

# USAID Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons Policy

USAID POLICY



U.S. Agency for International Development  
October 2004



PD-ACA-558



# USAID Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons Policy

U.S. Agency for International Development

October 2004



# Contents

Summary 1

Introduction 3

The Interest of the United States 4

USAID Policy Statement 4

USAID's Role 4

Guiding Principles 6

Addressing All Phases of Displacement 7

Protection 8

Implementation 8

Conclusion 8



## Summary

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) recognizes that the 25 million people displaced within their own countries are a pressing humanitarian, human rights, development, and political challenge for the global community. There are nearly twice as many internally displaced persons (IDPs) as the 13 million civilians classified as refugees who have crossed international frontiers, thereby gaining protection under international laws.

USAID's interest in internal displacement is driven by humanitarian and development concerns as well as political and security considerations. Involuntary displacement can lead to disaffection that could be exploited to threaten regional stability. *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, issued in 2002, elevated the importance of development, citing it—along with defense and diplomacy—as a fundamental element of U.S. security.

Since IDPs remain within the territorial jurisdiction of their own countries, the primary responsibility for their welfare and protection lies with the respective governing authorities. The international community should provide assistance and support to ensure this responsibility is being fulfilled. USAID advocates that IDPs should be granted the full security and protection provided for under applicable norms of international human rights law, international humanitarian law,<sup>1</sup> and national law. Population displacement can endure for a few days, several years, or even decades, creating a wide range of needs. Basic protection for at-risk populations requires attention during the immediate humanitarian response to population displacement as well as during the longer-term transition toward development and stability.

The inclusion of a comprehensive response to the problem of internal displacement in the broader

USAID strategy is a priority. This reflects the growing understanding of how population displacement can negatively affect stability and development prospects. USAID is committed to a long-term perspective that promotes durable solutions and eventual self-reliance for displaced persons, reinforcing the principle that internal displacement is an Agency-wide concern.

With its strong operational presence in the field, USAID will address the broad array of needs confronting all phases of displacement, ranging from emergency relief to transitional aid to long-term development assistance. The transitional phase is critical, requiring the coordinated efforts of all partners to develop a comprehensive strategy that facilitates IDP resettlement and reintegration. The ultimate goal is to enable IDPs to become fully productive contributors to economic and social progress in their local communities.

USAID will serve as the U.S. Government's lead coordinator on internal displacement to ensure a coherent response from the U.S. Government and the international community. The Agency will work closely with the U.S. Department of State and other U.S. Government entities, U.N. agencies, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), host governments, and local institutions in affected countries. As part of its advocacy role, USAID promotes

- lifesaving humanitarian access to needy populations
- information sharing to forge common understanding of the problems and build consensus on policy and strategic approaches
- the protection of IDPs during all phases of displacement
- accountability and evaluation of programs
- wider international recognition of the U.N. *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* as

<sup>1</sup> This applies where the United States has ratified the treaties or conventions in question or otherwise has accepted these principles as reflecting customary international law.

a useful framework for dealing with internal displacement

Internal population displacement and the factors that cause it pose difficult challenges and present complex legal and sovereignty issues. The availability of resources, security, and humanitarian access will affect the scale of assistance and protection that USAID and the international community can provide. USAID will review these challenging issues on a regular basis to develop and update effective strategies.

USAID developed its policy and implementation guidelines to ensure that a broad, integrated approach is used to reduce the human costs of population displacement and that long-term development is not reversed. ■



## Introduction

**A**t least 25 million people are uprooted within the borders of their own countries by armed conflict, generalized violence, persecution, and natural and human-caused disasters. The plight of these internally displaced persons (IDPs) in some 52 countries is a pressing humanitarian, human rights, development, and political challenge for the global community.<sup>2</sup>

IDPs are among the world's most vulnerable population groups because of problems related to the following:

- *Legal Status:* IDPs have no special legal status under international law because they remain inside their own countries. No single international legal instrument or international organization is exclusively devoted to addressing their needs. This distinguishes IDPs from refugees, who have crossed an international border. Refugees benefit from clear international responsibilities for their protection and the international organization mandated to assist them. IDPs lack internationally recognized legal status and rarely receive the assistance and protection afforded the world's 13 million refugees.
- *National Sovereignty:* IDPs who have fled state-sponsored or state-endorsed violence are often unable to depend on their governments for assistance. In fact, some governments invoke sovereignty to block or restrict international humanitarian assistance and long-term development aid to IDPs within their borders.
- *Difficult Humanitarian Access:* Ongoing conflict or generalized insecurity frequently impedes humanitarian and development aid to IDPs.
- *Protracted Displacement:* Protracted violence forces some populations to remain uprooted for years or decades, separating IDPs of all ages from their homes, lands, livelihoods, schools, and traditional social structures. Many families are uprooted multiple times. Deprived of opportunities to support themselves, many IDPs depend on external assistance for the most basic necessities and struggle to cope with serious psychosocial ills associated with prolonged displacement.
- *Prolonged Vulnerability to Danger:* IDP populations typically encounter serious security problems, even after fleeing their homes. Many IDPs are deprived of a true safe haven, since violence or abuse follows them as they flee. Death rates among IDPs are among the highest of all groups in humanitarian emergencies. Displaced women and children are particularly vulnerable to abuse long after the initial emergency subsides.
- *Difficult Reintegration and Resettlement:* When circumstances allow them to return home safely, many IDPs remain vulnerable. They return to destroyed homes and towns, disputes over land tenure, absent or distrustful local officials, and other obstacles to reintegration. Some IDPs never return home and must resettle permanently in new communities.
- *Long-Term Development Reversed:* Prolonged displacement typically disrupts or reverses progress made in schooling, healthcare, food production, sanitation systems, infrastructure improvements, local governance, and other sectors fundamental to economic and social development. Failure to address the long-term development needs of previously uprooted populations risks new cycles of national instability and population displacement.

---

*“IDPs are among the world’s most vulnerable population groups.”*

---

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *No Refuge: The Challenge of Internal Displacement* (New York: United Nations, 2003); James Kunder, *The U.S. Government and Internally Displaced Persons: Present, But Not Accounted For* (The Brookings Institution Project on Internal Displacement and U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1999).

## The Interest of the United States

Governing authorities in affected countries hold primary responsibility for IDPs: their wellbeing, security, safe return home, and resettlement. However, when these authorities are unable or unwilling to provide required humanitarian assistance, international humanitarian organizations and other appropriate actors should offer help to the internally displaced, particularly those in life-threatening situations.

Assistance to displaced persons has historically been driven by humanitarian and development motives as well as by political and security considerations. For decades, the United States has been a leader in providing relief and development assistance. *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, issued in 2002, for the first time cites foreign assistance as a fundamental element of U.S. national security. There is a growing concern that failure to respond adequately to the needs of failed states and large displaced populations can become a catalyst for regional instability and, in some circumstances, can produce disaffected individuals who become vulnerable to exploitation by international extremists. In the interest of stability, as well as for humanitarian reasons, the United States has an interest in helping IDPs and other vulnerable populations integrate or reintegrate into the economic and social fabric of their communities.

Beyond material assistance, the U.S. Government—as part of its commitment to human rights and the rule of law—has an interest in taking steps to improve the protection of war-affected populations, especially the internally displaced. In many locations, vulnerable populations assisted by international relief deliveries experience physical endangerment due to conflict, exploitation, unchecked human rights violations, and other forms of abuse that jeopardize the impact of material assistance being offered. Assistance programs are more sustainable when they include programs

to improve the safety of IDPs and provide recourse when abuses do occur. ■

## USAID Policy Statement

A comprehensive commitment to the problems associated with internal displacement is a USAID priority. The Agency will be an advocate for appropriate assistance and protection for IDPs. All USAID bureaus and missions, in partnership with other U.S. Government entities and international agencies, shall be committed and able to plan, implement, and coordinate appropriate short- and long-term programs that respond to internal population displacement where it exists. USAID will work with U.N. organizations, international organizations, and NGOs that assist and protect IDPs. USAID will equip its bureaus and missions with the capacity to anticipate, analyze, and monitor significant internal displacement events. Bureaus and missions will seek to mobilize the resources needed for effective response, including emergency relief, transitional assistance, reintegration and resettlement, and long-term development assistance. ■

## USAID's Role

USAID is the acknowledged lead U.S. Government agency for addressing internal population displacement.<sup>3</sup> USAID has decades of experience responding with integrated programs to a broad range of preconflict, conflict, and postconflict situations around the globe that typically include displaced populations or potential for displaced populations.

USAID does not work in isolation on these matters, but plays a leading role in deciding how best to initiate proper action on behalf of the U.S. Government. By including a comprehensive response to IDPs in the broader USAID strategy, the Agency reflects its growing understanding of

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Government Foreign Affairs Manual (2 FAM 066.3) states: "AID/OFDA has the responsibility for assisting people displaced within their own country as a result of natural or man-made disasters."

how population displacement can negatively affect stability and long-term development prospects.

With its strong operational presence in the field—ranging from Disaster Assistance Response Teams to missions in more than 73 countries—USAID has operated short-, medium-, and long-term programs that respond to the needs of IDPs. As a result, USAID and its partners can address all phases of population displacement, serve as the U.S. Government’s focal point on IDP issues, coordinate responses with other institutions, and advocate for IDP needs.

With the recognition that development—along with defense and diplomacy—is a key pillar of U.S. security, USAID’s *Fragile States Strategy* introduces a comprehensive approach to addressing state fragility that fosters internal displacement. In addition, the *USAID Conflict Mitigation and Management Policy* addresses violent, deadly conflicts that generated 13 million refugees and 25 million displaced persons. USAID will seek to address the sources of conflict vulnerability and the consequences of conflict in development, transition, and humanitarian assistance programming.

## Coordination and Leadership

No single donor or organization—including USAID—possesses sufficient resources to address all IDP needs in every situation. The complex needs of IDPs and other vulnerable groups require a coordinated response from the U.S. Government and the international community.

USAID will serve as the U.S. Government’s lead coordinator on IDP issues at the policy level in Washington, D.C., and in affected countries. To capitalize on the strengths of other U.S. Government partners in particular situations, USAID will work with the U.S. Department of State and other U.S. Government entities involved in humanitarian and development programs, human rights and security concerns, and political and strategic issues affecting IDPs and other vulnerable groups. USAID will also address IDP issues in partnership with U.N. agencies, interna-

tional organizations, private NGOs, host governments, and local institutions in affected countries.

Population displacement has demanded greater attention in humanitarian and political circles in recent years. An expanded international framework to address IDP issues has evolved, including the U.N. Secretary General’s Special Representative on IDPs, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its Internal Displacement Division, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. Regional intergovernmental bodies such as the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe, the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and other entities have taken steps to encourage more accountability on IDP issues among member governments. Linking with these partners helps meet the challenge of providing effective and comprehensive assistance to IDPs.

While recognizing the central role the UN can play in galvanizing the support of the international community on behalf of IDPs, the organization’s ability to take proactive, lifesaving actions may be hindered if the UN Security Council fails to act. In the event that the host country, UN, and other international organizations do not respond expeditiously and effectively to protect and assist IDPs, USAID will advocate for the use of bilateral diplomacy to galvanize support to end human suffering. Governments will be encouraged to fulfill their international responsibility to protect civilians, including IDPs, and ensure that human rights and international law violations do not occur. Accountability measures that ensure commitments are fulfilled will be promoted. USAID will use its leadership role to mobilize concerted effort with other donors and countries that share its commitment to ensure full support of IDPs.

This coordinated approach by USAID is consistent with the strategic goal outlined in the joint State Department-USAID *Strategic Plan: Fiscal Years 2004–2009*. This states that a strategic goal of the U.S. Government is to minimize the human costs

of displacement, conflicts, and natural disasters by promoting durable solutions for displaced persons.

## Advocacy

USAID will be a leading advocate within the U.S. Government for IDPs as well as other vulnerable groups. In coordination with the U.S. Department of State and other relevant agencies, USAID will encourage the governments of affected countries to fulfill their responsibilities to protect and assist their own citizens, including IDPs. USAID will

- advocate publicly and privately to gain and sustain lifesaving *humanitarian access* to needy populations and publicize politically inspired efforts by other governments to block aid within their borders
- promote *information sharing* inside and outside the U.S. Government to develop a common understanding of problems facing IDPs and obtain agreement on effective policy responses
- work to analyze, document, and respond to the *protection problems* of IDPs during all phases of displacement
- promote *accountability and evaluation* of international programs serving IDPs and other vulnerable groups to ensure that needs are being addressed comprehensively
- encourage wider international recognition and support for the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*<sup>4</sup> as a useful framework for dealing with IDPs, particularly in conflict-affected countries ■

## Guiding Principles

Three core principles will guide USAID policy toward IDPs:

<sup>4</sup>United Nations, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1998).

## 1. Do No Harm

Humanitarian and development aid to IDPs and other vulnerable populations should not place them in greater danger or empower those responsible for the violence, exploitation, or abuse suffered by IDPs. External aid should not produce inequalities or dependencies, nor should it exacerbate local tensions.

Support should be provided on the basis of greatest need and without partiality or discrimination, regardless of political factors. This may mean providing assistance to host families and local needy populations as well as IDPs. Humanitarian assistance and development strategies should build upon and enhance the capacities of IDPs and use local structures to the extent feasible.

## 2. Use UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as a Framework for Response

Principles and rules of international humanitarian law<sup>5</sup> will guide USAID's engagement with IDPs during armed conflicts. In addition, UN *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* offer a useful tool and framework for dealing with IDPs. USAID supports the goals of these principles, and will encourage its partners and host governments to use them as a practical reference.<sup>6</sup>

## 3. Ensure Comprehensive Commitment

USAID will ensure that all its bureaus are committed to addressing the broad and challenging array of IDP needs, ranging from emergency relief to transitional aid to long-term development assistance.

Many USAID missions regularly prepare needs assessments and vulnerability analyses that examine

<sup>5</sup>This applies where the United States has ratified the treaties or conventions in question or otherwise has accepted these principles as reflecting customary international law.

<sup>6</sup>Although the United States does not accept the UN *Guiding Principles* as an expression of governing international law, it recognizes the valuable practical role the principles can play in the protection of IDPs.

the potential for conflict in specific countries. USAID country strategies shall discuss the impact that IDP populations have on sustainable development and how the mission will address IDP-related issues in affected countries. USAID is committed to a long-term perspective that promotes durable solutions and eventual self-reliance for displaced persons, reinforcing the principle that IDP populations are an Agency-wide concern.

## Addressing All Phases of Displacement

Population displacement can endure for several days, many years, or even decades. It creates acute vulnerability, triggers a wide range of needs, and stunts development.

### Humanitarian Assistance

- In the early *emergency* phase, IDPs typically require urgent provision of housing, food, water, sanitation systems, healthcare, and protection.
- In the *care and maintenance* phase of displacement, IDPs tend to need access to education, training, tools, microcredit, legal documents, trauma counseling, family tracing, agricultural inputs, protection from exploitation, and support to improve self-reliance.

A clear priority is humanitarian assistance that ranges from emergency relief in the first weeks of upheaval to sustained support for IDPs and their host communities over many years.

### Reintegration and Transition

- In the transitional reintegration phase, IDPs often need transportation home, protection from involuntary return, help to reclaim their land and rebuild houses and businesses, assistance for demining, support to establish accountable local governance and stronger civil society, and programs to reconcile lingering ethnic or political tensions and safeguard the rights of female-headed households.

When local circumstances permit, most IDPs choose to return home or resettle permanently into new locations. During this phase of transition and reintegration, IDPs often go back to homes and properties destroyed or occupied by others, damaged infrastructure, devastated local economies, weak civil administrations, simmering social and political tensions, and lingering security risks. Conflict can erupt again, posing particular dangers to vulnerable populations. The international community must work with local governments and other local entities to address these problems in order to foster durable peace and stability and prepare the way for long-term development.

USAID is committed to addressing the complex web of reintegration and transition needs of IDPs and other postconflict populations, including ex-combatants, repatriated refugees, orphans and unaccompanied minors, victims of atrocities, and host communities who absorb and support IDPs at great local expense.

### Long-Term Development

- In the *long-term development* phase, IDPs who have returned home or resettled permanently into new communities need assistance to construct or repair water systems, health systems, schools, and transportation routes. Resettled IDPs also need access to vocational training and business or agricultural loans and inputs. Inclusion of IDPs in broader USAID development strategies reflects a growing understanding that population displacement can negatively affect stability and the longer-term development prospects of a nation.

The ultimate goal is to enable IDPs to become fully productive contributors to economic and social progress in their local communities and countries. Therefore, the goal of USAID programs at all phases is to integrate IDPs into their country's development process, sometimes even before the crisis or conflict causing their displacement has ended. This goal requires USAID to engage in coordinated programming that can mix emergency relief or reintegration support with development

assistance where appropriate, thereby achieving program synergy that addresses the needs of IDPs in flexible and creative ways.

Because USAID operates programs in conflict mitigation, conflict emergency assistance, postconflict transitional aid, reconstruction, and long-term development, the Agency is poised to address the full spectrum of IDP needs, given adequate resources. This capacity to program diverse resources simultaneously and in an integrated manner is key to USAID's ability to address the shifting assistance and protection needs of IDP populations over time. ■

## Protection

There is a growing acknowledgment within the international community that material assistance alone often cannot ensure the wellbeing of IDPs. Humanitarian assistance and development strategies should do more to protect IDPs and other vulnerable populations from violence, abuse, exploitation, and harassment.

USAID will use a broad definition of protection; IDPs must be granted the full security and protection provided for under norms of international human rights law, international humanitarian law,<sup>7</sup> and national law. In situations of armed conflict, principles and rules of international humanitarian law will guide USAID assistance to IDPs.

As a matter of priority, USAID will work where possible to ensure that basic protection and human rights for at-risk populations receive adequate attention, both during the immediate humanitarian response to population displacement and the longer-term transition phase toward development and stability. Efforts will be made to ensure humanitarian access to IDPs and other vulnerable populations when foreign governments or combatants deliberately block humanitarian deliveries.

---

<sup>7</sup> This applies where the United States has ratified the treaties or conventions in question or otherwise has accepted these principles as reflecting customary international law.

A “protection lens” in the design of country strategies will ensure that flexible and practical protection measures are integrated into all phases of programming for IDPs. USAID will seek practical protection mechanisms that can be easily integrated into ongoing programs. ■

## Implementation

The companion document, *USAID Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons Policy Implementation Guidelines*, further details approaches for implementing this policy framework and, in particular, protecting IDPs during all phases of displacement. Implementation of protection activities will be phased in incrementally to ensure adequate technical support and resources are available. ■

## Conclusion

Internal population displacement and the factors that cause it pose a difficult challenge. Because modern conflicts are increasingly intrastate in character, displacement of local populations is often a deliberate goal of combatants. Dangerous conditions often prevail for IDPs as well as international aid personnel attempting to provide assistance and protection. Complex legal and sovereignty issues exist. The availability of adequate resources, security, and humanitarian access will affect the scale of assistance and protection that USAID and the international community can provide in many situations. As part of its IDP policy, therefore, it is imperative that USAID review these difficult issues on a regular basis to develop and update effective responses.

The pervasive nature of internal displacement and the challenges of responding effectively inspired this policy on IDPs. A broad and integrated approach is required to reduce the human costs of population displacement and resume progress toward long-term development. The provision of coherent, comprehensive assistance and a durable solution to IDP needs is a USAID priority. ■



For more information, contact  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
Washington, D.C. 20523-1000  
Telephone: 202-712-4810  
Internet: [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)