Unacknowledged fragile states like El Salvador, Guatemala or Honduras highlight at best the lag in response time in refugee and humanitarian circles and at worst the geopolitical influences determining who is allowed to flee and to where. TCOs specifically choose weakened national bases where they can exert greater control. Arguably nations which contribute to situations creating flight – for example through large consumer demand for drugs – should be responsible for receiving the fleeing citizens.

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2. Importantly for this region, legal definitions of ‘persecution’ and ‘refugee’ are expanded and already recognise this point in the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, 1994 San Jose Declaration, and 2004 Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action.

3. The act of refusing to join a gang, despite mounting pressure, is at the very least neutrality and often a radical act of support for peace.

Data quality and information management in DRC
Janet Ousley and Lara Ho

Forced migration creates special challenges to collecting data and monitoring responses in fragile states where infrastructure and systems are weak or non-existent. These states often lack the statistics registries needed to measure the basic demographic information that is essential to planning when emergencies happen. As key building blocks in the process of state reconstruction, valid demographic data are required to conduct robust needs assessments and to measure and demonstrate progress. When migration takes place, whether forced or otherwise, the poor data from weak state systems can become almost unusable, necessitating the need for costly external assessments.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the data problems resulting from poor state information management have been a persistent issue for years. The last nationwide population census in the country took place in 1984, before the major conflicts of the 1990s and 2000s, and today’s population figures are often calculated by multiplying this 1984 baseline by a 3% growth rate regardless of changes in fertility, mortality (conflict-related and otherwise) or displacement, resulting in sometimes wildly inaccurate population estimates, and making it extremely difficult to prepare for or respond to the actual needs of both displaced and stable populations.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) conducted a series of nationwide mortality surveys to better understand the impact of the wars, which was at the time these surveys were key to bringing attention to the conflict’s devastating impact, they were also demanding in terms of the time, logistics and the technical and financial resources required to conduct them. Nevertheless, the mortality surveys did little to directly reinforce the Congolese state’s ability to measure mortality.

As a result, since 2008, IRC has been helping the Congolese state improve its ability to collect valid demographic information and to measure and respond to displacement and emergencies. IRC is also supporting community-based solutions to strengthen data quality. Yet, as conflict again erupted in North Kivu in early 2012, many of the Community Health Workers included in the data-strengthening project were displaced themselves or had the cell phones they used to send data stolen or lost. Months of lost data show the weakness of even innovative solutions to improving data collection in fragile states.

If states are to escape fragility through the establishment of functional institutions capable of delivering services, good quality data and monitoring can help measure changes that result from displacement and are therefore important parts of the process.

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1. www.rescue.org/special-reports/congo-forgotten-crisis