

Unlocking Solutions for the Internally Displaced

Additional¹ Submission to the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement

September 2020

Introduction

For more than forty-five years, UNHCR has been operationally involved with forcibly displaced persons within their own countries. As early as 1972, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) called on the High Commissioner for Refugees to extend assistance to both returning refugees and “persons displaced within the country”.² That same year, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) commended UNHCR’s “efficient role in the coordination of relief and resettlement operations of refugees and other displaced persons”.³ In following years, UNHCR included internally displaced persons (IDPs) in its programmes, namely those for refugees returning to Sudan (1972), Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique (1974), as well as Vietnam and Laos (1975); given that IDPs and returning refugees were often living in the same areas, “it was neither reasonable nor feasible to treat the two categories differently”.⁴

Since then, displacement dynamics have evolved. Internally displaced persons have increased seven-fold in only 15 years⁵, from 2005 when the international community established the cluster system, to enhance predictability, accountability, and coordination roles to different UN entities⁶. Within this system, UNHCR was allocated leadership and coordination roles based on the agency’s mandate and comparative advantage⁷. Today, UNHCR is involved in 33 situations of internal displacement, an increase from 15 in 2005. For greater predictability of engagement in situations of internal displacement, UNHCR recently issued an IDP Policy⁸ and released a stepped up IDP Initiative⁹.

This paper is UNHCR’s additional contribution to the work of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement with a focus on how best to unlock solutions for today’s internally displaced. It does not claim to address all challenges and constraints in the international response to internal displacement. Nor does it attempt to fully uncover all complexities associated with solutions, including the central discussion of when internal displacement ends¹⁰. The aim of this contribution is rather to share key reflections and perspectives based on UNHCR’s operational experience in seeking and finding solutions for and with IDPs. The reflections are broad in scope, inter-related, and span from the necessity to achieve a greater understanding of internal displacement (1-3) to establishing an adequate operational response (4-6). The final reflection (7) introduces an unexplored pathway to the solutions response for IDPs.

¹ Upon request from the High-Level Panel, UNHCR is tendering this additional Submission focused on IDP Solutions. This may be read in conjunction with UNHCR’s broader submission to the High-Level Panel on 8 May 2020. Available [here](#).

² Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Resolution 1705 (LIII), 27 July 1972. See also ECOSOC Resolution 1655 (LII), 1 June 1972, and ECOSOC Resolution 2011 (LXI). The latter acknowledged UNHCR work “in the context of man-made disasters, in addition to its original functions”.

³ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2958 (XXVII) 12 December 1972.

⁴ EC/SPC/87 of 17 August 1994.

⁵ There were 6,6 million IDPs in 2005. They were 43 million by the end of 2019, representing almost 60 per cent of the nearly 80 million people forcibly displaced worldwide. UNHCR Global Trends Report 2019. Available [here](#).

⁶ [Global Protection Cluster Working Group, Handbook for Protection of Internally Displaced Persons, 2010](#)

⁷ UNHCR, Emergency Handbook 4th Edition, Cluster Approach, 2020. Available [here](#).

⁸ Policy on UNHCR’s Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement, 18 September 2019. Available [here](#).

⁹ UNHCR’s Initiative on Internal Displacement 2020-2021, 2019. Available [here](#).

¹⁰ <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/when-does-internal-displacement-end/>

The paper also draws on lessons learned in the operationalization of solutions-related provisions contained in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement¹¹, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention)¹², and several national laws¹³ relating to internal displacement. Lastly, the reflections are aligned with the 2030 Agenda and support the achievement of the commitment to “leave no one behind”¹⁴.

1. Improving our understanding of IDPs and their evolving solutions needs

Improving the understanding of root causes of displacement, as well as who the displaced and their hosts are, their socio-economic profiles, needs, associated protection risks, intentions, capacities and available resources, is essential to identifying a more targeted and comprehensive approach to solutions. The causes and nature of internal displacement are particularly relevant in conflict-related situations, where efforts to achieve protection and solutions are, to a great extent, impacted by violence strife, and where all actors have to navigate complex underlying political and socio-economic contexts, both during and after hostilities¹⁵.

Despite the limited availability of data on IDPs’ demographics and socio-economic status, we have witnessed a change in IDP characteristics over the decades. Available geographic information confirms that IDPs were predominantly located in rural areas at the start of the 2010s. By the end of 2019, however, two-thirds of IDPs were living in urban or semi-urban areas¹⁶. Moreover, the IDP population is also often very young¹⁷, with associated specific solutions needs, priorities and preferences when compared to older displaced persons. These and other emerging dynamics, including the adverse effects of climate change¹⁸ and the persistent protracted nature of internal displacement, call into question the relevance of the notion of voluntary return to locations of origin as the ‘preferred’ durable solution by IDPs.

Many second-generation IDPs do not envisage returning to their location of origin. This is particularly the case for women, who may have enjoyed more freedoms during displacement¹⁹, and younger generations for whom livelihoods and self-reliance opportunities in rural areas remain limited. In Sudan (Darfur), for instance, an “emerging dynamic related to displacement, is the growing body of evidence highlighting that a significant number of IDP households prefer to permanently remain in their current urban or peri-urban locations. With displacement for many families stretching back a decade or more, new livelihoods strategies, new habits and new sociocultural preferences have developed, particularly in the generation that was born and raised in camps”²⁰. As possibilities for return fade, many IDPs make decisions that root themselves in their area of

¹¹ E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2

¹² African Union, African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa ("Kampala Convention"), 23 October 2009.

¹³ i.e. the National Policy, National Eviction Guidelines and the Interim Protocol on Land Distribution for Housing to Eligible Refugee-Returnees and IDPs in Somalia (2019)

¹⁴ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1

¹⁵ Displacement in the context of natural disasters and climate change represents a different degree of complexity and so requires a different response by different actors. While the paper acknowledges the inter-related linkages between climate change and conflict-related displacement, the reflections presented throughout this paper focuses primarily on conflict-related displacement.

¹⁶ See section 3 for more detailed information.

¹⁷ According to a recent study from the World Bank, children under 15 years represented 43% of IDPs in Sudan, 46% of IDPs in South Sudan, 51% of IDPs in Somalia, and 57% of IDPs in northeast Nigeria [*how does it compare to the national population? To be reviewed further*]. World Bank Group, *Informing Durable Solutions for Internal Displacement*, 2019

¹⁸ The possibility of return to rural areas is also increasingly diminished by climate change, which can alter rainfall or patterns of seasonal access to land or water by pastoralists and herders; such changes may mean that return at the same scale is not be sustainable.

¹⁹ K. Holloway, M. Stavropoulou and M. Daigle, Gender in displacement. The state of play, HPG Working Paper, December 2019

²⁰ Trias Consult, October 2019, *Review of the Darfur Development Strategy (2013-2019), Consolidated Review Report*, Vol.I, p.22. The review was conducted on behalf of the Government of Sudan, the United Nations (UN) and international partners, 2019.

displacement where solutions are more likely to take the form of local integration, in-country resettlement or settlement elsewhere²¹. However, information on the obstacles and opportunities facing IDPs in pursuit of these options have been scarce and a more comprehensive understanding is needed of how to best support IDPs to achieve sustainable solutions in such contexts.

As seen in several situations, a significant number of IDPs settle elsewhere or self-relocate in regional and State capitals following displacement, and in many instances do not seek assistance, formally register their displacement, and are unable to find livelihoods and rebuild their lives. While they may find temporary resolutions to their socio-economic challenges, long-term safety, security, documentation and freedom of movement are paramount for the exercise of political rights and to prevent secondary, repeated or cyclical (depending on the causes) displacement. This underlines the importance of ensuring the rights of IDPs to access basic services, and inclusion into national systems, such as education, health care, and housing, to enjoy freedom of movement, and not to be subject to arbitrary arrest and detention. Central to this is IDPs' access to civil documentation, such as identification cards, passports, birth and marriage certificates, educational diplomas, and certification of health and welfare rights or property title. Every effort must be made to support and strengthen national systems to ensure that IDPs have full and equal access to civil status registries and documentation, including replacement documentation. Moreover, access to civil documentation should be recognized for its evidentiary and non-political nature.

Furthermore, IDPs may not formally choose one settlement option to achieve a durable solution. They may choose to use multiple settlements at the same time, depending on the options available. As we have seen, displaced families may prioritize solutions that allow for flexibility (including through pendular movements), maximize security and bring economic gains for their whole family. These evolving solutions needs require a comprehensive and diversified approach while retaining the essential entitlements of other nationals (for example the right to recover property or receive appropriate compensation where recovery is not feasible). Agility, flexibility and adaptation of tools and programmes that respond to IDPs' solutions needs are critical and should allow for individual family members or communities to pursue different solutions options. In addition, any durable solutions programming should incorporate demographic considerations and look to address the specific needs of youth, women and older persons²².

Improved data and evidence, rooted in the realities of displaced communities, is central to achieving a wider understanding of internal displacement dynamics and the solutions needs of today's IDPs. A promising example can be highlighted from Sudan, where the Durable Solutions Working Group (DSWG) is coordinating a substantial effort on data collection and analysis under the Peace Building Fund-Darfur (PBF) and Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) programming. This work is combining area-based comparative profiling among displaced and non-displaced communities, intention and perception surveys, and multisector profiles of target localities, using a methodology that builds on earlier efforts undertaken by the World Bank and the UN Country Team (UNCT).

Finally, efforts to better understand the solutions needs of IDPs are most likely to have lasting impact if they are guided by national authorities and communities. National champions—ideally at the ministerial level in executive branches, through dedicated committees in legislative bodies and/or judicial institutions—can make

²¹ 'Settlement elsewhere', 'resettlement' and 'relocation' are used interchangeably to refer to the same durable solution where IDPs take refuge or settlement in another part of the country, e.g. the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) refers to resettlement while the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) (2009) refers to relocation and the IASC Framework refers to settlement elsewhere

²² This will also include persons with disabilities.

real and sustainable difference, as shown in Iraq, Ukraine, Nigeria and Colombia. They can also help with mobilizing support, resources and driving legislative policy change, which are all critical for achieving sustainable solutions.

2. Ensuring voices of IDPs inform planning and implementation of solutions

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement emphasize that special efforts should be made to ensure the full participation of IDPs in the planning and management of their return, resettlement or reintegration²³. The importance of understanding the views and preferences of IDPs was recently emphasized by the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons to the UN General Assembly²⁴ and available evidence shows that the participation of IDPs and host communities in project planning and implementation is a crucial element for successful humanitarian-development initiatives to address internal displacement²⁵.

Despite this, national authorities and the international community have too often “sought” solutions for IDPs without systematically discussing with the displaced communities what their intentions, preferences and coping mechanisms are. The disjuncture between the views of IDPs and those of national authorities/international actors can lead to IDPs seeking solutions outside of formal and organized programmes or initiatives. In many situations, solutions are found “spontaneously”, which is, when IDPs themselves deem the basic conditions to be in place. One-size-fits-all approaches to durable solutions need to be replaced with more nuanced processes adapted to the distinct needs of different groups and individuals. Displaced women, men, children, older people and those with disabilities as well as other groups, each have specific priorities and resources that must be considered while designing more adapted policies and programmes to support them. Moreover, the participation of IDPs does not only enhance the likelihood of achieving lasting solutions but is also an important element of prevention.

There are many good practices that can serve as inspiration and provide important insights, as we seek to ensure that the voices of IDPs inform planning and implementation of solutions. A study commissioned by the Turkish Government in 2006, for example, provided information on the needs and perceptions of IDPs in 13 Turkish provinces and provided a sound empirical basis for the development of action plans to assist and protect IDPs²⁶. In Colombia, the Transitional Solutions Initiative (TSI) led by UNHCR, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank ensured meaningful participation of IDP communities, including through dedicated discussions with groups of women, boys, girls and adolescents and youth, to ensure their contribution to plans developed for their communities²⁷. Likewise, in Sudan, consultations with IDPs, affected communities, and local leaders (both from the State administration as well as from customary and traditional authorities), have directly informed ongoing durable solutions programming supported by the PBF and CERF.

In the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria), community centers are mobilizing and empowering IDPs, returnees and affected host communities; and provide them with a forum to promote their participation in decision-making

²³ Principle 28 (2).

²⁴ Report to the General Assembly of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, A/72/202, 2017.

²⁵ OCHA, Reducing Protracted Internal Displacement: A snapshot of successful humanitarian-development initiatives, 2019

²⁶ Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, Turkey Migration and Internally Displaced Population Survey, Press Release, 2006. Access the study [here](#) (in Turkish).

²⁷ OCHA, Reducing Protracted Internal Displacement: A snapshot of successful humanitarian-development initiatives, 2019. This is also aligned with UNHCR’s Age, Gender and Diversity approach through which UNHCR field teams and partners promote the role of women, men, girls, and boys of all ages and backgrounds as agents of change in their families and communities.

processes that have an impact on their lives²⁸. In Nigeria, efforts were made to enhance the participation of IDPs in national electoral processes in both their area of displacement and origin, including by conducting sensitizations on the right to vote, the electoral process and voting procedures²⁹. Lessons learned can also be drawn from previous engagement of refugees and internally displaced persons in mediation and peace processes, including the delegation of displaced South Sudanese who participated in the negotiations for the 2018 peace agreement.

3. Responding to the growing urbanization of displacement

Recent decades have been characterized by a rapid and steady urbanization of the global population. This is also evident among internally displaced populations: the majority of IDPs are estimated to now reside in urban and peri-urban areas³⁰. IDPs living in urban environments are often dispersed and struggle to find accommodation, particularly where rapid urbanization has resulted in a significant shortage of adequate housing. Consequently, many IDPs are forced to live in collective centres, unfinished public buildings or informal settlements amongst the urban poor where additional protection risks can arise due to overcrowding and little or no access to safe water, sanitation and other basic services. Tenure insecurity and risks of eviction are also greater in urban settings and this can lead to further displacement, as seen in Mogadishu, Somalia³¹.

One of the main concerns for IDPs in urban areas is to ensure a livelihood and regular income. While jobs are more readily available in urban areas than in rural areas or camps, urban IDPs' economic conditions, however, tend to be similar to, if not worse, than those of the urban poor³². A 2019 study by the World Bank found that IDPs with an agricultural background can face greater challenges in urban centers and higher poverty levels than others³³. Likewise, limited access to quality, affordable and uninterrupted primary education opportunities represents another central barrier to IDPs ability to integrate into urban life.

Urban displacement also offers opportunities for interim solutions to many IDPs if authorities and the international community are able to provide the necessary support enabling IDPs to live dignified lives while retaining the prospect of eventual return or settlement elsewhere. This can be done through greater promotion of local solutions³⁴, interim integration³⁵ or transitional solutions³⁶, which facilitates the appropriate economic, social and cultural inclusion of IDPs, without prejudice to eventual durable solutions. This means better identifying and removing the barriers that prevent IDPs from benefiting and contributing to the social, political, economic and cultural life of towns and cities, including through expanding health, water, infrastructure, and education capacity. However, as emphasized by the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, transitional solutions for IDPs in urban areas must not be mistaken for durable solutions³⁷.

²⁸ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Community%20Centres%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20September%202018.pdf>

²⁹ <https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2019/02/15/displaced-but-not-disenfranchised-idps-and-the-2019-nigerian-elections/>

³⁰ UNHCR Global Trends Report, 2019

³¹ JIPS, Internal Displacement Profiling in Mogadishu, 2016

³² IDMC, Global Report, 2019

³³ World Bank Group. Informing Durable Solutions for Internal Displacement, 2019. See in particular pp. 20-21

³⁴ Other "Local Solutions" mentioned in paragraph 100 of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), affirmed by the UN General Assembly in December 2018, offer inspiration for solutions for internally displaced persons.

³⁵ The concept of 'interim integration' is discussed in the report by Brookings, IDMC, NRC titled IDPs in Protracted Displacement: Is local integration a Solution, 2011.

³⁶ As conceptualized e.g. by the Transitional Solutions Initiative (TSI), spearheaded by UNDP, UNHCR and the World Bank. The aim of the TSI was to increase the self-reliance of protracted refugees and IDPs, and host communities through inter-agency collaboration and tailored area-based interventions.

³⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15210&LangID=E>

Solutions responses need also to consider the impact of urbanization. Both the achievement of durable solutions for IDPs in urban areas and the achievement of sustainable urban development require improved land management, governance and urban planning, which are best realized through greater involvement of authorities at local and municipal levels and the adoption of an area-based approach. A number of progressive durable solutions initiatives can serve as good practices in this regard; in Somalia, for example, several municipalities have taken steps towards inclusive urban planning, providing opportunities to promote durable solutions at scale for IDPs while ensuring the interests and concerns of all groups of people. The municipalities of Hargeisa and Kismayo have established a property registry, which register documentation of land and properties within municipal boundaries while Puntland and Somaliland have developed urban regulatory frameworks³⁸. In Colombia, the legalizing of informal settlements in urban areas, which have been inhabited for years, have proven an important step for IDPs to access state support for housing and public services; and have led to urban integration³⁹. Legalization also has the effect of empowering IDP communities, as their presence and contribution to the economic vitality of cities becomes visible. The urbanization programme in multiple municipalities in the Diffa region in Niger is another example of close collaboration with communities and local authorities to provide legal access to land for displaced families, while contributing to the local economy⁴⁰.

Cities' capacity to support IDPs are critical for solutions. Building and strengthening the capacity of local governments and municipalities hosting IDPs are needed to appropriately respond to urbanization. IDPs rely on the urban system – the built environment, available services, social fabric and economy – to provide for their basic needs and self-reliance. However, basic services and infrastructure in many towns and cities, particularly in middle income and developing countries, are still severely overstretched. There is also a need for matching investments in rural capacities, markets and infrastructure, including in secondary cities, so as to reduce the pressure on urban areas⁴¹.

Lastly, it is important to note that although support is needed for IDPs to access solutions in cities and towns, it does not take away the importance of addressing the solutions needs of those who remain in rural areas.

4. Access to housing, land and property as a critical factor for solutions

Failure to consider housing, land and property (HLP) rights in the response to internal displacement could compound existing inequalities and discriminatory patterns and could ultimately hinder IDPs' access to solutions. IDPs returning to their area of origin are often unable to re-occupy their houses and/or land as a result of secondary occupation, damage or destruction, intra-family disputes, or loss of relevant documentation. If they do not have alternative housing options, they may face many of the challenges that they confronted during their displacement, including limited available residential land, discriminatory practices in the (private) rental market, and inability to meet eligibility criteria of social housing programmes. The inability to access adequate housing impedes self-reliance and affects the ability to cover other basic needs, in particular for those IDPs that require access to land and/or water for their livelihoods, such as pastoralists.

Again, the centrality of access to civil documentation must be emphasized: it is a prerequisite to obtaining HLP documents and necessary for the recognition, exercise and full realization of associated rights. As we see in

³⁸ <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/UN-Somali-DSI-Towards-Sustainable.pdf>

³⁹ Recent submission from UNHCR Country Operation in Colombia to 2nd IDP Initiative Quarterly Update, 2020; OCHA, Reducing Protracted Internal Displacement: A snapshot of successful humanitarian-development initiatives, 2019

⁴⁰ <https://www.unhcr.org/niger-urbanization-project.html>

⁴¹ IDMC Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020

Syria, housing, land and property rights and civil documentation are critical needs of IDPs and a foundational concern for the entire humanitarian response⁴². However, investments are also needed to (re-) establish access to housing, land and property, including through low-cost (re-)construction options, social housing programmes, agricultural development, (legal) assistance to address disputes or secure clear tenancy agreements. Focus must also be on strengthening the capacity of both formal and informal authorities to address accommodation needs, with the direct engagement of displaced populations and their host communities. Humanitarian partners are often not equipped and certainly not funded to support large repair interventions and other adequate housing options at scale. Development actors, who do have capacity to scale, are more often risk averse and have generally been less engaged in internal displacement situations⁴³.

In order to ensure that bedrock investment in durable housing solutions is prioritised and achievable, a broad understanding will need to be developed across all key sectors and with all key actors that respond to the demands, needs, and supply within local communities; this includes employment, training, health, human security and economic prosperity. In addition, to ensure the sustainability of return, integration and post-conflict reconstruction, support is required to protect the rights of IDPs to recover housing or land in the aftermath of displacement or to receive full and effective compensation when recovery is impossible. Housing and land underpin human activity and have often played a role in the violence and conflict that caused displacement. Mechanisms or processes to address HLP-related grievances and protect the right to restitution require strengthening to truly be accessible to the most vulnerable IDPs⁴⁴. Governments, meanwhile, may be unable (or unwilling) to allocate the required level of funding for reform, restitution and compensation processes, necessitating strategic advocacy and fundraising efforts¹².

5. The primacy of security and protection for sustainable solutions

The findings of numerous profiling and intention surveys for IDPs suggest that the most important factor influencing intentions to return are peace and security in the place of origin. This is evident, for example, in recent profiling conducted with IDPs in Darfur (Sudan), where 78% and 91% of households respectively in Abu Shouk and El Salam highlighted insecurity in their place of origin as a main obstacle for returning⁴⁵. Thorough profiling exercises conducted in countries affected by violence not related with armed conflict, for example in the North of Central America, underline the profound impact on individuals and communities of criminal violence associated with the weakening or corruption of public institutions that underpin various elements of national protection, including citizen security, the rule of law and human rights⁴⁶. The manner in which insecurity drives displacement is constantly in a state of flux. Although one factor behind increased numbers of urban IDPs is flight from conflict in rural areas (as occurred in Colombia), the scale of more recent urban internal displacement is a direct consequence of urban warfare where the primary targets of belligerents are civilians. This is evident, for example, in parts of Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Nigeria⁴⁷.

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