

UNHCR's Population Movement Tracking initiative – FAQ's ***November 2007***

What is the Population Movement Tracking Initiative?

UNHCR-Somalia began the Population Movement Tracking (PMT) initiative in mid-2006, mainly in response to the IDP movements resulting from a drought in South/Central Somalia. Though managed by UNHCR, the project was presented as a Protection Cluster initiative. The reasoning was, and remains, that the Protection cluster cannot plan appropriate and effective interventions without reliable information on vulnerable populations – in this case IDPs. The PMT was designed to capture information on IDP movements, and the populations in a systematic way, thereby providing (for the first time) reliable and standardized information on IDPs across Somalia, even for those areas with little or no humanitarian access.

How does the PMT collect information on population movements?

The information flow of the PMT initiative is simple. Local NGOs – identified, trained, and supported by UNHCR, monitor key locations such as IDP settlements, bus stations, roads, etc. and report on IDP movements using a standard reporting form. These forms are emailed to UNHCR on a daily basis, where they are entered and analyzed in a database.

How is this information verified?

In Nairobi we do our best to verify and cross-check these reports, as well as remove duplicate information (which is rare because our partners are generally well coordinated in the field). All available sources of information are consulted and compared. Significant work has been done to streamline, standardize, and simplify this process over the last few months. The result is that the PMT project can provide daily updates on IDP movements, has proven to be relatively accurate (when our figures are verified by humanitarian actors on the ground), and has become the undisputed global source of information on IDP movements in Somalia. PMT information has become critical to the planning and programming of most humanitarian actors operating in Somalia.

Can the PMT provide the total number of IDPs in Somalia?

The PMT only collects information on new movements, that is to say, only IDPs that have moved since the initiation of this project which was in mid-2006. This means that the PMT cannot provide information on previous IDP caseloads such as those protracted IDPs who have lived in IDP settlements since the early 1990's. As a result the PMT can not provide the total number of IDPs in Somalia, nor in any particular part of Somalia, unless ALL the IDPs in a particular area arrived since mid-2006. In an effort to provide "big picture" planning figures, information from the PMT is complemented by information from other assessments and projects such as the IDP profiling exercises which were undertaken in late 2006 and early 2007, other reports and assessments by other agencies, and previously agreed-upon planning figures. Putting all this existing information together, it becomes possible to provide very rough estimates of the total IDP

caseload in Somalia. It is very important to understand the limitations of this information though.

How accurate are the PMT reports?

Given the nature of the situation in Somalia which includes; limited humanitarian access, complex humanitarian emergencies comprised of man-made and overlapping natural disasters, and multiple population movements (including refugees and asylum seekers moving in and out of Somalia, IDPs, economic migrants, immigrants, and seasonal/pastoral movements) it is virtually impossible to provide an accurate count on the total number of IDPs in Somalia. There are populations that are counted as IDPs but who are not really IDPs. These include urban poor, economic migrants, and immigrants from Ethiopia. Furthermore there are IDPs who are not “counted” but should be. These include IDPs who have moved into the homes of family or clan members, particularly in rural areas. These IDPs seem to “disappear” into local communities.

Even when focusing strictly on recent IDP movements, our partners face a number of challenges. In some cases our partners are expected to cover vast areas with very little resources. (i.e. Gedo, Bakool, Sool, Sanaag). Certain situations simply overwhelm the monitors. Recent movements from Mogadishu have been so massive that it becomes extremely difficult to monitor the movements of large numbers of people, moving in different directions, in the middle of intense armed conflict between combatants. They even face problems of IDP communities who tire of being questioned on new arrivals to their settlement when there has been no aid or assistance forthcoming. There are also external forces and motivations that cause certain communities to inflate or exaggerate the number of IDPs in a bid to increase assistance. Lastly, there are political pressures to suppress the provision of accurate figures on displacement. All of these limitations to our monitoring cause us to be unable to report 100% accurately on IDP numbers.

How should information from the PMT be used?

The goal of the PMT is to provide the overall trends and patterns of movements, as well as highlight key IDP issues. We are very comfortable with statements like, “of all the IDPs leaving Mogadishu, most have gone to Lower and Middle Shabelle”. We are hesitant to provide numbers of beneficiaries. When we do provide numbers we explain that they illustrate trends and not the actual caseloads. Our recommendation is always that our numbers should guide strategic planning and prioritization, but that actual interventions or distributions should be done only after a field-based needs assessment/registration is completed.

How accurate have the PMT reports been historically?

Given the limitations in the use of PMT figures, it is fair to say that our figures of IDPs are not 100% accurate when compared with the number of people on the ground. (However when it comes to the accuracy of our trends, which is our actual goal, we are very accurate). Nevertheless it is important to note that when there are discrepancies between our IDP figures and those reported after field based assessments, they nearly always indicate that UNHCR have under-reported the number of IDPs.

In summary, while there are limitations to the data we collect on IDP movements, the PMT initiative remains a valuable resource for the humanitarian community working in Somalia, and represents a successful data management initiative which provides better information for better operational decision making.