*), humanitarian agencies in the country have yet to demonstrate the extent of their commitment to this initiative, and it remains to be seen whether it will be successfully implemented.

Hidden humanitarian crisis

While the emergency needs of IDPs in the wake of large displacements have generally been fairly well addressed, as they are often easily identifiable in camps or centres, the humanitarian situation of the vast majority of IDPs effectively hidden within overburdened and also vulnerable host communities is evidently very poor.

Côte d'Ivoire's only purpose-built IDP camp, in the western town of Guiglo, houses some 6,800 IDPs in two sites. Although intended as a temporary transit centre, many IDPs – predominantly Burkinabé immigrants from around the towns of Bolequin and Toulepleu near the Liberian border – have been living in the camp since the beginning of the crisis in 2002. The camp is managed by IOM and multi-sectoral assistance provided by various agencies including WFP and UNICEF. Although camp residents complain of overcrowding, leaking shelters, endemic malaria and lack of soap for washing, they do concede that they are fully dependent on the assistance they are receiving. Camp leader Alhaji Alidou speaks for many when he maintains that he and his three wives and seven children cannot return home to Bolequin because his house is destroyed, his land occupied by “native” Ivoirians of the Gueré ethnic group, and moreover because he is scared about the security situation. However, he has never been back to Bolequin even for a visit, and has little accurate information about conditions there. His youngest wife, aged 17, arrived from Burkina Faso in August to begin married life in the camp and knows no other life in Côte d'Ivoire (Interviews with IDPs in Guiglo camp, 22 September 2005).

Yet with a *de facto* UN policy favouring return, humanitarian assistance cannot be taken for granted even in recognised IDP centres. In the Catholic Mission in the western town of Duékoué, where some 2,700 out of almost 10,000 IDPs still remain following the series of deadly clashes in nearby villages in May and June 2005, regular food relief and other humanitarian assistance had virtually stopped after just a couple of months in order to encourage return. Father François Cisco, the Spanish priest running the mission, complained in September 2005 that five children had died of malnutrition and disease in just one week, and that he was unable to cope with the magnitude of needs and only *ad hoc* assistance (Interview, Duékoué Catholic Mission, 24 September 2005). Only a few days later, the military authorities gave the IDPs in the mission four days' notice to leave or be forcefully evicted, with the apparent support of Father Cisco. International outcry, including from the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, succeeded in at least postponing the eviction (UN OCHA, 30 September 2005).

Elsewhere, the humanitarian situation of IDPs and other vulnerable groups is even worse – particularly in the north and west of the country where basic social services are poor if not non-existent. The main issues for concern include the lack of potable water, food

insecurity, lack of access to health services and lack of access to education. Malnutrition rates remain high, particularly among children under five, with 22 per cent chronic malnutrition and 7 per cent acute malnutrition, according to the UN. Waterborne diseases are rife, curable diseases have been on the increase, while the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate has reached at least 7 per cent – the highest in West Africa – which may increase further in the event of renewed population displacements (UN, 23 June 2005). At the same time access to health care is extremely poor – for IDPs and other vulnerable groups alike – with some 600,000 people in the western region lacking access, according to Save the Children-UK (Interview with SC-UK, Abidjan, 20 September 2005).

In rebel-held areas, many schools have not been functioning since the outbreak of the crisis in 2002, not least because large numbers of teachers (and other civil servants) remain displaced in major towns in the south. In the north-western town of Man – which hosts an unknown number of IDPs (although substantially less than southern towns) – the non-functioning of schools has been an overriding concern of both residents and humanitarian agencies. There was angry reaction when in September 2005 the Minister of Education effectively blocked the holding of exams on the pretext of insecurity, requesting UNOCI troops to oversee the exams, which would in turn prevent the resumption of classes in October (Interviews with representatives of UN agencies and NGOs, Man, 23 September 2005). The UN estimates that in Côte d'Ivoire more than 700,000 children, mostly girls, have been denied access to primary education since 2002 due to a lack of teachers and worsening living conditions (UN SC, 26 September 2005).

In the economic capital Abidjan, an estimated 120,000 vulnerable IDPs are living an extremely precarious existence, many of them in shanty towns housing West African



Boribana shanty town, Abidjan (McGoldrick/ Global IDP Project, 2005)

immigrants as well as Ivorians of predominantly northern ethnic groups. In the “Boribana” shanty town bordering the lagoon in the north of the city, more than 30,000 people (with an unknown number of IDPs among them) are crammed into a maze of squalid shelters separated by streams of open sewage. Families live with an average of ten to a room. According to residents, some of whom have lived in the shanty town all their lives, the situation was bad enough

before the crisis in 2002 but became much worse afterwards (Interviews with residents, Boribana, 20 September 2005).

With the destruction of many shanty towns in Abidjan by government forces and their allied militia in 2002-2003, the arrival of new IDPs added to the burden of making ends meet, while Boribana itself was only narrowly saved from destruction by the advocacy efforts principally of Save the Children (Sweden). Protection concerns remain high, with shanty town dwellers particularly vulnerable to abuse and targeting as political scapegoats during times of crisis. While Save the Children clearly focuses on child protection activities in Boribana and other shanty towns, primarily through developing the capacity of local social workers and supporting child protection committees in various activities, it is the only NGO active in this sector. Following some immediate albeit ad hoc emergency assistance by various agencies in the aftermath of shanty town destruction in 2002 and 2003, the longer term humanitarian needs of the urban displaced in areas like Boribana have been completely overlooked.

While there does seem to be a widespread acknowledgment among humanitarian agencies in Côte d'Ivoire that IDP response is generally insufficient, even where IDPs have been clearly identified as such in specific sites, there seems to be little idea of how to assist IDPs in host families. And while an IDP census may appear a necessary first step to identify IDPs' numbers, locations and needs, some agencies are sceptical that such an exercise will only serve to raise expectations and – in places like Boribana – ultimately discriminate unfairly against vulnerable and needy host families.

Obstacles to return

In view of the highly complex patterns of displacement, especially in the west of the country, only small-scale spontaneous return has been taking place (with new displacements at the same time making the overall picture less and less clear). For example, the displaced Burkinabés and other “allogènes” living in the Guiglo camp say their plantations around the western town of Bolequin are now occupied by indigenous (or “autochtone”) ethnic Guéré, who were in turn displaced from their land in the Zone of Confidence by other “allogènes” from the north.

Yet the overall UN policy has been to limit assistance in areas of displacement and encourage return, both in government and rebel-controlled areas of the country, partly



Displaced woman returns to her destroyed home in Fengolo (McGoldrick/ Global IDP Project, 2005)

because there was – at least in the past – an assumption that the crisis would soon end and people would quickly return to their communities.

At the outset of the crisis it was also widely believed that host communities were relatively well-off and able to absorb the burden of IDPs.

A UNOCI-led pilot return project in the starkly divided village of Fengolo, on the southern edge of the Zone of Confidence, illustrates the potential problems and even dangers of promoting and implementing organised IDP return without key conditions pertaining to safety and dignity as stipulated by the UN Guiding Principles.

Before the crisis the village of Fengolo comprised some 10,000 “allogènes” and only 3,000 “autochtones” (mostly of the Gueré ethnic group), easily identifiable since the two communities lived on opposite sides of the main road dividing the village. In February 2005 the Gueré community fled following an attack by groups of “allogènes”, many of them taking refuge in the Catholic Mission in Duékoué. Many Gueré houses were looted and destroyed after the inhabitants had fled in order to deter return. UNOCI then decided to implement a pilot return project there, rehabilitating a number of houses (20 by September 2005), as well as providing security. Humanitarian agencies provided food packages as well as seeds and tools for returnees, while also drilling water boreholes and rehabilitating two schools. A mobile clinic provides healthcare services to residents of Fengolo and surrounding villages. A small contingent of French peacekeepers is also based on the edge of village, whose commander believes there is “no real problem” between the two communities but admits that may change if and when the peacekeepers leave (Interview, Fengolo, 23 September 2005).

By September 2005 almost 700 Gueré had returned to Fengolo, but tensions clearly remained high. Gueré returnees complained about the slow pace of reconstruction, but principally about the fact that the “allogènes” were now occupying their land on the cocoa plantations. Returnees complained of continuing mistrust between the two sides and a complete lack of reconciliation initiatives. Some Gueré women said they were still afraid of their “allogène” neighbours who they believed were at least complicit in attacking them, and consequently they try to avoid seeing them as far as possible. On the other side of the road, the leader of the “allogène” community claimed that the Gueré were welcome to reclaim any land that was rightfully theirs and that there was no need for fear. They should negotiate directly rather than rely on the peacekeeping forces to mediate, he insisted. Indeed, both sides stressed the need for reconciliation activities through local “Peace Committees”, to be developed with assistance from the international community (Interviews with residents, Fengolo, 23 September 2005).

Clearly, with international peacekeepers nearby providing temporary security and community relations still extremely tense, the sustainability of return in Fengolo and other villages remains questionable at best. But with the UN keen to replicate the Fengolo initiative on a wider scale, and IOM in Côte d'Ivoire indicating its readiness to take a lead role in promoting and carrying out organised IDP return, some within the humanitarian

community have voiced concerns that minimum standards must be adhered to in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles. UN OCHA, through its Protection Network, is advocating for a proper assessment of return possibilities in all the key localities, including “go and see” visits with IDP leaders, in order to provide IDPs with a full and impartial view of conditions in their areas of origin. This would include shelter, infrastructure, security and – crucially – possibilities for community reconciliation, based largely on trying to reach compromise over land tenure issues.

A few initiatives have been undertaken in the area of conflict resolution and peace building. Care International has a peace and reconciliation project in various areas of western Côte d'Ivoire, working with local partners to ultimately strengthen community level governance through dialogue and micro-projects (Care, June 2005). The German government is planning to finance a conflict resolution project in the Tai park area near the Liberian border, implemented by GTZ through local partners, using a combination of customary and statutory law to resolve land tenure problems. And UN OCHA has a broad “social cohesion” project but this is not yet operational.

The importance of international assistance in the field of conflict resolution and reconciliation, particularly in the context of IDP return, has been widely emphasised in Côte d'Ivoire. At the Duékoué Catholic Mission, still housing some 2,700 IDPs, Father Cisco is adamant that dialogue must be encouraged in order for people to admit to their crimes and atrocities. Unless the truth comes out, insists the priest, there can be no forgiveness and the desire for revenge will ensure that the violence continues, making IDP return practically impossible. While catechists from different ethnic groups would apparently be willing to participate in truth and reconciliation projects, Father Cisco emphasises the need for high-level participation in such an initiative (Interview, Duékoué Catholic Mission, 24 September 2005).

Weak response

The state response to the situation of internal displacement in Côte d'Ivoire has been wholly inadequate, not least since at both the policy and operational levels there is little



Displaced girl in Guiglo IDP camp (McGoldrick/ Global IDP Project, 2005)

knowledge or experience in tackling humanitarian crises in general. There is no central government coordination mechanism for humanitarian response and no state body with overall responsibility for IDPs. While there is a “Ministry of War Victims” (*Ministère des Victimes, des Déplacés et Exilés de Guerre*) this has

been preoccupied with seeking compensation for all victims of the conflict, and has had no real relevance to IDP response. The government did appoint an IDP focal point within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in October 2005, although it remains to be seen what impact this will have on OCHA-led efforts to put in place a coordinated IDP response structure.

This situation has been compounded by the continuing absence of local administration and social service workers from many parts of the country, particularly the rebel-held north as well as insecure areas of government-held territory in the west. Although some efforts have been made to re-establish state administration, principally through the *Comité Nationale de la Redéploiement de l'Administration* (CNPRA), the lack of services combined with a deteriorating humanitarian situation remains of major concern. Humanitarian organisations have therefore been working directly with various government institutions aiming to complement their work, but in many cases effectively substituting for them.

At the local level, crisis committees (*comités de crises*) are responsible for registering IDPs and for coordinating and managing humanitarian aid mobilised at the national level – but this has been inconsistent and generally poorly managed, according to international agencies in the country. In times of crisis such as the May-June 2005 attacks near Duékoué, municipal authorities may provide some emergency relief, but this is generally ad hoc and uncoordinated. And in areas under the control of the rebel *Forces Nouvelles* the capacity to deal with the humanitarian needs of vulnerable populations has been even more limited, and access to humanitarian agencies patchy at best.

At the international level, UN response to the humanitarian crisis in Côte d'Ivoire is headed by the Humanitarian Coordinator, who is also the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (D-SRSG), and is supported by UN OCHA based in Abidjan and other strategic locations. A key pillar of coordination is the inter-agency humanitarian coordination committee (IAHCC), consisting of numerous UN agencies; the Red Cross movement; IOM; UNOCI's child protection, human rights and civil-military coordination units; and international NGOs.

Yet various aspects of humanitarian coordination at the international level in Côte d'Ivoire have in fact further contributed to the generally weak response to IDPs. There is no single agency with responsibility for IDP protection and assistance in the country, and while UN OCHA has hired three IDP advisers since the end of 2003 there has been little or no continuity between them, partly due to lack of funding and slow recruitment procedures. OCHA's Protection Network, developed in July 2005 by their current Protection and IDP Adviser, is now the main pillar of IDP response in Côte d'Ivoire (OCHA-CI, 5 September 2005). This brings together various UN agencies and international NGOs with the ultimate aim of collecting and acting on protection-related information (with internal displacement just one component of broader protection concerns). Yet with limited capacities of country teams, a truly collaborative approach to implementing activities through the network will be a challenging and sometimes uncomfortable experience for some. Also, in meetings, some agencies repeatedly voiced concerns about how to deal with sensitive protection-

related information in the network (Inter-agency meetings, Abidjan/Guiglo/Man, September 2005).

Indeed there have been constant tensions particularly between the UN Mission (UNOCI) and NGOs, with many of the latter complaining about the constraints of working alongside a mission that integrates its peacekeeping and humanitarian components. These tensions came to a head following the resumption of hostilities in Côte d'Ivoire in November 2004, when the response of French troops was widely viewed as highly partial, and by association, that of UNOCI as well (IRIN, 8 November 2004). With UN peacekeepers perceived to be taking sides in the conflict, and due to the nature of the integrated mission, Save the Children-UK was one NGO that argued it was very difficult to resume activities in the conflicted-affected areas and still be seen as impartial and independent humanitarian agencies (Jefferys and Porter, 26 November 2004).

Rebutting these criticisms, the Humanitarian Coordinator in Côte d'Ivoire, Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, defended the model of coordination used in the country and insisted that the "true enemy" in addressing the needs of half a million IDPs and other vulnerable groups has been the lack of means and resources (AlertNet, 1 December 2004).

Yet there have been divisions even among international NGOs on the issue of relations with the UN Mission, with some relying heavily on UNOCI for security information and evacuation, and some for logistical support such as helicopters. One NGO in Côte d'Ivoire was critical of the "us versus them" attitude adopted by some NGOs towards the UN, and urged constructive engagement. A clear code of conduct to define parameters of humanitarian space for NGOs as well as UN agencies would be beneficial (Interview with representative of international NGO, Abidjan, 19 September 2005). UN OCHA too, which has a "functional synergy" with UNOCI, has had to fight sometimes to present a separate identity.

While the main IAHCC consultative forum has been very wide, it has had limited NGO participation (although in October 2005 the Humanitarian Coordinator did open up this forum to any international NGO wishing to attend). Various UN agencies and NGOs expressed hope that in terms of IDP protection at least, the new Protection Network would provide a much more conducive forum for UN-NGO collaboration.

Further constraints hamper the response of international agencies to the needs of IDPs in Côte d'Ivoire. The aforementioned lack of information about IDPs' numbers, needs and locations has been a fundamental obstacle to response, one which the UNFPA-funded survey should help to alleviate. Humanitarian access has also been limited to varying degrees by the endemic insecurity in some areas of the country. Following the resumption of hostilities in November 2004, many humanitarian agencies were forced to suspend operations and personnel were temporarily evacuated. Agencies have at various times been harassed, blocked in their movements, or deliberately targeted with violence (UN News, 1 December 2004). UN peacekeepers have been particularly hampered in their movements (UN SC, 26 September 2005). Furthermore, the poor state of roads, particularly in the

rainy season, has made access to remote areas in the north and west of the country practically impossible, according to WFP.

Another major constraint has been the acute lack of funding for humanitarian programmes, largely as a result of the belligerence of the parties to the Ivorian conflict and the lack of tangible progress in the peace process. A UN Consolidated Appeal (CAP) 2005 for Côte d'Ivoire was launched in November 2004, requesting just over \$34 million in order to respond to the humanitarian needs of more than 3.5 million vulnerable people, including some 500,000 IDPs, affected by the crisis and ongoing situation of “no war, no peace”. Emergency response was to be paired with activities encouraging and supporting IDP return, including the rehabilitation of health centres and schools (UN, 11 November 2004). However, the resumption of hostilities in Côte d'Ivoire in November 2004 necessitated a review of the common humanitarian action plan by the IAHCC, and an addendum to the CAP was issued in December. This gave higher priority to various emergency needs and recognised the likelihood of continued internal displacement as a result mainly of inter-ethnic and inter-community tensions. A mid-year review of the CAP in June 2005 stressed that notwithstanding some positive developments in Côte d'Ivoire's peace process, the continuing volatility of the situation would require humanitarian agencies and organisations to focus on the protection of civilians, including in all advocacy efforts (UN, 23 June 2005). However, according to the UN's financial tracking service in October 2005, just ahead of the 2006 CAP, a mere 40 per cent of the \$36.5 million requested in the revised CAP had been funded.

According to one donor in Côte d'Ivoire, the situation of “no war, no peace” prevailing in the country has made the issue of IDPs in particular difficult to “sell” as a priority. Côte d'Ivoire is effectively a “country on the edge” with neither all-out conflict nor sufficient stability for real rehabilitation activities. The political impasse has made conflict prevention activities similarly hard to sell to many donors, some of whom admit being more interested in “repair” than prevention (Confidential interview, Abidjan, 20 September 2005). Ironically then, in the event of the “worst-case scenario” of return to major conflict, as envisaged by various UN agencies and NGOs in their current contingency planning, response to the needs of IDPs would be much easier to fund.



IDPs taking refuge at the Duékoué Catholic Mission (McGoldrick/ Global IDP Project, 2005)

Conclusion

Clearly the area of protection – both for existing IDPs and for vulnerable civilians who may become displaced – is of paramount concern, and should be a top priority for both humanitarian organisations and donors. This includes conflict resolution and reconciliation initiatives. Regrettably, the realpolitik of donors' preference for "repair" over "prevention" is much more costly in the long run, both financially and in human terms. There is no shortage of examples in the West African region to illustrate this. In the absence of long-term commitment to tackle the root causes of conflict, quick-fix peace building solutions entailing deployment of peacekeepers, incomplete disarmament of fighters and the accelerated return of refugees and IDPs, ahead of premature elections, presaged a slide back to war in both Sierra Leone (1996) and Liberia (1997).

With the political impasse in Côte d'Ivoire progressively worsening, the international community appears to be bracing itself for a return to all-out conflict. At the same time, somewhat paradoxically, the UN is limiting humanitarian assistance to existing IDPs and encouraging return. IDPs have therefore found themselves in the precarious situation of being forced to choose between an acute lack of assistance on the one hand and the often frightening prospect of return on the other.

At a minimum, IDP return and resettlement should only be encouraged and facilitated where proper assessments have taken place and the necessary conditions of safety, dignity and sustainability are in place in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles. And where IDPs are unwilling or unable to return in safety and dignity, the international community should be ready to provide appropriate protection and assistance in areas of refuge, and encourage the national authorities to fulfil their primary responsibilities in this respect.

Note: For more detailed information on the internal displacement situation in Côte d'Ivoire, please visit the [Côte d'Ivoire country page](#) on the Global IDP Project's online IDP database

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About the Global IDP Project

The Global IDP Project, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Project contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Project runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Project advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Global IDP Project also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Project cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Global IDP Project website and the database at www.idpproject.org.

Media contact:

Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer

Head of Monitoring and Advocacy Department

Tel.: +41 (0)22 799 07 03

Email: jens.eschenbaecher@nrc.ch

Global IDP Project
Norwegian Refugee Council
Chemin de Ballexert 7-9
1219 Geneva, Switzerland
www.idpproject.org
Tel: +41 22 799 0700
Fax: +41 22 799 0701