## **Internal displacement and access to adequate housing in conflict situations**

### IDMC submission to the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing for the report on “Protecting the right to adequate housing during and after violent conflict”

### Loss of housing and internal displacement: human and economic impacts

The war in Ukraine is only the most recent example of “domicide”, the intentional attack on and demolition of housing to cause human suffering and destroy communities.[[1]](#footnote-1) Internally displaced people in the country faced challenges in accessing housing even before the current conflict. Many IDPs in Ukraine come from urban backgrounds, particularly cities such as Donetsk, Horlivka Kramatorsk, Luhansk and Sloviansk.[[2]](#footnote-2) In recent years, and before the war broke out, the country’s urban centres, including the capital Kiev, have also been important destinations for those fleeing the conflict.[[3]](#footnote-3) Ukraine’s towns and cities offer better access to services and income-generating opportunities than rural areas, and many IDPs have managed to establish themselves in their new urban environments.[[4]](#footnote-4) Housing, land and property rights were a challenge, however, because Ukraine does not have a specific mechanism to process claims on properties affected by the conflict.[[5]](#footnote-5) Nor does Ukrainian legislation list IDPs as a group entitled to social housing. The local authorities in Bakhmut, Kramatorsk and Slovyansk had made efforts to address some of these issues with support from the international humanitarian community[[6]](#footnote-6), but the scale of destruction these communities are faced with now goes beyond the solutions that have been designed to date.

Other examples of recent years show the heavy toll that large-scale housing destruction takes. In Syria, the mass destruction of towns and cities resulted not only in mass displacement, but also created a barrier to returns for both refugees and IDPs as reconstruction at that scale presents a huge challenge to this day. Housing destruction has also resulted in secondary displacement, particularly in areas with large IDP populations, further intensifying suffering and prolonging displacement. Eight years of civil war have left around a third of the country’s urban housing stock in ruins and in addition, there is evidence that displacement is being used as a means to segregate communities and consolidate the state’s authority by rewarding its supporters. The government adopted a law that speeds up expropriation procedures; officially to support the reconstruction effort, but with the effect that people face the risk of losing their property and not being compensated.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In Nigeria, returns areas affected by violence and conflict are severely hampered not only by the security situation, but also by the lack of adequate housing due to the destruction of many villages. In Somalia, IDPs displaced by conflict in rural areas and towns elsewhere in the country, continue to face high risk of eviction in Mogadishu.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The challenges IDPs face in exercising their right to adequate housing after they have fled their homes vary depending on their age, gender, ethnicity and other characteristics. Displaced women and girls are particularly at risk without secure shelter or basic resources necessary for their survival and dignity.[[9]](#footnote-9) In addition, people with disabilities are particularly at risk during displacement and face significant physical, social and economic barriers accessing inclusive housing.[[10]](#footnote-10) Evacuation centres, camp facilities, temporary shelters and other housing available in displacement settings are frequently inaccessible. Barriers to employment reduce the financial resources available to IDPs with disabilities and their families to access appropriate housing. In a survey IDMC conducted of 150 displaced households living in Jos, Nigeria, the average monthly income for households with at least one member with disabilities was $35, compared with $49 for households without a member with disabilities.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Loss of housing due to conflict across the globe, and particularly so in Sub-Saharan Africa takes place against the backdrop of unprecedented urbanisation. The region is still substantially rural with 40 per cent of its population living in cities, but this is set to change considerably in the coming years.[[12]](#footnote-12) African cities are among the fastest growing in the world and some, including Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Kampala in Uganda, Abuja in Nigeria, Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso and Bamako in Mali, are expected to double in size by 2035.[[13]](#footnote-13) The rapid and unplanned nature of much of this urbanisation has the potential to aggravate existing challenges and create new ones, and several cities are also trying to cope with significant influxes of IDPs displaced by conflict and violence from rural areas. Millions of people live in inadequate housing in overcrowded but underserved and marginalised neighbourhoods, in conditions of high exposure and vulnerability to disasters and the risk of displacement.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Secure tenure is often impossible to attain for IDPs: in the Afghan capital of Kabul displaced communities struggle to secure tenure over adequate housing, which puts them at constant risk of secondary displacement, mainly in the form of evictions. Kabul’s IDPs tend to have significant protection concerns and often live in sub-standard housing in marginalised areas of cities.[[15]](#footnote-15) Policy initiatives such a 2006 white paper on tenure security and community-based upgrading and a 2013 policy on the upgrading of informal settlements point in the right direction, but adoption and implementation remain a challenge.[[16]](#footnote-16)

In Colombia, the impact of lost housing among displaced populations is equally visible: in Quibdó and Caucasia many IDPs’ houses are of much poorer quality than those of non-displaced people, according to a study conducted by IDMC.[[17]](#footnote-17) Many displaced homeowners lost their homes and have resorted to renting or other less secure housing arrangements. Forty-four per cent of the surveyed IDPs in Quibdó owned their home before they were displaced, but 46 per cent now rent their accommodation and 20 per cent live with someone else without paying rent. Forty-nine per cent of the surveyed IDPs in Caucasia owned their home before they were displaced, falling to 12 per cent at the time of the study. Most now rent their accommodation, but six per cent live in a makeshift shelter. Others live in collective shelters or are hosted by other households. Most IDPs in both locations are less satisfied with their housing conditions now than they were before they were displaced. The most reported reasons were increased costs, exposure to disasters and the elements, the risk of eviction, lack of privacy, physical insecurity, poor sanitary conditions, lack of accessibility, overcrowding and culturally inappropriate shelter.

In Jos, Nigeria, displacement has led to significant changes in the living conditions of surveyed IDPs and a deterioration in their level of housing satisfaction. Ninety-three per cent of surveyed IDPs owned their home prior to their displacement, but less than nine per cent own the place where they reside now. Most rent accommodation of a lower quality in Jos. By comparison, 86 per cent of non-displaced respondents owns their home in Jos. This may also have an economic impact on the housing market in the near future: the average value of the homes owned by IDPs is $3,163, down from $5,334 in their communities of origin. The average value of the homes owned by non-displaced respondents in Jos is nearly double, at $6,103. These economic impacts go far beyond the impacts on individuals and households. IDMC estimated that the economic impact of internal displacement globally was over $21 billion in 2021.[[18]](#footnote-18) Across 18 countries analysed, nearly a quarter of the economic impact of displacement stemmed from the cost of providing IDPs with support for their housing, including shelter and non-food items, WASH and, in some cases, the cost of managing camps.

While violent conflict can result in the loss of housing for whole communities, increasingly a convergence of conflict, natural hazards and economic crises heighten housing needs across the globe. For example, inter-communal conflict, economic crisis and flash flooding in Sudan increased housing needs in the country in 2020. As a result, some 1.3 million IDPs were identified to be in need of shelter and non-food items in 2021, and 2.2 million in need of WASH assistance.[[19]](#footnote-19) IDMC estimated that the cost of providing Sudan’s IDPs with support for their housing was over $203 million in 2021, representing around 23 per cent of the total estimated economic impact of internal displacement in Sudan.

### Promising approaches to increase access to adequate housing for people displaced in conflict

A number of promising approaches to tackle IDPs’ housing challenges have been developed over the past decades, many of them originally designed to address the general scarcity of urban housing and then adapted to the pursuit of durable solutions. They can broadly be divided into housing approaches and area-based approaches, the former including incremental housing schemes and purchase certificates targeting individuals’ needs and the latter broader schemes such as neighbourhood upgrades, incremental tenure, support grants and cooperative development initiatives.[[20]](#footnote-20)

As with informal labour markets, recognising that housing and urban development in many cities are driven by informal processes is an important step toward finding ways to build on existing potential. In Latin America, for example, more housing per square kilometre of city is built and maintained by informal settlers than by governments and developers.[[21]](#footnote-21) Accepting this reality implies adopting new approaches that find ways of turning temporary answers to housing crises into sustainable solutions for all. Before the war, Mariupol municipality in Ukraine recognised a need to provide IDPs with the option of affordable rented accommodation as well as the opportunity of buying property. It developed a “rent to own” initiative, in which a range of stakeholders including an international development bank, the local government, civil society organisations and contractors have come together to create affordable housing options for IDPs. Those eligible received homes with a contract that gives then title deeds to their rented property after 10 years.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Local governments and international agencies have also worked together to address displacement in Kosovo, where policies have been put in place to help municipalities support sustainable returns for people displaced by conflict between 1998 and 2004. The Regulation on the Return of Displaced Persons and Durable Solutions in Kosovo, for example, calls for municipal action plans on the issue and emphasises the importance of IDPs’ socioeconomic integration based on their skills, gender, age and disabilities.[[23]](#footnote-23) It also aims to improve cooperation between national and local authorities to ensure return conditions are comparable across the territory.[[24]](#footnote-24)

These examples are promising steps in the right direction, but three major challenges remain: the availability of data on numbers of IDPs, their capacities and requirements; legal obstacles; and the financial sustainability of subsidised housing schemes. In Mariupol, the last two combine resulting in limitations to the support made available. National budget allocations to the local authorities do not account for IDPs and at the same time, IDPs are not locally registered, leaving them unable to exercise their right to vote and with little leverage over local officials.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Transparent HLP rights and processes for settling disputes are vital to the resolution of urban displacement.[[26]](#footnote-26) Therefore, the establishment of tenure security and guarantees of housing rights for displaced and host communities should be included in conflict prevention, disaster risk reduction and durable solutions initiatives. They also need to be part of transitional justice, peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in the aftermath of conflicts. The same issues are fundamental in ensuring sustainable returns for IDPs and refugees, and for reducing the risk of new and secondary displacement.[[27]](#footnote-27) In this sense land and property disputes in places of origin can be both a cause and consequence of displacement. There are numerous accounts in Sudan, for example, of the government forcibly evicting the new occupants of abandoned homes to allow IDPs to return, fuelling new tensions and triggering further displacement.[[28]](#footnote-28) Recent reconstruction efforts in Syria also show that in the absence of transparent HLP rights, resettlement schemes contribute to the wilful appropriation of IDPs’ property (see above).

The UN’s Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement recognise that forced evictions “share many consequences similar to those resulting from arbitrary displacement” as defined in the Guiding Principles.[[29]](#footnote-29) They also highlight the fact that forced evictions violate the right to housing. The guidelines, together with the right to adequate housing, constitute a strong normative framework to guide policy and practice on urban housing and neighbourhood regeneration that prevent displacement and reduce its impacts.[[30]](#footnote-30) Adopting a human rights approach to make visible the challenges of displacement, evictions and resettlement associated with developments projects is useful, but it does not easily translate into practical action. Situating it within national and international sustainable development frameworks would help identifying steps towards reducing displacement risk and impacts by applying more inclusive approaches that respect people’s rights and promote sustainable solutions.[[31]](#footnote-31)

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