

Introduction to the Handbook

1. Around the world today, across more than 50 countries, some 24 million individuals are uprooted from their homes and displaced in their own country as a result of conflict or human rights violations.
2. **Internally displaced persons**¹ or “IDPs” are part of the broader civilian population affected by conflict and human rights abuses, who are in need of protection and assistance.
3. Forced from their homes, IDPs also experience specific deprivations, such as loss of shelter, and often face **heightened or particular protection risks**. These risks can include:
 - armed attack and abuses while fleeing in search of safety;
 - family separation, including an increase in the number of separated children, unaccompanied minors and women heads-of-household;
 - heightened risk of sexual and gender based violence, particularly affecting women and children;
 - arbitrary deprivation of land, homes and other property;
 - being cut off from traditional livelihoods and sources of income;
 - loss of identity documentation essential to accessing benefits and public services and enjoying legal recognition;
 - disruption of schooling for children and adolescents;
 - displacement into inhospitable environments, where they suffer stigmas, marginalization, discrimination or harassment;
 - psychological distress related to the traumatic experience of displacement;
 - forced return or resettlement to an area that is unsafe.
4. In the face of such risks, internally displaced women, men, girls and boys demonstrate a remarkable degree of resilience and strength, drawing on their own capacities to develop basic support mechanisms and seek protection.
5. Protecting IDPs and other persons within their own country is the responsibility primarily of **national authorities**. Yet, States are not always fully able or ready to do so. National resources and capacity may be insufficient to respond to the magnitude and scope of the crisis. Particularly in situations of armed conflict, IDPs may find themselves in territories over which state authority is absent or difficult to enforce. State policies and practices may even cause forced displacement and aggravate the risks IDPs face.
6. In those cases where States require support or national protection is not ensured, a critical protection role and responsibility falls to the **international community**. Addressing this “protection gap” has been a challenge, in light not only of the sensitivity of the subject in a national context but also gaps within the international framework. In recent years, important progress has been made towards ensuring a more effective response.
7. A **normative framework** for the protection of IDPs has been developed with the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*.² Based on international human rights law and international humanitarian law, the Principles set out the rights of IDPs and the responsibilities of national authorities and other actors in all phases of displacement. The Principles provide an important tool and standard to guide protection work in situations of internal displacement.
8. Concerted efforts also are being made to address **institutional gaps** in the humanitarian response, including in situations of internal displacement. A reform of the humanitarian system initiated in 2005

¹ Underlined words are defined in the Glossary.

² Annex I. See also Part I, Chapter 2: the Legal Framework.

identified protection as a persistent gap and put in place institutional mechanisms to ensure that protection is a core component (or “cluster”) and cross-cutting element of humanitarian response.

9. The critical test of course is on the ground. However, practical and comprehensive guidance on how to operationalize protection in situations of internal displacement has been lacking.

Goals and objectives

10. This Handbook provides **operational guidance and tools** to support effective protection responses in situations of internal displacement.
11. Specifically, the Handbook seeks to:
 - Ensure that staff are familiar with the core concepts, principles and international legal standards that form the framework for protection work;
 - Assist staff in operationalizing these concepts, principles and legal standards and in carrying out their protection responsibilities;
 - Improve understanding of the particular protection risks faced by internally displaced women, men, boys and girls of various backgrounds;
 - Provide guidance on how, through a range of different activities, to work to prevent and respond to the protection risks faced by IDPs;
 - Enhance staff skills for carrying out protection work;
 - Promote a consistent and well-coordinated protection response in different operations.
12. The focus of the Handbook is on the protection of IDPs and other affected populations³ in situations of internal displacement in complex emergencies. Much of the guidance provided may also be relevant in situations of natural disasters, when internal displacement as well as protection risks also often arise.⁴

Intended audience

13. This Handbook is primarily intended for use by staff, in particular field staff, of international organizations engaged in responding to situations of internal displacement.
14. This includes not only human rights and protection officers, but also humanitarian and development actors more broadly. Protection is a cross-cutting issue to which *all* staff have a responsibility to pay attention and to promote.
15. Indeed, the Handbook can be a source of information and guidance for all partners in a protection response, including State authorities and civil society.

Contents

16. The Handbook is divided into five parts.
 - Part I covers the **foundations of protection**. It sets out core concepts, approaches and

³ In contexts of internal displacement, “affected populations” have been defined as: host communities where IDPs are living; host communities in areas of IDP return; and persons or communities at risk of displacement if their protection problems are not addressed.” Progress Report of the Cluster Working Group on Protection to the IASC Principals, 12 Dec 2005. Throughout this Handbook, operational guidance referring to IDPs should generally be understood to include not only IDPs but also affected populations.

⁴ See also *Protecting Persons Affected by Natural Disasters: IASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters* (IASC, 2006).

humanitarian principles for our protection work and provides an overview of the legal and institutional frameworks for the protection of IDPs.

- Part II focuses on **building the protection response**, providing guidance on how to: assess and analyze the protection situation; develop protection strategies for response; and monitor and evaluate protection programs.
- Part III provides guidance on **how to prevent and respond to specific protection risks and rights violations** commonly faced by IDPs, suggesting actions to support IDPs' to realize their rights and for the State to fulfill its protection responsibilities.
- Part IV provides more detailed information about key **protection activities** that contribute to an effective protection response, identifying the operational challenges that may arise and the principles which should guide our action.
- Part V outlines **skills**, both professional and interpersonal, which are important to support protection work.

17. These five parts and their individual chapters are complementary and interlocking. They also can stand alone as self-contained modules. An **Index** enables users to quickly find the particular guidance they need.
18. The Handbook also includes a list of Acronyms, a Glossary, and five Annexes:
 - Annex I: the **Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement**;
 - Annex II: a **legal matrix** summarizing, by thematic issue, the legal standards which guide protection work;
 - Annex III: a matrix setting out the roles, responsibilities and areas of activity of the main **international organizations** engaged in protection;
 - Annex IV: a template for a **protection strategy**;
 - Annex V: a checklist of **protection activities**.
19. This Handbook builds on a growing body of information on internal displacement as well existing tools and guidance materials on protection. It points to relevant other resources to which staff can usefully refer when dealing with particular issues in greater depth.
20. This Handbook is a living tool which will be regularly updated to reflect evolutions in doctrine and practice, as well as lessons learned from operational developments.

Feedback on this Handbook and examples of field practices on protection are welcome at any time. Email us at: Hqidphb@unhcr.org