

**Brookings-CUNY Project on Internal Displacement  
Norwegian Refugee Council  
United States Committee for Refugees**

**Meeting on European Donor Policies towards Internally  
Displaced Persons**

**Brussels: 6th November 2001**

**Notes**

The three sponsoring organisations called the meeting to review the policies and programmes of the European Union (EU) toward internally displaced persons and discuss the shape EU policy should take in future. In 1999 a meeting had been held with the U.S. Government to review a report that had been commissioned on the policy of the United States toward internally displaced persons. The findings of that report had influenced U.S. government thinking and persuaded the Clinton administration to establish a focal point on internal displacement. Interested in encouraging a similar debate in Europe, the sponsoring organisations in 2000 commissioned a report on “European Donor Policies Towards IDPs” from Philip Rudge.

The Rudge report covers the policies of the EU as well as of the governments of Norway and the United Kingdom. The meeting reviewed the findings of the draft report. Participating in the meeting were representatives from the European Commission of the EU, humanitarian NGOs and research institutions. In response to the report, the meeting was informed that the government of Norway had appointed a focal point in its Foreign Ministry on the issue of internal displacement.

Participants heard that the European Union had made progress in a number of areas since the drafting of the Rudge report. For example, the whole area of asylum policy, with implications for IDPs, was under active consideration, including reception policy and practice and the development of a common procedure for asylum applications. This was linked to work on temporary protection and subsidiary forms of protection. Outside the Union, a human rights approach was being developed. A concept paper on protection and humanitarian assistance had been prepared and the global plan would include dissemination of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. In addition, the boundaries between humanitarian work and development were now clearer and the debate about linking relief, rehabilitation and development had moved forward. The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) was now producing annual strategy documents.

The report would prove useful to EU deliberations. Although there was no fixed policy on IDPs, no formal focal point, and no real guidelines to the field on security and protection issues, there was considerable interest in the subject at the organisation, and

there did exist an informal IDP focal point in ECHO; moreover, the planned focus on staff security would have impact on the protection of IDPs.

Participants heard that at the international level, the absence of consensus for the creation of a new agency devoted to internal displacement or for designating an existing agency to take the lead meant that the international response would remain based on collaboration among various involved agencies, under the leadership of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In 2000, a Senior Inter-Agency Network on Internal Displacement had been established to enhance OCHA's coordination role and in 2002 a designated Unit on internal displacement would be operating within OCHA. The Unit will identify gaps in the field, engage in advocacy, conduct monitoring, deliver training and set up a resource base to be deployed as necessary when new situations arise. It would work closely with the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons and its framework would be the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

Discussion at the meeting predominantly focused on the following issues, raised in the Rudge paper:

*The need for a policy response*

Participants examined the pros and cons of developing a policy specifically focused on internally displaced people or integrating IDPs into policies addressing overall vulnerability. Those in favour of a special policy felt that the needs of internally displaced people were very similar to those of refugees for whom there had been international protection and special programmes for many years. The formality of whether or not they had crossed an international border should not affect the level of assistance they receive, nor make a large difference to the policies covering work with them.

In addition, IDPs, it was pointed out, have special and distinct needs by virtue of their displacement – loss of shelter and access to land, severance from community and family, and severe security problems. Special policies were needed to ensure that adequate attention was paid to these needs. In the absence of special policies, international resources were invariably distributed inequitably. As a result, the nutritional and mortality status of IDPs in many emergencies was generally far worse than those of refugees, returning refugees and the rest of the population. Identifying and targeting the internally displaced was not intended to confer a privileged status upon them but rather to ensure that their needs, like those of other vulnerable persons, would be addressed. Indeed, community-based approaches could target both overall communities and the specific needs of internally displaced people.

Those questioning a special policy mentioned the inadvisability of providing assistance to displaced people which was noticeably more generous than that provided to the host community, which will often face similar difficulties. Some also felt that the act of crossing an international border did make an important difference. Within their own

country, displaced people should be able to rely on their own government. International assistance could weaken that responsibility and lead to a reduction in the efforts that governments took to respond to the needs of their citizens. Also, to ignore the legal difference between refugees and internally displaced people could undermine the position of refugees.

It was noted that donor governments often were interested in developing programmes for internally displaced people more to discourage the people concerned from seeking asylum than because it seemed the best solution for the displaced people. This was a risk that could be increased if donors in general (and the EU in particular) were to establish a specific policy on internally displaced people.

Lastly, there were concerns that a specific EU policy on internally displaced people would result in the organisation's being less able to respond to the situation of people in need in a flexible and effective manner. It was however pointed out that this did not need to be the case. A policy might not even imply a special budget line. What it would do is define terms, define objectives, launch a debate about strategies and clarify responsibilities. A policy would provide donors with the tools they need to ensure that their responses were more directly related to need. At present political factors and media coverage seemed to be the main determinants of the level of support available to groups of displaced people. Some groups received relatively high levels of assistance whereas others seemed to be almost invisible. Increasingly, local groups advocating for the displaced in different countries as well as internally displaced communities themselves were increasingly advocating for more targeted international responses.

It was agreed that further discussion was needed on this issue although it was recognized that there was no disagreement over the fact that internally displaced people were particularly vulnerable and that assistance programmes should be designed with that in mind.

### *Protection*

Protection of the personal safety and human rights of internally displaced people was recognised as raising the most difficult questions. Participants recognised the critical importance of the Guiding Principles in restating the relevant rights, responsibilities and duties already recognised by the international community. The Guiding Principles had gained a good deal of international acceptance and were being promoted by the European Union in multilateral fora, although it was noted that they had not been formally endorsed by the organisation.

The central dilemma around protection was that there could be circumstances when an agency would be prevented from delivering material assistance if it raised protection issues too clearly. Yet it was recognised that to deliver humanitarian assistance with no attention to protection risked situations, such as the one that arose in Goma, where assistance sustained genocidal and terrorist groups or even as in Sudan, where assistance could be seen as contributing to prolonging conflict. A balance needed to be found that

preserved the neutral, impartial and non-political nature of humanitarian assistance and at the same addressed critical protection and human rights concerns. There was appreciation of the balance between assistance and protection shown by the Council of Europe in its approach to Chechnya, though it was recognised that the Council was freed from some of the concerns because it did not have a major aid programme to run.

Participants felt that there was a need to de-mystify protection. Possible activities included:

- integrating protection concerns into needs assessments missions;
- establishing new (and making more use of existing) schemes for the rapid deployment of protection experts;
- urging ECHO to play a stronger role in expanding humanitarian access and to develop, and pass on to their field officers, guidance on protection issues;
- urging the European Union to enter into dialogue on protection issues with non-governmental organisations, which implemented most of the programmes. This might lead to contractual requirements on the need to balance humanitarian assistance with protection work;
- reinforcing the UN's protection structure in the field by having resident coordinators become more active, by engaging the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and through the development of more effective partnerships with NGOs.

### *Coordination*

The discussion mainly focused on coordination within the European Commission. Participants recognised that the issue of internal displacement raised questions of human rights, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and development and foreign policy, which meant that it cut across several directorates-general and services and came within the mandates of at least three commissioners.

At present there is little coordination among the services concerned. Participants were not even clear about the appropriateness of coordination between humanitarian assistance work and foreign policy. Overall, however, the need for greater coordination was not disputed, indeed was strongly emphasised. In as far as the Commission does have a focus on internally displaced people, it was seen as being within ECHO. However, concerns were expressed that ECHO (with its time horizon for assistance being 6 months) did not have the right mandate for dealing with what are often long-term issues.

### **Conclusions**

Without making any formal recommendations, participants made the following suggestions for future work on the way the European Union responds to situations involving internally displaced people:

- greater debate is needed within the Commission, among non-governmental organisations and between the Commission and non-governmental organisations;

- this debate should lead to discussions with the Council structures. The Danish presidency, it was noted, was already well advanced on preparations for its period in office (second half of 2002). It, and the subsequent Greek presidency, should be approached in the near future;
- a discussion paper, expanding on the themes raised in Philip Rudge's report and in the discussions of 6<sup>th</sup> November, would be invaluable in promoting these debates;
- a central concept to be discussed in such a paper would be "mainstreaming" - ensuring that all relevant European Union programmes paid attention to the needs of internally displaced people;
- the European Union needed to find ways of supporting its officials on the ground and its partner non-governmental organisations to ensure their protection and to enable them to provide protection to internally displaced people;
- at the highest political level, the European Union should formally endorse the Guiding Principles;
- the European Union should be encouraged to develop a roster of experts on protection matters and study why existing rosters are not fully used;
- the results of these activities, together with Philip Rudge's report, could form the basis for a donors' meeting.

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