

# Exit Strategies & Transition to Durable Housing

Rental assistance has proven effective at helping displaced families access improved shelter, reducing their rent burden, improving their mental well-being and tenure security, and even helping to build social capital. However, without more targeted and holistic support, there is little evidence that these benefits last beyond the end of the programme<sup>1</sup>. Helping families to move from short-term rental accommodation to a more durable housing solution is therefore an essential component of humanitarian rental support but is often one of the most challenging. In many contexts, the lack of reliable livelihood options and the limited capacity of the government to provide longer-term affordable housing makes this even more difficult. The exit strategy – what this will be and how it will be achieved – must be considered at the very start of the programme and should influence the direction, and design of the programme. As the situation and programme evolve, and as more information becomes available, it is likely that the planned exit strategy and timeframe will also need to be revised. This is particularly the case in dynamic urban environments or where the initial programme plan was based on limited information. The exit strategy should be regularly reviewed and updated to allow for timely adjustments to the programme. The programme and budget need to have enough flexibility to enable these changes to be made.

- 1 A holistic, integrated approach is necessary for the longer-term impact of the programme:** A cash-based approach alone is also not enough as it only addresses financial barriers to accessing housing. Instead, an integrated, multisectoral approach and complementary activities to address legal, social, and physical barriers to adequate housing are likely to be necessary.
  - Examples of such interventions can be found in [“Tip Sheet 2: Design and Implementation”](#)
- 2 Working with the housing sector and government to support the transition to durable housing:** The timeframe of humanitarian responses and funding cycles, and the restricted mandate of humanitarian organisations limit their ability to address underlying problems of access to adequate housing. However, humanitarians have an important role to play in supporting longer-term solutions, but must do so by working with the housing sector, development actors and different government departments.
- 3 The three most common longer-term options for families receiving humanitarian rental support are:**
  - ✓ Improving household resilience and financial independence.
  - ✓ Referral to other forms of support, including government safety-net programmes.
  - ✓ Alternative, more durable housing solutions.

<sup>1</sup> For example, NRC’s Impact Evaluation of their OFC programme in Lebanon found very little longer-term impact on beneficiaries’ housing situation or on wider access to affordable housing, with the exception of their social capital, which was found to have lasted beyond the duration of the programme.

## Attention

Applying the Do No Harm principle requires that humanitarians consider the benefits of assistance against its potential to cause longer-term harm to the target population, wider community, and market. Where there is a risk that a programme will cause significant inflation to the low-income rental housing market, encourage the construction of sub-standard rental housing, or cause other negative impacts, organisations should consider alternatives to rental assistance.

## Examples

In the Philippines, one NGO provided rental assistance as a transitional solution to households affected by a landslide, while the government built housing for them in a low-risk area. However, when construction was significantly delayed, many households were forced to return to at-risk or unsafe housing at the end of the programme. Closer collaboration with the government during the implementation period and greater flexibility in the programme itself could have helped to anticipate these issues and made it easier to adapt or extend the programme accordingly.

In Greece, rental accommodation was initially a short-term solution to support refugees as they awaited resettlement in other European countries. When the political context changed and they had to settle in Greece, this strategy was no longer appropriate. One NGO moved to a holistic, integrated programme which combined cash-for-rent, with other assistance to support their longer-term integration into the local community and establish livelihoods.

Examples of each of these exit strategies, key challenges and considerations for each, and information about when they might be appropriate are outlined in the table below.

## Alternative durable housing solutions (e.g. reconstructed owner-occupied housing and public/social housing)

When and for whom might this be appropriate?	Exit Strategy	Key Challenges	Key Considerations and Best Practices
<p>After natural disasters, while households await reconstruction of their homes.</p> <p>In contexts in which governments have the policies and capacity to provide social housing this, or where public housing is available.</p>	<p>Rental assistance should form part of a wider shelter response, including construction/reconstruction of housing and neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Support for households to register for other housings support; advocacy for them to be included in this.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction and reconstruction works are often delayed, leaving households vulnerable if rental grants cannot be extended.</li> <li>• Eligibility criteria for support will vary and target groups may not be eligible.</li> <li>• Provision of housing for displaced or refugee populations is often very politically sensitive because it suggests that they will settle long term.</li> <li>• Very few countries have social or public housing policies. Where they do, there may be limited capacity to realise them.</li> <li>• Policy or changes in government can lead to wide-ranging policy changes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The duration of rental assistance should be aligned to the expected construction timeline and be flexible enough to adapt when there are delays.</li> <li>• Area-based approaches which focus on neighbourhoods with high concentration of displaced households, informal housing, or poverty should be considered as part of any durable housing solutions.</li> <li>• Close collaboration with the housing sector and relevant government departments is needed to advocate for and promote the inclusion of displaced households in social and public housing, to promote expanding existing public and social housing policies, or to promote the upgrading of informal settlements.</li> </ul>

## Self-financed rental accommodation

When and for whom might this be appropriate?	Exit Strategy	Key Challenges	Key Considerations and Best Practices
<p>Protracted crises, where families have no other options but to continue to rent accommodation, including households who were tenants before the crisis and displaced owner-occupiers who can no longer access their property or land.</p>	<p>Provision of livelihood and other support to increase their income, re-establish their livelihoods and enable households to make rental payments, without humanitarian support. This should look to address not only financial, but all barriers to accessing adequate rental housing.</p> <p>Promotion of an active and functional low-cost rental housing market.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-going conflict, continued displacement and poor economic conditions can make longer-term livelihood support a challenge.</li> <li>• Translating livelihood support into jobs can be challenging given that competition for unskilled and skilled work is often exacerbated by displacement.</li> <li>• Limiting regulatory framework</li> <li>• Language barriers and discrimination when competing with the local workforce.</li> <li>• Even where households have reliable income sources, in contexts of protracted, large-scale displacement, demand for low-cost rental housing is still likely to outstrip supply in the short and medium term.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tracking household income, expenditure, savings, and debt levels over the course of the programme will help monitor progress towards self-sufficiency.</li> <li>• Training on financial planning and households budgeting has been proved as an effective way of preparing households for the end of rental support and making it easier for them to save.</li> <li>• Livelihood programming should be based on a labour market analysis so that support is targeted to gaps in the market, as well as their existing skills and capacities.</li> <li>• Support may also be required to help households access the right documentation which will allow them to work legally.</li> <li>• Informal home-based enterprises can be an important livelihood opportunity, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women.</li> <li>• Holistic programming which addresses service provision can increase the effectiveness of direct livelihood support.</li> <li>• Understanding the barriers to increasing the supply of affordable housing in a given market, why property owners choose to rent, or not, and how they do so, is key to understanding the functionality of the rental market and advocating for the necessary changes in government regulations to improve it.</li> </ul>

Transition to other governmental/ non-governmental support to access housing (e.g. social protection, other humanitarian support and housing micro-finance)

When and for whom might this be appropriate?	Exit Strategy	Key Challenges	Key Considerations and Best Practices
<p>Depends on context, availability of appropriate support and eligibility criteria.</p>	<p>Support to eligible households to register to receive governmental support.</p> <p>Collaboration with other humanitarian and development actors to ensure that households are registered for and receive support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transitioning households to other humanitarian support mechanisms is only a short-term solution and is unlikely to solve underlying issues.</li> <li>• Transitioning households from one form of support to another can be very challenging because there is usually limited guarantee that they will be eligible/receive this support, and it can be difficult to avoid delays between the end of one intervention and the start of the next phase of support, leaving households vulnerable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding what other forms of support are available and whether the government has the capacity to realise them should be a key component of the initial contextual analysis.</li> <li>• Housing microfinance has been little used to date but may offer an alternative way to access housing and fund the construction of housing. This is dependant also on planning and construction regulations, urban plans and government policies.</li> <li>• Close collaboration with other parties to ensure that programmes remain aligned and to ensure a smooth transition between one form of support and the other.</li> <li>• Advocacy may be required to align targeting and other criteria to ensure that beneficiaries are eligible, but this may be beyond the timeframe of a humanitarian rental programme.</li> </ul>