



Comparative Experiences on Internal Displacement: A Regional Exchange Series

Regional Exchange on Preventing and Addressing Internal Displacement in the Middle East and North Africa 7 July 2020

EVENT SUMMARY

Introduction

During 2019, over 12 million people were living in internal displacement in the Middle East and North Africa as a result of conflict and violence.¹ There were also over 2.5 million new conflict and violence-induced internal displacements throughout the year.² The total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the region represents over one-quarter of the global total, 45.7 million people displaced due to conflict and violence.³ Natural hazards such as flooding and severe cold weather also displaced over 630,000 people in the region in 2019, including those already living in displacement sites as a result of conflict.⁴ The vast majority of IDPs are in Syria, Yemen and Iraq and their protection and assistance needs remain immense despite the sustained response to these persistent crises.

In July 2020, GP20 convened an online State to State exchange for the Middle East and North Africa. This summary details the exchange, which had three main objectives:

1. To provide a platform for government officials from Libya, Syria and Yemen to share multi-stakeholder good practices and lessons learned on preventing and addressing internal displacement in line with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement;
2. To identify challenges and opportunities for improved protection, assistance and solutions for IDPs in Libya, Syria and Yemen;
3. To document and draw lessons from the engagement of international organizations in multi-stakeholder practices on preventing and/or addressing internal displacement in Libya, Syria and Yemen.

GP20's co-chairs, UNHCR and UNOCHA, opened the meeting and the three guest speakers were representatives of the Ministry of IDPs in Libya, the Damage Compensation Center in Homs Governorate in Syria, and the Executive Unit for IDPs in Yemen. UNHCR facilitated the meeting. The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs moderated the discussion, which included an intervention from Dr. Sima Samar, Member of the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Internal Displacement.

¹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 28 April 2020, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

² Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 28 April 2020, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020, p. 29, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 28 April 2020, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

⁴ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 28 April 2020, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020, p.29, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

The experiences shared at this exchange feature in this report and will be referenced in the GP20 compilation of practices for preventing, addressing and resolving internal displacement to be published in late 2020. This report from the online State to State exchange will also be shared with the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement to inform their deliberations.⁵

MENA country initiatives to prevent and address internal displacement

The internal displacement crises in the Middle East and North Africa call for a vast and committed humanitarian, development and peacebuilding response to support the governmental authorities in realizing their responsibility to protect and assist IDPs and other communities affected by displacement and to address the causes and consequences of internal displacement. Given the overwhelming level of needs, there is a massive challenge to prioritize assistance to the most vulnerable in the current context and IDPs should be included in that determination. Scaling up development and stabilization efforts including measures to promote social cohesion, reconciliation, justice and reparation, with the participation of IDPs are essential as are community-based and area-based approaches. This is key since host communities and local partners are often frontline responders.

Libya: Presentation by the Ministry of IDPs

Internal displacement in Libya dates to the beginning of the political crisis in 2011. Displacement occurred in several waves, including in Tripoli in 2014, displacement from eastern to western Libya between 2016 to 2018, and displacement between 2019 and 2020 from south Tripoli. Today, there are around 400,000 IDPs (90,000 families) living in around 25 areas.⁶ Around eight per cent of IDPs live in camps in the west and east of the country. Basic services are generally provided through partnerships between government bodies, civil society and international partners. IDPs' priorities include shelter, income-generating opportunities and health care.

Libya faces specific challenges as a result of the armed conflict. These include the political division in the country, general insecurity, and weakened infrastructure and government services. The overall situation also affected the government's ability to provide a comprehensive and effective response to the needs of IDPs. However, despite legal, political and financial challenges, the Government established an emergency budget line on internal displacement that financed support for solutions and reconciliation such as facilitating returns and compensation. Funds were also allocated to local municipalities that had received IDPs, including for cash assistance and shelter support for IDPs.

Data

The government established a database of IDPs in May 2019 to compile accurate numbers of the displaced. To date, this database covers people recently displaced from the south of Tripoli. This task was led by the Libyan Social Security Fund, which has registered 55,000 families that will benefit from government services. However, the database is incomplete because some displaced families and individuals have not registered because they have not requested government assistance.

⁵ More information on the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Internal Displacement is available here: <https://www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/>

⁶ International Organization for Migration, 01 April 2020, Displacement Tracking Matrix: Libya, accessed on 27 July 2020 at: <https://dtm.iom.int/libya>

Coordination

The Ministry of IDPs has established an emergency cell that coordinates the response to more recent displacement from the south of Tripoli in April 2019. It includes the government, civil society and international organizations. The cell has attempted to guide and direct the support in accordance with the most pressing needs, as well as to support returned IDPs with reintegration. To solve emergency issues, the government has formed a high ministerial committee co-chaired by the Vice President, which indicates the importance the government places on resolution of the conflict and internal displacement.

Support to municipalities

The Ministry of IDPs has also worked with municipalities to address their challenges on internal displacement, including through allocation of 120 million dinars (around USD\$88 million) to 63 municipalities. Local crisis committees comprising municipal government representatives for displacement in each municipality hosting IDPs were established to provide a quick response. The government is discussing projects to integrate IDPs and to offer shelters including 5000 units for IDPs. The government has also assisted IDPs to access their savings and documents regardless of their location and has instructed government bodies to be lenient with IDPs who do not have the required identification documents due the conflict and their displacement.

Return

The government has adopted the agreement brokered by the UN Support Mission in Libya.⁷ This agreement includes measures to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of IDPs and refugees, ensure the provision of basic services and provide compensation for losses they sustained. The compensation is estimated at 463 million dinars (around USD\$340) of which the government has paid 30 per cent. The government has also worked on national reconciliation mechanisms, with progress in Riaina.

The government is also trying to implement a holistic approach to return by supporting actors to help with the safe and voluntary return of IDPs and ensuring that the return areas are viable for living when return occurs. The Ministry of IDPs has insisted with the Presidential Council that basic services should be available in return areas.

Tawurgha town, 40 kilometers southeast of Misrata, Riaina town and Kikla town approximately 150 kilometers southwest of Tripoli, were all deeply affected by the armed conflict. The government helped facilitate the return of IDPs to Kikla and around 1000 families have begun to return to Tawurgha. There are nevertheless still difficulties with access to utilities despite some recovery of electricity and water services. This is due to the lack of funding to facilitate reconstruction and return and to pay compensation.

Syria: Presentation by the Damage Compensation Center, Homs Governorate

Description of the practice

Syria's property damage compensation mechanism was first activated in 2012. Several challenges arose over time related to this process. First, applicants faced lengthy procedures and the cost and time burden of consulting three government bodies in different locations: the Municipality, Governor's Office and Department of Technical Services. Second, there were no unified file management, common database or coordinated work modalities across the three government bodies. As a result, applicants lacked clarity on the administrative process as well as the status of their file other than the availability of the file in each location. Third, some applicants inappropriately benefited from both property damage compensation payments from

⁷ Libyan Political Agreement, 17 December 2015, available at: <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/Libyan%20Political%20Agreement%20-%20ENG%20.pdf>

the government and housing rehabilitation assistance. In parallel, the lack of documentation was one of the major protection challenges that IDPs faced.

Established in early 2018, the One Window initiative is a “one-stop shop” to facilitate IDPs’ and IDP returnees’ access to information, documentation, compensation for damaged property, shelter assistance schemes and referral to legal assistance provided by national legal partners. With One Window offices in Homs and Hama, applicants can apply for government compensation for damaged property⁸ and shelter rehabilitation assistance as well as recover lost documents required for their application including documents related to civil status and housing, land and property rights. One Window also provides “Compensation Clearance,” a confirmation that the person either did not receive government compensation for their damaged property or did not apply for the compensation. This document is usually requested to start the rehabilitation of a beneficiary’s damaged house.

One Window gathers all housing, shelter and documentation partners within one coordinated structure and location, including government bodies and national and international agencies. It is implemented by government authorities including the Governor’s Offices in Homs and Hama, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Local Administration, UNHCR, Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the NGO Syrian Society for Social Development. Service desks offer information services for applicants to inquire about their file status or complete their file with missing documents. In the Homs One Window office, UNHCR seconded an Information Management expert to support the database and mapping, and a Liaison Officer to facilitate two-way data exchange between the One Window office and national and international agencies.

Each One Window office manages a database of all damage compensation cases that enables automation of case processing in an integrated manner. The documents required for the property damage compensation request include a housing property title, police report to confirm property damage and a copy of a personal identification document. The Municipality receives the compensation application and conducts an initial assessment after which the documents are sent to the Governor. The Department of Technical Services then validates the documents and the compensation amount is calculated by the Municipality. The Governor then requests the Ministry of Local Administration to allocate funds. Should the application for damage compensation be rejected, the applicant may receive a “Compensation Clearance” document required to apply for rehabilitation assistance.

Results for IDPs and others

The One Window offices in Hama and Homs have facilitated and simplified access of IDPs and others to assistance for damaged housing. Compensation paid in Homs has doubled since the office opened. They have eliminated procedural delays and reduced waiting periods for IDPs and others to acquire information, access services and apply for documents required for damage compensation. The initiative also alleviates the time and financial burden on applicants to reach the various departments for the required number of visits. It also helps IDPs and others access easy-to-understand and up-to-date information about services and bodies and facilitates the access to service and departments that are temporarily operating in other locations due to the crisis.

There are additional positive results for the protection environment. The One Window initiative builds the local capacity of various departments and entities affected during the crisis with respect to housing assistance. Other positive results include reducing the administrative burden and service delivery time and costs for the government; improving the organization and transparency of the government procedures by systemizing the process; ensuring that the

⁸ See Decision number 13387, dated 23/9/2012 on the establishment of the Reconstruction Committee, available at: <http://www.mola.gov.sy/mola/index.php/2018-04-19-13-25-36> The Committee is mandated to estimate the damage compensation and disbursement of funds.

services are consistently provided as a public service by official agencies, and enabling the One Window offices to serve as a protection tool against irregular practices, such as requests for unofficial fees for package of services.

Lessons learned

Several factors proved to be important during implementation. These included community feedback mechanisms on challenges to increase the transparency and improve the efficiency of public services; simultaneous coordination by different bodies involved with program planning; referral mechanisms to expand the service delivery to wider government entities and partners; technical capacity of government entities in planning and design to instantly manage the undertaking and services required by the initiative; capacity building for government personnel to ensure proper program delivery; data-sharing on return movements; and developing a strategy with clear roles and responsibilities.

Yemen: Presentation by the Executive Unit for IDPs

The Executive Unit for IDPs is a governmental agency established by Cabinet Resolution No. 454 of 2009 operating under the authority of the Prime Minister of Yemen. Responsible for the protection and assistance of IDPs, it oversees accommodation of IDPs, maintaining a database on IDPs and people affected by displacement, coordination of humanitarian work and monitoring of services provided to IDPs and others affected by displacement. Its work covers 13 Yemeni governorates, 67 districts, 521 IDP camps and 774 staff and volunteers who cover all areas where IDPs are. It also sponsors IDPs in rented housing.

Description of the practice

When the Executive Unit for IDPs was established in 2009, the number of IDPs was much lower than today. In the face of multiple waves of displacement, absorption capacity in already constructed buildings was soon exhausted. The government therefore established camps for IDPs and those affected by displacement, though not all IDPs opted to live in the camps.

In 2018, 109 internally displaced families informally settled in Dar Saad District, Aden Governorate on the land of a private owner without a legal agreement, but with their spoken consent. This is an urban land plot without any buildings covering 3200 square meters. After around one year, the private landowner informed the IDPs of her wish to regain her land that they were living on and requested that they leave. The Executive Unit was also informed about the need for IDPs to vacate the land, after which the Executive Unit negotiated with the private landowner to allow the IDPs to remain until an alternative could be provided.

The IDPs were informed of the necessity to leave the land in January 2019, and the IDPs were relocated by June 2019 to a new site, Al-Shaab 2, in Al Buraiqeh district of Aden Governorate, a serviced urban area. After the Executive Unit identified and leveled land for the new site, UNHCR led the coordination efforts and the work to prepare the site for settlement with relevant clusters. An intention survey was carried out to understand IDPs' views on relocation and provide them with information about the new site. Efforts were also taken to protect IDPs during the process and alleviate fears of subsequent displacement.

Results

While these IDPs were obliged to move again after having been forcibly displaced by the conflict, they gained access to a settlement location with more secure tenure and access to services. Relations between the host community and IDPs also improved.

At the same time, several challenges emerged in this relocation process and exposed difficulties with addressing internal displacement in Yemen. This was the first case of relocation of IDPs from informal settlements carried out by the Executive Unit and their main role was

negotiating with the private landowner and allocating alternative land. A collaborative approach between government and international actors was necessary as government technical and financial capacity to conduct relocation was weak. International actors provided essential technical guidance and financial support to transform the allocated land into a serviced and viable settlement, though this could have been more timely and coordinated. The relocation also exposed the need for an updated IDP database with information on sites where IDPs are living and their needs to properly plan to address displacement, and the lack of sufficient financial capabilities of the Executive Unit, preventing them from fully resolving the eviction risk that may IDPs face.

Lessons learned

The partnership between the Executive Unit for IDPs and UNHCR on this case was successful. It reinforced the conviction that cooperation leads to a common understanding of problems and partnerships are essential for facilitating solutions for IDPs.

It was important to include the host community surrounding the IDP site in the relocation plan, which can include provision of humanitarian assistance or access to public services. For the relocation to be sustainable, time and resources are required to provide assurances and build trust to persuade the host community to accept the relocated IDPs.

IDP protection and assistance should also be provided to IDPs living outside of camp settings, though given the large number of IDPs in Yemen the camps should be improved to ensure a safe environment and stability for IDPs and humanitarian work. International organizations feel more secure investing in areas where the government has provided suitable land with protection guarantees with less risk of eviction.

This case illustrates a larger issue in Yemen of the existence of many informal IDP sites where IDPs are at risk of eviction. The Executive Unit is working on a process to legalize the lands hosting IDPs as IDP sites and searching for suitable alternative land, for example in al-Mukha city, Hadramaut Governorate and Al Dhale'e Governorate.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- The challenges surrounding internal displacement in the Middle East and North Africa cannot be underestimated. An approach built around solidarity and based on humanity to achieve collective aims is required, as is ensuring IDPs participate in decision-making processes that affect them.⁹ Laws and policies to prevent and address internal displacement are also key to ensuring good governance on internal displacement.

Recommendation: Increase and strengthen the fora available for IDPs to express their needs and wishes and meaningfully participate in decision-making processes that affect them, including the development of laws, policies and programmes and reconciliation initiatives.

- Offering IDPs and returnees access to information, documentation and compensation under one roof can improve the efficiency of these processes, alleviate the burden on IDPs and protect against irregular practices. It can also improve local capacity and coordination between national and international actors to address internal displacement.

⁹ See the report on this topic by the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs, available here: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IDPersons/A-72-202.pdf>

Recommendation: Take stock of IDPs' current access to information, documentation and compensation and take measures to make the processes and locations of relevant offices more efficient and accessible for IDPs.

- Financial and technical assistance is critical for local governments, who are often frontline responders. Budgets should be adapted to reflect the increase in population and not only for emergency assistance but also for dealing with increased pressure on local services. Procedures may also need to be adapted for IDPs to access their documents and savings.

Recommendation: Ensure local and municipal budget transfers consider the increase in population due to displacement and include funds for assistance to IDPs and displacement-affected communities as well as measures to relieve pressure on utilities and services.

- Access to shelter and land with tenure security is an essential component of durable solutions for IDPs. It is important not only for having a roof over one's head, but also for accessing agricultural and entrepreneurial livelihoods, and the living conditions and location affect IDPs' health and access to services.

Recommendation: Ensure that the prohibition of arbitrary forced evictions of IDPs is respected by all actors and take measures to reduce any eviction risk IDPs face, including by putting evictions procedures in place that are in line with international standards.

- An accurate evidence base on the vulnerability, severity of needs, access to rights and durable solutions preferences of IDPs and other conflict-affected groups is required to drive priority decision-making and ensure the needs are met. This will become increasingly important as challenges increase, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and financial resources of the international community decrease.

Recommendation: Ensure the scope and quality of data on the situation and needs of IDPs is sufficient for decision-making on allocation of humanitarian and other assistance and facilitation of durable solutions to internal displacement.