



## Fact sheet 7

# Internally Displaced People

### Who are Internally Displaced People?

Internally Displaced People (or IDPs) are often wrongly called refugees. Unlike refugees, IDPs have not crossed an international border to find sanctuary but have remained inside their home countries. Even if they have fled for similar reasons as refugees (armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations), IDPs legally remain under the protection of their own government – even though that government might be the cause of their flight. As citizens, they retain all of their rights and protection under both human rights and international humanitarian law.

### IDPs and the UNHCR

UNHCR's original mandate does not specifically cover IDPs, but because of the agency's expertise on displacement, it has for many years been assisting millions of them. UNHCR has the lead role in overseeing the protection and shelter needs of IDPs as well as the coordination and management of camps.

Millions of other civilians who have been made homeless by natural disasters are also classified as IDPs. However, the UNHCR is only involved with this group in exceptional circumstances, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, the earthquake in 2005 and floods in 2010 in Pakistan and 2008's Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar.<sup>1</sup>

### IDPs today

The global number of conflict-generated IDPs at the end of 2011 was estimated at some 26.4 million. The number of IDPs, including people in IDP-like situations who benefited from UNHCR's protection and assistance activities stood at almost 15.5 million at the end of 2011. This was the second highest figure on record, and almost 800,000 more than at the end of 2010 (14.7 million). The increase was partly due to new or renewed displacement occurring in Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen.

UNHCR reported at least 2.9 million newly displaced people in 2011. More than 3.2 million IDPs returned home during the reporting period – the highest number in 15 years. In countries where UNHCR was engaged with IDPs in 2011, returns were highest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (822,700), Pakistan (620,400), Côte d'Ivoire (466,800), and Libya (458,000).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the Run in Their Own Land, UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c146.html>

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR Global Trends 2011, UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/4fd6f87f9.html>