

## PATHWAYS TO DURABLE SOLUTIONS: BOLSTERING INTERIM SOLUTIONS TO INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

### *Discussion Paper*

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#### **1. Moving beyond the dichotomy between displacement and solutions**

People's experience of internal displacement induced by armed conflict or other situations of violence is far from static. Forced to leave because of a threat to their safety and well-being, people lose their homes, their assets, their livelihoods and familiarity with their social and physical world. Internally displaced people may not have crossed an international border, but they still need to adapt to a new environment, forge new social ties, find a roof and ways to earn their living to meet their basic needs.

People's ability to re-establish a relatively stable life after being displaced depends on several elements. The more they have to worry about imminent threats to their lives, the less they can focus on normalizing their situation. But even when they find relative safety, displaced people often struggle to regain the financial stability needed to pay rent regularly, put food on the table and pay for services, a proper support network and indiscriminate access to basic services. People often gradually exhaust their resources, and uncertainty about the future, and the possibility to achieve a durable solution through integrating locally, returning to their homes or resettling to another part of the country, only increases people's hardship.<sup>1</sup>

Achieving durable solutions is often a distant prospect in protracted crises, as shown by the enduringly high numbers of internally displaced persons in countries such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Syria.<sup>2</sup> Yet, even in long-lasting crises, steps to address losses and protection gaps can be taken. At the end of 2019, almost 13.5 million people displaced by armed conflict were found to have made some progress toward durable solutions – even though not all problems related to their displacement might have been addressed.<sup>3</sup>

The *LASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced People*<sup>4</sup> recognises that securing durable solutions is an inherently long-term process during which displacement-specific needs progressively diminish. Yet, the search for an immediate fix to internal displacement infuses discussions on solutions. This perpetuates a dichotomy between displacement and durable solutions, and often results in a focus on reversing displacement itself, rather than on respecting and restoring rights and addressing losses, in accordance with relevant obligations.<sup>5</sup>

The emphasis on securing rapid returns that may not be safe, voluntary or people's preferred solution has at times led to re-displacement and protracted suffering, as exemplified by the consequences of premature returns in places such as Iraq or South Sudan.<sup>6</sup> The focus on returns – commonly conceived as the default and optimal solution – has also deterred investment to help people locally integrate in their place of displacement. Even if a safe and voluntary return may ultimately be the preferred durable solution of many displaced persons, steps should be taken to help them achieve some level of integration in their place of displacement – or in another location, if temporary resettlement is deemed preferable for security reasons or other considerations<sup>7</sup> – as they wait to go home for prolonged periods.

This discussion paper aims to reinvigorate thinking and action on gradual steps that can help internally displaced people regain some level of security and autonomy in their place of displacement during prolonged crises, when durable solutions might remain out of reach. It also discusses the role that humanitarian actors can play to support states and displaced persons.

## **2. Defining ‘interim solutions’**

In protracted displacement situations, steps at various levels – from tailored individual measures to systemic ones – that contribute to restoring rights and addressing losses *in the place of displacement* and to addressing obstacles to achieving some level of local integration can make a positive difference in people’s lives. For lack of a better term, this paper uses ‘interim solutions’ to refer to steps taken to gradually reduce the assistance and protection needs of internally displaced persons that are linked to their displacement and restore their ability to enjoy their rights without discrimination related to their displacement, in full respect of relevant obligations.<sup>8</sup>

Interim solutions can, for instance, contribute to restoring safety and security, addressing restrictions on freedom of movement or obstacles to accessing labour markets and livelihoods, or helping to re-establish adequate standards of living (comparable to those of the host of the community), including access to adequate food, water, adequate housing, health care and basic education. Helping people regain some autonomy is not only positive for displaced persons themselves. It is also beneficial for authorities who may no longer have to provide support, and for host communities who may benefit from efforts to help displaced persons integrate, such as structural interventions to scale up basic services to accommodate higher demand.

While they help people regain their autonomy and reduce displacement-induced vulnerabilities, and may involve changes to physical manifestations of displacement such as the deconstruction of camps or the dispersal of displaced persons in an urban environment, such transitional steps taken in isolation do not replace durable solutions, and do not lessen the responsibility of states to ensure that durable solutions are achieved and that the rights of displaced persons are respected.<sup>9</sup> These steps can still open pathways towards solutions and their sum can, ultimately, constitute a durable solution, as long as this is people’s choice. Indeed, interim solutions that help people achieve some level of integration in their place of displacement should not compromise their ability to pursue another durable solution of their choice or preclude the possibility to return when this becomes possible.

## **3. Leading the charge**

The potential for interim solutions is shaped by the level of security and stability in a location – but even when insecurity is protracted, some measures can usually be taken to help people improve their situation in their place of displacement. This potential is also influenced by the recognition by local and national authorities and non-State armed groups who control parts of a territory of their responsibility towards displaced population – and their willingness to explore avenues to address obstacles that undermine the efforts of internally displaced persons to rebuild their lives in their place of displacement. In certain circumstances, the perception of displaced persons as associated with the armed opposition or as a source of insecurity can result in hostility towards them and undermine efforts towards their integration. In that regard, recognising that in armed conflicts, under international humanitarian law, displaced persons are civilians and, as such, are entitled to the protections afforded to all persons who are not, or are no longer, taking a direct part in hostilities, is critical.

Humanitarian and development actors have a key role to play, both by mobilising authorities and non-State armed groups to fulfil their responsibilities and identify pathways to solutions, and supporting their efforts. They should work with displaced people to address urgent needs and strengthen the resilience of people and systems, thus reducing the need for emergency support.<sup>10</sup>

Leveraging the complementary humanitarian and development expertise often contributes to more comprehensive responses, opening up pathways to solutions.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. Operationalising interim solutions

The potential for ensuring a more sustainable humanitarian impact through interim solutions that support people's ability to rebuild their lives with autonomy, agency and dignity vary from one situation to another and over time, as does the type of interim solutions that may be attainable.<sup>12</sup> There are, however, some elements that cut across all situations and are core to achieving interim solutions.

- ✓ **Nurturing a dialogue with decision-makers and parties to armed conflicts** – As people's safety and security largely shapes the potential for progress, nurturing a dialogue with all those who influence the security landscape and can address political constraints to interim solutions is key. Constraints can result from the fact that displaced persons are commonly perceived as a security threat. They can also result from policy and legal gaps and barriers in the domestic framework that can limit people's ability to stabilize their situation by hampering access to basic services, civil documentation, formal employment or protection from eviction. Working with authorities, and when relevant with non-State armed groups, to address stigmatization and gaps or barriers to inclusion and to ensure respect of their obligations is critical.

##### *Pathways to inclusive social security*

*In Iraqi cities, in partnership with local non-governmental organizations, the ICRC has helped women-headed households – half of whom were displaced – to register to receive social allowances from the State, thus addressing obstacles that sometimes prevent vulnerable households from gaining access to existing State support and filling a social protection gap. The ICRC covered the expenses related to registration as well as the families' basic needs during the registration period. Local organizations helped the women collect the required official documentation. In parallel, the ICRC engaged the pertinent authorities in dialogue on the need to ease the registration procedure for the women.*

- ✓ **Working at different scales: From tailored individual support...** Identifying the steps that can be taken to achieve a sustainable humanitarian impact and help people regain some safety and autonomy requires a firm understanding of the context, the possibilities that exist in a given location and of people's specific needs, wishes, capacities and evolving situation. This understanding can only be achieved through working together with displaced people and host communities. Specific support may, for instance, be required to help people recover their financial autonomy, to re-enter existing social protection programs, to facilitate a dialogue between displaced persons and host communities, or simply to ensure that newcomers into an environment are informed of existing support and services.

##### *Pathways to economic security*

*Displaced people often lack the capital to restart an economic activity, but they may also lack skills adapted to their new environment or social ties to find a job. Tailored programs can help addressing some of these obstacles. In Colombia, the ICRC helped displaced persons and other vulnerable residents access formal employment through partnerships with private and semi-private companies. Companies agree to hire candidates from those pre-identified by the ICRC. In return, the ICRC ensures their acquisition of necessary 'soft skills' and technical skills, offers to pay a part of their salaries for six months, and makes sure that they are registered in the national social security system and that they receive a work certificate at the end of their contract.*

- ✓ **... to blanket solutions** – To address needs in a comprehensive manner, tailored measures commonly need to be completed by blanket measures to alleviate the pressure on host communities and help ensuring a sustainable access to basic services through rehabilitating or expanding services for entire communities. Such measures may also contribute to lessening tensions between displaced people and their hosts and often require coordination between humanitarian and development actors.

#### ***Pathways to water security***

*In several countries, the ICRC focuses on the maintenance, rehabilitation and, when necessary, the expansion of water-delivery systems to cater to the needs of displaced people and permanent residents of urban settings. Although a significant number of displaced persons return home at some point, such expansion of the infrastructure is not wasted: as cities keep growing, an increased quantity of water for domestic use becomes progressively necessary, even if people use it responsibly. Through such activities, the ICRC does not specifically target displaced persons, but neighborhoods where water is most needed. Given the interconnected nature of urban services, ICRC programmes have also become more holistic to cover not only water supply, but also wastewater collection and treatment, energy supply and solid waste management, while being inclusive of other associated services like hospitals, public bakeries or schools.*

- ✓ **Acting early, and for as long as needed** – In chronic emergencies, assistance is often directed at the most vulnerable. People who are able to cope by themselves in the short term often become increasingly vulnerable over time, as little support is available to help them recover their autonomy and prevent that they become completely destitute. Rapidly focusing on interim solutions that help all displaced people regain a livelihood, secure adequate housing and address potential legal hurdles to integrating into the host community can significantly shape people's capacity to normalize their situation.
- ✓ **Working with others** – Cooperation between a broad range of actors, from humanitarian organizations to development actors, the private sector, local and national authorities, civil society and host communities contributes to the development of adequate interim solutions that can provide individual and community-wide support.<sup>13</sup>

#### ***Working together to address short and longer-term needs***

*Access to water in Aleppo in Syria was severely impacted by the conflict, as water treatment and pumping facilities were at times shut down or failing. Groundwater wells that could help cover needs were depleted because of over-pumping. In response to this, as urgent needs were being covered by water trucking and ground water wells, the government, service provider, and humanitarian organizations decided to tap into a deeper aquifer by drilling further groundwater wells. During this time, the ICRC provided support to the Aleppo Water and Sanitation Authority, including by developing an online platform to allow Aleppo's residents to locate their closest well, and by providing goods in kind (spare parts, equipment, and consumables) to help restoring reliable access to piped water.<sup>14</sup>*

The scale of a crisis and of insecurity may limit the gradual measures that can be taken to help people regain their autonomy. Yet, in most prolonged crisis, interstices where progress can gradually be achieved can be found. Reflection on durable solutions must therefore also focus on exploring the pathways that exist or can be nurtured to help people gradually rebuild their lives while they are displaced, even if, in the long-term, they may opt to return, resettle, or migrate rather than locally integrate.

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- <sup>1</sup> ICRC 2019. [\*Displaced in cities: Experiencing and Responding to urban internal displacement outside camps\*](#). Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva.
- <sup>2</sup> IDMC 2020. [\*Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020\*](#). Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Available at:
- <sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 69.
- <sup>4</sup> Subsequently referred to as *The IASC Framework*. Available [here](#).
- <sup>5</sup> K. Long and J. Crisp 2010. “[Migration, mobility and solutions: an evolving perspective](#).” *Forced Migration Review* 35.
- <sup>6</sup> D. Chatty and N. Mansour 2011. “[Unlocking protracted displacement: An Iraqi case study](#).” *Refugee Studies Centre Working Paper* 78; IDMC 2019. [Tired of Running: Repeated Displacement and Premature Returns in South Sudan](#). Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.
- <sup>7</sup> While the circumstances and execution of relocation measures would merit a specific analysis, the steps taken towards local integration discussed in this paper should be considered in the planning and implementation of relocation measures.
- <sup>8</sup> UNHCR and UNDP’s 2012-16 Transitional Solutions Initiative aimed to provide a framework for ‘transitioning’ situations of protracted displacement towards durable solutions. See OCHA 2019. [Reducing Protracted Internal Displacement: A Snapshot of Successful Humanitarian-Development Initiatives](#). New York: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
- <sup>9</sup> C. Beyani 2014. [Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons](#). A/69/295, United Nations General Assembly.
- <sup>10</sup> ICRC 2019. [Displaced in cities](#).
- <sup>11</sup> ICRC 2016. [Protracted conflict and humanitarian action: some recent ICRC experiences](#). Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross.
- <sup>12</sup> IRRC 2019. “[Q & A: The ICRC and the ‘humanitarian-development-peace nexus’ discussion; In conversation with Filipa Schmitz Guinote, ICRC Policy Adviser](#)”. *International Review of the Red Cross*. 101(912): 1051-66.
- <sup>13</sup> W. Kälin and H. Entwisle-Chapuisat 2017. “[Breaking the Impasse: Reducing Protracted Internal Displacement as a Collective Outcome](#)”. New York: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.; ICRC 2019; ICRC 2015. [Urban services during protracted armed conflict: a call for a better approach to assisting affected people](#). Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross; World Bank, ICRC and UNICEF 2021. [Joining Forces to Combat Protracted Crisis. Humanitarian and Development Support for Water and Sanitation Providers in the Middle East and North Africa](#).
- <sup>14</sup> World Bank, ICRC and UNICEF 2021.