



# DISPLACED IN CITIES

EXPERIENCING AND RESPONDING  
TO URBAN INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT  
OUTSIDE CAMPS



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## **About this report**

This research is the fruit of a joint project between the divisions of protection and of policy and humanitarian diplomacy at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with significant support from the organization's economic security and water and habitat units and ICRC delegations across the world. It received some financial support from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs through its Human Security Division.

This report was written by Catherine-Lune Grayson, policy adviser, and Angela Cotroneo, global adviser on internal displacement, who also co-led the project. We benefited from the precious assistance of field colleagues in Honduras, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia, without whom the case studies would not have been possible. We are immensely grateful to the persons we met during the case studies – to displaced persons and host community members for their trust and for sharing their experiences with us, and to the representatives of authorities and other organizations for sharing their perspectives on the response to displacement. We are also thankful to many of our colleagues who agreed to engage in this critical reflection with us, who shared their insights and provided feedback on the draft of the report. Finally, Nadine Walicki's support, as an independent consultant, was invaluable. She not only conducted the literature review, but also shared her remarkable knowledge and critical perspective with us.

The study was also reviewed by an external advisory committee composed of practitioners and experts. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Natalia Baal and Isis Nunez-Ferrera (Joint IDP Profiling Service), Deborah Baglole (DFID), Prof. Chaloka Beyani (London School of Economics), Leah Campbell (ALNAP), Dr Jeff Crisp, Lucy Earle (UNICEF), Daniel Macguire (UNHCR), Prof. Elisabeth Ferris (Georgetown University), Prof. Walter Kälin (University of Bern), and Petra Sigrist (Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs).

## **About the photographs**

The unique photographs in this report were taken by independent photographers from Iraq, Nigeria and Honduras. Rahima Gambo met with displaced persons in Maiduguri, Nigeria. Hawre Khalid visited displaced persons in Mosul, Iraq. Delmer Membreño did so in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. We asked each of them to explore the experience of being displaced in these cities. Beyond that, they were given completely free rein. Their familiarity with the country and their connection with the people has resulted in photographs that provide a moving and intimate insight into the reality of displacement.

Special thanks is owed to Matthew Clancy and Kathryn Cook-Pellegrin, ICRC humanitarian policy spokesperson and photo editor, respectively, for initiating this project.

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“The year 2018 marks the 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. It has provided a time for reflection on the progress in tackling internal displacement while at the same time highlighting the many ways in which the response fails to sustainably address the needs of internally displaced people. This report is timely and relevant, as it contributes to this ongoing reflection by spotlighting the unique challenges caused by urban internal displacement. The situation of those internally displaced in urban settings has been a focus of the mandate since its inception and I am heartened to see the strong projection of the voices of individuals who are rarely heard, both those displaced and the communities that receive them. Moving beyond numbers and statistics, this report invites us to listen to people, reminding us to be humble in our work and question underlying assumptions. It sheds light on the reality of countless individuals around the world today. This personal insight coupled with solid analysis and concrete recommendations are a strong call to action – a reminder that we cannot remain idle and must act to confront these challenges. As the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, I welcome this report and hope it will translate into meaningful advances in the response to people in these situations.”

**Cecilia Jiménez-Damary**

UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights  
of Internally Displaced Persons



# FOREWORD

In recent years, I have met with displaced people living in towns and cities all over the world, from Aleppo to Bangui to Bogota. Not only had they lost their homes and their livelihoods, they were also uprooted from their communities. They often lived in miserable conditions; parents tried to keep their children safe and did all they could to meet their basic needs. They often had to rely on the support of host communities that were also suffering from the effects of armed conflict or other violence.

At the end of 2017, some 40 million people were displaced by armed conflict and violence inside their own country.<sup>1</sup> A large – but unknown – number of them had settled in urban settings, outside camps. Yet, their reality is under-documented and the humanitarian response to their needs is timid, in part because humanitarian organizations are still struggling to adapt approaches developed in rural environments and camps to urban settings.

This year, as we mark the 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the ICRC has reflected at great length on ways to develop a better response to urban displacement, one that helps people recover their autonomy and their sense of dignity, and provides essential support to communities and cities. As part of this reflection, we embarked on a study to better understand the experience of those displaced in urban settings and their hosts, and the typical humanitarian response to urban displacement.

Through this process, we were reminded once more that host communities are the first responders, that adequate policy and legal frameworks are essential to ensure that displaced people's rights are respected and to facilitate their recovery, and that humanitarian actors have a key role to play in responding to urban displacement – and must become better at it.

Great efforts to overcome urban challenges have been made in recent years. But more needs to be done. We must truly involve the people affected in the development of any humanitarian response. We must begin thinking, right at the onset of a crisis, of how people can be helped to become autonomous again. We must build our responses on reliable data, and not on unverified assumptions. And we must dare to innovate – as new environments call for new practices.

The ICRC is committed to helping people affected by displacement rebuild their lives. We know that we cannot do this alone. The scale of the needs requires a collaborative effort between displaced people themselves, host communities, municipal and national authorities, civil society, humanitarian and development actors and the international community.

It is clear that we have to live up to the urban challenge: we cannot overlook populations because they live in cities. We hope that this report will inspire a necessary conversation among all those who play a role in responding to urban needs.



**Peter Maurer, ICRC President**

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<sup>1</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2018. *2018 Global Report on Internal Displacement*. Geneva: v.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A growing proportion of people internally displaced by armed conflict and other violence live in cities and towns. This report looks at their experience in four cities – Mosul in Iraq, Baidoa in Somalia, Maiduguri in Nigeria and San Pedro Sula in Honduras – and recommends a number of important ways to improve the humanitarian response to meet their immediate and longer term needs and help them fully recover.

The report takes a people-centred approach to urban displacement. Part One starts with an analysis of people's experience of displacement in their own words. Part Two then examines the strengths and weaknesses of current practices in the humanitarian response to internal displacement in urban settings. It uncovers some strategic assumptions that are skewing current humanitarian policies and practice. Part Three makes a series of recommendations to improve the humanitarian response. The report is accompanied by photographic essays on displaced people in cities.

## **The characteristics of urban displacement**

Urban displacement is permanently changing the landscape and social fabric of many towns and cities across the world. The population of Baidoa in Somalia doubled because of internal displacement between 2016 and 2017. In Nigeria, Maiduguri's population has increased dramatically since 2016. Urban space in many cities in the Middle East, including Mosul in Iraq, has been transformed as people move from one part of the city to another in search of safety.

People are displaced because their own town or city has become the scene of armed conflict or other violence, or disaster, or they move from rural areas to seek refuge in a city, contributing to global urbanization trends. Displaced people often end up living with the urban poor in peripheral slums where housing is low-quality and access to jobs and services is limited.

General awareness of urban displacement has been rising since the 1970s but response to displacement outside camps remains inadequate. The humanitarian response is often insufficient and requires better long-term vision to meet community needs and deal with individual vulnerabilities. The primary responsibility to provide protection and assistance to internally displaced people lies with the State under whose jurisdiction these people find themselves. But humanitarian organizations, affected communities themselves, local authorities, civil society, development organizations and local businesses can team up better to respond to the needs of displaced people and host communities.

## **Purpose of the report**

This research is intended to contribute to the improvement of the humanitarian response to urban displacement caused by armed conflict or other violence, by reflecting on people's experience of displacement and examining how well the current humanitarian response is aligned with people's needs and expectations. The report is based on field research by the ICRC in Baidoa, Maiduguri, Mosul and San Pedro Sula, a literature review and interviews with key informants.

The research has been a learning experience for the ICRC and its lessons will guide an improved approach to our own operations in response to internal displacement and in urban settings. Urban displacement is one of several areas of urban humanitarian

action in which the ICRC is working hard to develop its knowledge and skills to better respond to the multi-faceted needs of people affected by conflict and other violence in an increasingly urbanizing world.

The report calls upon everyone involved in the humanitarian response to urban displacement to focus on four key pathways to improvement: putting people at the centre of humanitarian planning and response, focusing on their dignity and resilience, building responses on reliable data, and exploring positive opportunities created by urban displacement. These operational principles are set out in detailed recommendations in Part Three of the report.

### **Main messages of the report**

**1. Understanding the experience of displaced people is key to developing good programmes** and should drive the design and implementation of humanitarian responses. People's needs are interconnected and have to be addressed holistically and not simplistically in vertical short-term programming.

- Responding to the knock-on effects of displacement must be built into the design of humanitarian programming. People's lack of assets and income has profound consequences for their ability to secure stable accommodation and meet the needs of their families. This lack of stable accommodation then threatens people's ability to keep a job, as they move from one neighbourhood to another, re-establish social networks and, more generally, normalize their situation. In turn, this may foster harmful survival strategies, such as children being sent to work or people engaging in transactional sex.
- Social, political and legal systems can facilitate people's settlement or prevent their integration, and thus affect their ability to resume a normal life. These systems must be understood and leveraged or improved to meet the needs of hosts and displaced people.
- Humanitarian organizations must reach out better to displaced people and help them safely reach humanitarian services. This means devoting time and resources to building meaningful two-way engagement with displaced people and host communities.
- The performance of humanitarian organizations should be assessed against their ability to connect with and include populations affected at every stage of the response.

**2. Host families and communities are first responders in situations of displacement** but experience displacement as a burden when it becomes prolonged and when support from governments or humanitarian organizations is minimal or nil. This is equally true whether a city has experienced large-scale displacement from rural areas – as in Baidoa or Maiduguri – or a large influx of people from other parts of the city itself, as in Mosul. Displacement exacerbates pre-existing problems of employment and markets, and of housing, infrastructure, access to land, waste management and other public services, in the neighbourhoods affected.

**3. The humanitarian response should help people regain a sense of dignity** beyond their bare survival and think long-term from the onset. Many displaced people spoke of their sense of having lost a part of their dignity and their social place in the world because of displacement. If they had benefited from a humanitarian response, it was most often one that focused simply on their survival and not on helping them regain a sense of dignity and autonomy by providing security of income or housing. Organizations involved in the humanitarian response must commit to staying by people's side as long as needed and help them to recover their assets and livelihoods.

4. **Humanitarian organizations must approach emergency support and resilience-building simultaneously**, from the outset of displacement rather than as sequential phases of a response. Striking the right balance between meeting short- and long-term needs remains a major challenge for humanitarian organizations. In chronic emergencies, this tension is typically solved by postponing longer-term activities to the detriment of displaced people and their hosts. But long-term considerations are critical and should capture the full spectrum of durable solutions to help people settle where it suits them best.
5. **Humanitarian organizations need to focus more and better on responding to urban displacement outside camps.** The current response is biased towards camps even though a significant proportion of displaced people settle outside them. This means a failure to provide adequate and consistent coverage of displaced people's urgent needs, and to help them regain their autonomy and resume a relatively normal life.
6. **A better balance is also needed between a blanket approach to needs and an individualized approach.** The humanitarian response in urban settings tends to prioritize some form of blanket coverage, like rehabilitating or expanding urban services for entire communities. Such whole-of-neighbourhood approaches alleviate the pressure on host communities, help people meet some of their basic needs and may contribute to lessening tensions between host communities and those displaced. But they do not provide tailored protection and adequate support to the most vulnerable individuals and families among those displaced within the communities. Blanket programming must be complemented with individual targeting.
7. **The response to internal displacement must be built on solid data** and not on unverified assumptions. The fallacies in certain common assumptions were exposed by this research. It is commonly assumed that displaced people dispersed within urban communities are difficult to identify and that they tend to be better off than those living in camps because they receive support from relatives or friends or can afford to pay rent. It is also often believed that displaced persons in cities outside camps face the same problems as the urban poor and therefore do not require specific support. These unverified assumptions – and the standard humanitarian approaches that flow from them – underpin programme design and development. But these assumptions are far from universally true and lead to distorted programmatic responses.
8. **Humanitarian organizations have a significant role to play, complementary to development actors**, in responding to urban displacement. Needs generated by urban internal displacement go beyond humanitarian organizations' capacity to meet them. But humanitarian organizations can play an important part in meeting urgent needs, sustaining systems essential to people's survival and helping people regain their autonomy. To do so, humanitarian organizations must be able to work fast while also having a long-term vision of solutions. They must also be able to work on various scales: the individual, the community and the city.
  - An adequate response that takes into account the particular experience of displaced persons, and the impact of armed conflict or other violence and displacement on other segments of the population, relies on complementary and coordinated efforts by humanitarian and development organizations in support of the authorities and other central and municipal actors.

- Development organizations may be better placed than humanitarians to work with public authorities on broader, structural issues of unemployment and poverty reduction, but they are often not in a position to address specific vulnerabilities at the individual and household levels. Humanitarian organizations may also have a well-developed capacity in areas that remain out of reach for development organizations.

9. **Displacement in cities is overwhelmingly portrayed as a burden to host families, host communities and the cities themselves, but it can also create opportunities that are worth exploring.** The emergency can be used to rapidly gain knowledge of urban realities, and the humanitarian response in urban settings can also be an opportunity to develop partnerships and strengthen complementarity with others by leveraging existing capacities and expertise, based on the various mandates and responsibilities. Finally, to develop new ways of working in urban environments, humanitarian organizations must have the courage to test new ideas, must learn from experience and must dare to fail.

# INTRODUCTION

“We fled at the beginning of the military operation. We did not want to go to the camp with children and elderly people. So we came to Mosul and lived for the first year in a partially destroyed house. Then we moved into a rented house.”

Wafa<sup>2</sup> and 36 of her family members fled their village in the vicinity of Sinjar in north-western Iraq in 2016 because of the armed conflict that threatened their lives and livelihoods. They do not think that they will ever return. They know their homes have been burned down and, having heard of people who were killed upon return, they fear they would be at risk if they went back.

Wafa’s family is among the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons<sup>3</sup> who settled in Mosul after being forced to flee by heavy fighting between the Iraqi security forces and coalition forces and the Islamic State group. Some arrived from the countryside or another city. Others moved within the city, seeking shelter in safer neighbourhoods from ongoing military operations.

Mosul is not unique in having experienced such large-scale displacement. A significant and growing proportion of people displaced by armed conflict, other situations of violence<sup>4</sup> and disasters live in urban areas and outside camps in developing countries, durably changing the landscape and social fabric of cities.<sup>5</sup> With the progressive arrival of some 825,000 people fleeing the armed conflict in north-east Nigeria, Maiduguri’s population had significantly increased by February 2016. The population of the Somali city of Baidoa is estimated to have doubled because of the large-scale movement from rural areas to the city caused by drought and the insecurity in 2016–2017.<sup>6</sup> Slower paced displacement also occurs in cities affected by generalized violence such as San Pedro Sula in Honduras. Such displacement might be less visible, but its consequences for the individuals affected are profound.

Broad awareness of urban displacement outside camps has been developing since the 1970s, but the examination of specific factors that shape people’s experience in such circumstances has been limited.<sup>7</sup> Research on displacement in urban areas has often focused on refugees, rather than internally displaced persons, or has considered both populations together without examining possible differences in their respective

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<sup>2</sup> All the names in this paper have been changed to protect people’s identities.

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter, ‘displaced persons’ and ‘displaced people’ are used interchangeably to refer to internally displaced persons.

<sup>4</sup> The ICRC uses ‘other situations of violence’ (hereafter ‘violence’ or ‘generalized violence’) to refer to situations of collective violence perpetrated by one or several large groups of people that do not reach the threshold of an armed conflict. Such situations are characterized by a definite degree of violence that has, or may have, significant humanitarian consequences. It can include situations in which the violence is predominantly criminal in nature, such as that perpetrated by gangs, drug traffickers and the like.

<sup>5</sup> The scale of displacement in urban areas is deemed significant and increasing, but reliable data tend to be limited. It is broadly assumed that the majority of people displaced in cities live outside camps, but evidence to support this is also scarce (see IDMC 2016; Beyani 2011: 7; World Bank 2017: 6). Hereafter, ‘cities’ and ‘urban settings/areas’ are used interchangeably to refer to socially complex, densely built and populated areas that have an influence over a larger area. This includes urban centres of various sizes and their outskirts. For more on defining cities, see Smith, M. E. 2011.

<sup>6</sup> IOM Feb. 2016; interviews with OCHA and local authorities in Somalia.

<sup>7</sup> Grünewald 2011; Pantuliano *et al.* 2012.

situations.<sup>8</sup> In-depth studies on the impact of urban internal displacement on host communities and cities are also few. Furthermore, despite the welcome publication of urban profiling and assessment tools and operational guidance in recent years, humanitarian actors continue to struggle to respond adequately in urban environments.<sup>9</sup> Several obstacles can explain these shortcomings: the scarcity of data and the complexity of urban settings, the difficulty of adapting approaches developed in rural environments or camps to urban realities, and of integrating long-term considerations in the design of programmes, in part because of humanitarian organizations' limited urban expertise. Political factors, funding constraints and the pressure to deliver big and fast also hamper the development of an adequate response – a response that is far from being strictly humanitarian, but depends on the effective interplay of authorities, civil society, service providers, people affected, and humanitarian and development organizations.

## THE STUDY

This study aims to contribute to strengthening the humanitarian response to internal displacement outside camps in urban settings, in light of displaced people's stories and perspectives. To do so, it examines the experience of people displaced in cities, outside camps, by armed conflict or violence and reflects critically on the extent to which the overall response of humanitarian organizations, including the ICRC, meets the needs and expectations of internally displaced persons.<sup>10</sup> The research is based on the analysis of four situations of urban displacement a literature review and interviews with key informants. Displacement situations in Baidoa in Somalia, Maiduguri in Nigeria, Mosul in Iraq and San Pedro Sula in Honduras were examined through individual interviews and focus-group discussions with displaced persons, hosts, community members, community leaders, local authorities and staff from humanitarian organizations, and other actors involved in the response (see Annex 1).

Case studies were selected to reflect different contexts and patterns of displacement to distinguish similarities and differences in people's experience and in the humanitarian response to displacement. For instance, is the experience of someone displaced in a city affected by violence perpetrated by gangs significantly different from that of someone displaced within a city at war or to a more stable city within a country affected by armed conflict? What distinguishes the experience of those displaced from rural to urban areas from those moving between or within cities? What are the variations related to the place of settlement in the city itself?

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Crisp *et al.* 2012; Kirbyshire *et al.* 2017.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. *Urban Profiling Guidance* (Jacobsen *et al.* 2014), *Using the Sphere Standards in Urban Settings* (Mountfield 2016), or the *Urban Multi-Sector Vulnerability Assessment Tool for Displacement Contexts* (Mohiddin *et al.* 2017). For a discussion on tools for improving context analysis, see Campbell (2018). In that regard, the Urban Analysis Network Syria has been working towards developing a comprehensive urban analytical framework that considers the physical and institutional context of the city, and the characteristics, experiences and needs of its population to inform better humanitarian and development planning, targeting and monitoring. It considers five pillars: infrastructure, ecosystems, and services; housing, land and property; governance; economy; and social cohesion and integration. The consortium, which brings together complementary areas of expertise, includes iMMAP, the Joint IDP Profiling Service, Mercy Corps Humanitarian Action Team, and the European Commission Joint Research Council and works closely with global platforms such as the Global Alliance for Urban Crises.

<sup>10</sup> The focus is on people who are displaced long enough, i.e. at least a few months, for their situation to start normalizing, and not on short-term displacement.



People who arrived in Maiduguri and Baidoa most often left rural areas because of armed conflict or a combination of conflict and drought. Some of those displaced in Mosul had fled the hostilities raging in other parts of the city. Others arrived from smaller cities or rural areas also affected by the conflict. In San Pedro Sula, people have often moved between neighbourhoods to escape the violence perpetrated by gangs. Unlike in Maiduguri and Baidoa, people displaced in Mosul and San Pedro Sula often stayed in the vicinity of the insecurity that forced them to leave in the first place. In all these cities, displaced persons spoke of the difficulty of trying to reestablish themselves in a new location, often with extremely limited means. In various ways, they alluded to their sense of having lost a part of their dignity and their social place in the world because of displacement. Differences in their perspective and ways of coping seemed influenced by their feeling of safety and their ability to find protection at the place of displacement, whether they came from a rural or an urban area, their location in the city and their living arrangements.

#### **A note on the scope of the study**

In this paper, ‘urban displacement’ refers to internal displacement to and within urban environments i.e. rural to urban, inter-urban or intra-urban. It does not cover the movement of people fleeing from cities to rural areas. The study focuses on displaced people who self-settle outside formal and informal camps, and live dispersed within host communities. They may live in rented apartments, in abandoned or unfinished buildings or houses, in makeshift shelters, occupy public buildings or be hosted by the community, typically by relatives or friends. In Maiduguri, two slightly peripheral locations where groups of displaced people had informally self-settled on vacant land were also considered.<sup>11</sup>

When there was a humanitarian response outside camps, it often focused on ensuring the bare survival of people, but not necessarily on helping them properly meet their basic needs, preserve or restore a sense of dignity, or plan for the future. People who were able to cope by themselves in the short term were often left unassisted and became increasingly destitute and vulnerable over time. In the midst of an emergency, ensuring that people stay alive is essential. But not only did the response fail to ensure an adequate coverage of essential needs, it did not rapidly move towards helping people regain their autonomy and resume a relatively normal life either. In general, the response was inadequate. In some locations, such as Maiduguri, significant efforts had been made to enhance access to urban services in a sustainable manner in areas hosting the displaced, but attempts to develop an individual response to people’s specific needs and think beyond the emergency remained limited. In other places, such as Baidoa, people who had settled outside camps were simply overlooked.

Others before have pointed out that the inadequacy of the humanitarian response in cities partly results from the complexity of the urban environment and humanitarian actors’ struggle to adopt new approaches adapted to such an environment.<sup>12</sup> Shortcomings also stem from unverified assumptions, rather than reliable data, underpinning the response. For instance, it is commonly believed that displaced persons outside camps are better off than those in camps, that they are difficult to identify as they live scattered within communities and that their needs are no different from those of their

<sup>11</sup> For more on settlements types, see CCCM 2017a.

<sup>12</sup> Global Alliance for Urban Crises 2016a.



host communities. Such beliefs considerably shape the response, but are hardly ever carefully and contextually examined and questioned.

## STRUCTURE

This paper first focuses on the perspective of displaced persons living in urban settings and outside camps and, to a lesser extent, on the perspective of host communities. It looks into displaced people's expectations when fleeing to (or within) cities and what shapes their experience as they strive to settle and rebuild their lives in a new location. The study then examines the relevance and effectiveness of the humanitarian response to urban displacement caused by armed conflict or violence, in light of people's experience of displacement. It goes on to argue that to develop an adequate response that helps people preserve their sense of dignity, in addition to adapting to urban ecosystems, humanitarian actors – as well as authorities and donors – must base their response on evidence, not on assumptions. It concludes by making recommendations on effective responses to urban displacement.

During the research, some promising approaches in responding to urban displacement were identified in the visited locations. Some inspiring examples are highlighted in text boxes throughout the paper. It is clear that programmes must be adapted to the peculiarities of the context and of people's situation.



CHAPTER 1

# EXPERIENCING URBAN DISPLACEMENT

# 1. WHY PEOPLE FLEE TO OR WITHIN CITIES

Populations in cities might become displaced when cities are theatres of armed conflict, violence or disasters. As a growing proportion of the world's population live in cities, humanitarian crises unfolding in densely populated areas affect growing numbers of people who are likely to be displaced within cities. In the Middle East and North Africa, a significant proportion of displaced persons live dispersed in urban settings because there are few formal camps, but also because the population is generally urbanized.<sup>13</sup> Cities can also be sites where people seek refuge from armed conflict, violence or disasters happening elsewhere, thereby contributing to global urbanization trends. These trends also shape the movement of displaced persons: people are moving to cities generally, and therefore, displaced people move there too, accelerating urbanization.<sup>14</sup> This is especially true in sub-Saharan Africa, the region with one of the lowest proportions of people living in urban areas but urbanizing the fastest.<sup>15</sup>

Displaced people most often explain their decision to move to (or within) a city by security considerations, but also by other pull factors. Ali, for example, fled his village located over a hundred kilometres north of Baidoa with his large family in early 2017 because of the prevailing insecurity, but also because of its impact on the economy and his business. He chose to move to Baidoa, a city he already knew, to seek safety, and hoping for livelihood opportunities and humanitarian assistance. Similar reasons for settling in urban areas were repeatedly brought up by displaced persons in Iraq, Nigeria and Honduras. These echo the literature that identifies physical security, access to services, markets and livelihoods, social networks and potential support from relatives and friends as elements motivating people to seek refuge in cities. In some instances, and especially in cases of targeted violence such as in San Pedro Sula, the possibility of remaining anonymous is also key.<sup>16</sup> The influence of humanitarian assistance seems variable, in part because humanitarian assistance is not always available and because people's need for humanitarian assistance varies contextually.<sup>17</sup> In Somalia and Nigeria, displaced persons often said that their expectations of receiving humanitarian assistance had influenced their choice of destination. In Mosul and San Pedro Sula this was an unusual consideration: it was rather the presence of relatives or friends that could help them, or the possibility of keeping their livelihood, that was highlighted.

Not all people intend to move to an urban area in the first place and their journey might include several steps before they arrive in a city. Several displaced persons in Maiduguri had first fled to a location closer to their homes. They had later proceeded to Maiduguri for security-related reasons, and in hopes of greater assistance. On average, people's journey lasted for more than five months.<sup>18</sup> In some instances, people simply followed the movements of others. Young Nigerians said that community leaders had decided where to head. An Iraqi woman recalled that her whole village had left together and that she had followed and settled with many fellow villagers in East Mosul's Al-Intisar neighbourhood.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank 2017: 6.

<sup>14</sup> Kirbyshire *et al.* 2017: 8.

<sup>15</sup> Over half of the world's population lives in cities. This share should reach 66 per cent by 2050. In 2015, in sub-Saharan Africa, 38 per cent of the population lived in cities and the annual urban growth was 4.2 percent, compared to a global urban growth of 2.1 percent (UNDESA 2015: 2; World Bank n.d.).

<sup>16</sup> Alcayna and Al-Murani 2016: 17; Brookings-LSE 2013: 3; Grünewald 2011: 53; World Bank 2017:10; Zetter and Deikun 2010: 6.

<sup>17</sup> Lyytinen 2009: 6; Tudehope 2016: 91.

<sup>18</sup> REACH 2017: 17.

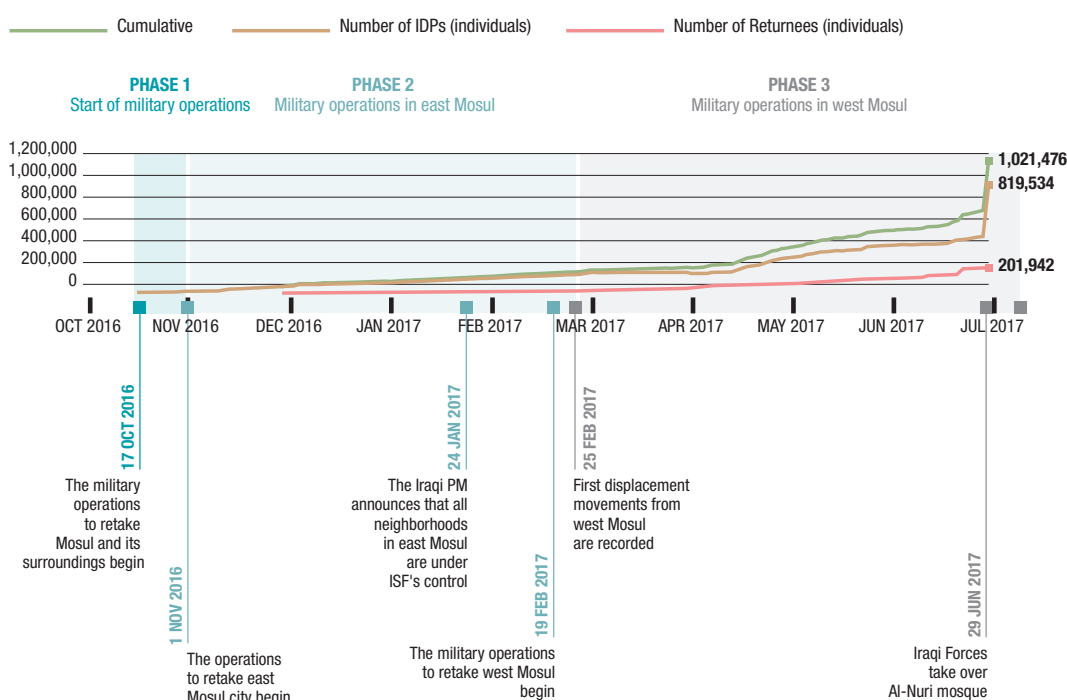
### Displacement in Mosul

More than three years of heavy fighting between the Iraqi security forces and coalition forces and the Islamic State group (ISG) have caused major internal displacement to, within and between cities in central and northern Iraq. Large-scale displacement in the district of Mosul began in late 2016, with the start of a military operation to retake the city from the ISG. Displacement reached a first peak between November 2016 and January 2017, as military operations were unfolding in the eastern part of the city. A second and greater peak occurred between February and June 2017 when the fighting concentrated on West Mosul, after East Mosul had been retaken. People who were displaced from East Mosul were mostly hosted in camps, whereas most of those displaced from West Mosul stayed outside camps as they moved in large numbers to East Mosul or other safer areas. By the end of June 2017, the city of Mosul was hosting nearly 384,000 displaced persons from Mosul itself.<sup>19</sup> Many who had fled East Mosul at the outset of the military operation returned in the first few months of 2017 and are now hosting displaced persons. The 2008 National Policy on Displacement, issued by the Ministry of Displacement and Migration but never translated into law, is the main domestic framework guiding the government's response to the needs of internally displaced persons.

Data for this study were collected in Al-Intisar, a relatively poor neighbourhood, home to some 20,000 families in the southern part of East Mosul. Local authorities estimate that some 2,000–2,600 displaced families from other parts of the city, smaller cities and villages live there in rented accommodation, unfinished buildings and empty houses, or with relatives.

### POPULATION MOVEMENTS TIMELINE DURING MOSUL CRISIS 17 OCTOBER 2016–29 JUNE 2017

Source: Adapted from IOM Iraq 2017: 19



<sup>19</sup> IOM 2017: 49.



## ON WHETHER TO LIVE IN CAMPS

People's perspective on camps and their family situation can influence their decision to seek safety in a city. Wafa's large family chose to settle in an unfinished building in Mosul rather than in a camp outside the city, to shield the children and the elderly from severe adversity: they deemed the living conditions in the isolated and dusty camps unbearable. This negative perception of camp life was widespread not only in Iraq, but also in Maiduguri and Baidoa – in spite of humanitarian assistance often being more readily available in camps. While highlighting their difficult living conditions, displaced persons in the three locations often also stressed that it was their decision to avoid camps. In Maiduguri, people sometimes did so to preserve their freedom of movement or keep their animals, which were barred from the camps. Others feared moving to camps managed by authorities who were sometimes viewed as a threat. In Baidoa, a few mentioned that in the absence of the right clan connections, it was difficult to gain access to an informal camp and live there safely. As their situation is not static, in some cases, people initially settle outside a camp, but move into it after failing to get settled independently in the city. Others do the opposite: they move out of a camp, seeking more freedom of movement, livelihood opportunities or privacy. In some cases, people keep moving between the camp and the rest of the city because of insecurity, a lack of means or other pressures.<sup>20</sup>

*In some cases, people initially settle outside a camp, but move into it after failing to get settled independently in the city. Others do the opposite.*

In other instances, such as in San Pedro Sula, camp options do not exist. This was also true in Maiduguri for some time: when large numbers of people started arriving, there were no camps to receive them or the few existing camps were so full that people were turned down. Even once official camps had been erected, many preferred to stay out of them.

### Displacement in Maiduguri

The intensification of the conflict between the armed opposition and the authorities in north-eastern Nigeria has led to mass displacement since mid-2013. Borno state is home to some 77 per cent of the displaced, or 1.3 million people. Most displaced persons have settled in urban centres and outside camps. Maiduguri, the capital of Borno, has received a large number of people from rural areas, with figures of displacement in the city peaking at 825,000 persons in February 2016 and progressively declining since then.<sup>21</sup> Nigeria is party to the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), but has not yet incorporated the Convention's obligations into domestic law. The 2012 National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons has never been formally adopted by the Federal Executive Council and is currently under review.<sup>22</sup>

Data collection for this study took place in three different neighbourhoods: Bolori, in the centre of the city, where displaced persons live dispersed within the host community; Kusheri, a neighbourhood that used to be sparsely populated, where displaced persons have gathered; and Dalori, in the periphery of the city, where displaced people have also settled together.

<sup>20</sup> Such movements have been observed in many other settings. See Alcayna and Al-Murani 2016: 18; Carrillo 2009: 539; and Syn 2016: 40.

<sup>21</sup> IOM Feb. 2016 and Dec. 2017.

<sup>22</sup> ICRC 2016b: 24.

## 2. STRUGGLING WITH A NEW ENVIRONMENT: THE PERSPECTIVE OF THOSE DISPLACED

“We are worried about being able to support ourselves and our families. And housing is a problem.”

Ali's family did find relative safety in Baidoa, but struggles to find stable accommodation and food, receives no support and economic opportunities are limited. Ali now shares a rented room, in a shack built out of iron sheets, with his two wives and 18 children and worries about their well-being. He worries for his newborn baby: money is so tight that they can only eat once a day, which affects his wife's ability to breastfeed. He also worries that he will soon have to find another roof for his family: they have already moved five times since they arrived eight months ago, having been repeatedly evicted for failing to pay their rent. And finding a new place for a large family is difficult: people are afraid that they will monopolize the toilet and that the children will make noise.

Ali hoped to find assistance in Baidoa, but has received none, neither from humanitarian organizations nor from the community or the authorities. He believes that, in a place where clan and family ties are key, his lack of relatives explains the absence of community support. Knowing that, as in many other countries, the humanitarian response has focused on the hundreds of informal camps that have mushroomed in and around the town, out of despair he tried moving his family to a camp. He was asked for money by the camp leader. He paid, but still was not allowed in.

*Uncertainty is not specific to displaced persons.  
The specificity might lie in the sudden loss of one's home,  
assets and familiarity with one's social and physical world,  
exacerbating one's sense of unsettledness.*

Ali's family has had to find ways to manage. His wives fetch water to sell. He goes out every day to look for construction work, but there are days when he earns nothing. Ali did not have such concerns back home: until the armed conflict started upsetting the security and the economy, he had a profitable business and a proper home. If he had some capital, he would resume selling donkey carts. But he has none left: he exhausted his resources to flee and to support his family after their arrival in Baidoa, and he has no access to formal or informal credit.

Ali's story epitomizes the unpredictability that displacement often brings into people's lives. Uncertainty is not specific to displaced persons. It can characterize the lives of the urban poor and of people affected by violence and armed conflict who have not been displaced. The specificity might lie in the sudden loss of one's home, assets and familiarity with one's social and physical world, exacerbating one's sense of unsettledness.

### Displacement in Baidoa

The capital of Somalia's Bay region witnessed a new and large influx of people displaced by the drought in the country between late 2016 and mid-2017, as well as by lasting insecurity and fears of forced recruitment. Over 240,000 displaced people arrived in the city, mostly from rural areas.<sup>23</sup> Most live in miserable conditions in more than 200 informal camps located in and around the town.<sup>24</sup> An unknown, but apparently significant, number of newcomers have settled outside these camps because they could either be hosted by relatives or could afford to rent accommodation. In other instances, people have not been able to find a place in a camp and had no choice other than to look for accommodation elsewhere in the city. Baidoa was already home to tens of thousands of people who had been displaced in previous years, most often in 2011 owing to the drought and, in some instances, in 2006–2007 because of the insecurity. A small number are former refugees who, upon their return, could not go back to their places of origin owing to insecurity and poverty. The scale of the displacement is such that local authorities believe that the number of displaced persons has surpassed that of long-term residents. Somalia has signed, but not yet ratified, the Kampala Convention. A comprehensive national policy on internal displacement is pending adoption at the federal level.

### NAVIGATING AN URBAN SETTING

Ali's experience is of course unique, as is everyone's experience. People who are displaced in the same setting may have similar difficulties and opportunities, but these might not affect their ability to navigate their new environment in the same way: people's paths are influenced by their history, gender, age, ethnic and religious affiliation, and capacity.<sup>25</sup> Still, the experience of displacement has a number of characteristics that are common to most displaced people.

*In all locations, displaced people underlined the difficulty of meeting the basic needs of their families by finding accommodation and a livelihood, and accessing essential services.*

Because of their limited resources, displaced persons often end up living in slums or informal settlements, on the periphery of cities or in disadvantaged neighbourhoods where they lack security of tenure and access to services is inadequate.<sup>26</sup> In all locations, displaced people underlined the difficulty of meeting the basic needs of their families by finding accommodation and a livelihood, and accessing essential services. Their efforts were often hampered by the social, political and legal landscape. Similarly, their ability to cope with the new situation and rebuild their lives is consistently influenced by the security situation. Their patterns and location of displacement, as well as their living arrangements, also have a major impact.

<sup>23</sup> UNHCR 2017: 2.

<sup>24</sup> CCCM 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Essed *et al.* 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Brookings-LSE 2013: 7.



### Displacement in San Pedro Sula

Honduras is the first country in the Northern Triangle of Central America to have officially recognized the phenomenon of internal displacement caused by the generalized violence of groups such as urban gangs (the so-called *maras* and *pandillas*) and drug traffickers. A government-led profiling exercise conducted in 2015 in the country's 20 municipalities most affected by displacement concluded that there were an estimated 174,000 persons displaced by violence within Honduras; however, given the invisible nature of this displacement, these figures are unlikely to reflect its real scale.<sup>27</sup> It found that the municipalities of Distrito Central (Tegucigalpa) and San Pedro Sula together hosted nearly half of the country's displaced households and that figures of displacement in the two locations had been increasing more or less continuously since 2004. A vast majority of people displaced in San Pedro Sula have moved within the violence-ridden city.<sup>28</sup> As a first step to address the problem, the Inter-Institutional Commission for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence has developed a draft law on internal displacement, which is pending examination by the National Congress.

### LIVING ON THE EDGE: COPING WITH UNCERTAINTY

Most people are able to meet their basic needs before displacement. Displacement most often disrupts their livelihood and way of life. It forces them to adapt to a new environment, establish new social networks, and find a roof and new ways to earn their living and meet their basic needs. The possibility of re-establishing a normal life after becoming displaced depends on several elements and is closely connected to people's safety.

In cities grappling with generalized violence such as San Pedro Sula, insecurity often remains core to people's daily lives, limiting their ability to move around to seek employment and access services, and undermining their psychological well-being. In other words, the more displaced people have to worry about imminent threats to their lives, the less they can focus on normalizing their situation. This is especially true for those who become displaced as a result of serious threats and abuses against them or their families, and who seek anonymity for security reasons.

*The more displaced people have to worry about imminent threats to their lives, the less they can focus on normalizing their situation.*

Insecurity may force people to move repeatedly, further increasing their vulnerability. For instance, Marta and her family first fled to another neighbourhood of San Pedro Sula after she had tried to resist extortion by the controlling gang. When she had managed to restart a small business, she was threatened again and the whole family moved once more within the city. Restarting anew was even harder, as much of the family's savings had been used to settle after the first episode of displacement and Marta's husband had become chronically ill. Fear was evident in such an unequivocal manner only in San Pedro Sula, but displaced people in Maiduguri and Mosul also limited their movements to certain parts of the city.

<sup>27</sup> Inter-Institutional Commission for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence 2015; on patterns of violence-induced displacement in the Northern Triangle of Central America, see Cantor and Plewa 2017.

<sup>28</sup> San Pedro Sula had the country's highest murder rate until 2016 (Institute of Security, Justice and Peace 2016).

Even in a more secure city, displaced people often struggle to regain their autonomy, unless they have a predictable and reliable income, accumulated wealth and/or governmental, humanitarian or community support allowing them to pay rent regularly, put food on the table and pay for services. Most cope, but often at the expense of adequate housing, meals, education or health care or by resorting to other harmful ways of surviving, such as sending their children to work or beg, trading sexual favours or opting for transactional marriages. The need for cash is not specific to displaced people outside camps and in urban settings, but it is certainly greater when people must pay rent and cannot farm, hence must buy food.

Some manage to stabilize their lives over time, but many displaced persons stressed that after months or years in displacement, they were still living on the edge. Without income or support, some gradually exhaust their resources, getting poorer over time. For instance, displaced persons who had arrived in Maiduguri with their livestock often had to sell their animals progressively to survive. Others, such as Faiza, faced life events that, in the absence of any safety net, disrupted potential normalization. She settled in a makeshift shelter in Maiduguri with her children four years ago, after her husband was killed and their house burned down during an attack on their village. She remarried in Maiduguri, and her new husband left her when she became pregnant. She had been cleaning homes to earn money, but had to stop working when the baby was born three months ago. Since the food rations that she receives are insufficient, she ended up taking her four older children, whose ages ranged from 3 to 13, out of school so they could beg in the market and earn some money. If Faiza had some capital, she would prepare soup to sell and earn money – but she barely manages to feed her family, let alone save money.

*The need for cash is not specific to displaced people outside camps and in urban settings, but it is certainly greater when people must pay rent and cannot farm, hence must buy food.*

People often lack the capital to restart an economic activity, but they may also lack skills adapted to an urban environment, particularly if they come from the countryside, as underlined by these men displaced to Maiduguri: “At home, we had all that we needed and we were even able to help others. Here, we have to beg, and we have to accept jobs that we aren’t used to, to earn our living.” If land was secured, and if provided with the necessary tools, people could continue to farm in peri-urban areas, with the notable advantage of the proximity of markets. But this is not even a remote possibility for those who settle closer to the centre of the city. Even for people with the right skills, economic opportunities can be limited by a lack of capital and social ties and by the fact that armed conflict or violence often upset the economy and limit people’s movements. People displaced within Mosul and San Pedro Sula might have been a few kilometres away from their former homes and livelihoods, but these areas were often out of reach. In San Pedro Sula, some people managed to keep their jobs by settling in a not-so-distant and safer neighbourhood, but had to incur additional expenses to rent a new place.

## THE UNDECIPHERABLE LOGIC OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Although displaced people in Baidoa and Maiduguri often mentioned humanitarian assistance as one of the factors that compelled them to move to cities, their access to assistance was limited. In some cases, people who had settled outside camps in Baidoa and Mosul were supported by community members, most often relatives, or other displaced persons. Those without such support often received no individual assistance at all, either from the authorities or from humanitarian organizations, and stressed that to obtain any, one had to live in a camp.

In Maiduguri, those gathered in the periphery of the city often collected food rations and, in some cases, had received building materials for their shelters. But not everyone was assisted and distributions were unreliable. Displaced persons in Kuseri estimated that perhaps two-thirds of the families grouped there benefited from monthly rations,

*Because we are in town, we do not receive assistance. Organizations provide to those in the camps. We have to manage by ourselves.*

but the distribution had been suspended for nearly two months and they did not know why. They did not know why some received no support at all either. Their sole explanation was that humanitarian organizations were overwhelmed by the scale of the needs and had randomly picked the people receiving their assistance. And those who were assisted felt that it was insufficient. People living dispersed in the centre of town usually received no individual humanitarian assistance and attributed this to their location in the city, as stressed by this woman displaced to the city centre: “Because we are in town, we do not receive assistance. Organizations provide to those in the camps. We have to manage by ourselves.”

## THE HOLISTIC NATURE OF PEOPLE’S WELL-BEING

A stable income or reliable support is crucial for rebuilding one’s life, but does not solve everything. People’s capacity to adjust to a new environment and normalize their situation is also closely connected to the legal and policy framework, the social climate and the availability of public services, in addition to their safety.

In cities, authorities often exercise greater control than in rural areas and laws, regulations and policies tend to have a stronger impact on various aspects of people’s daily lives.<sup>29</sup> Domestic normative and policy frameworks are not always consistent with international law and with the authorities’ primary responsibility to protect and assist internally displaced people; or while being adequate, they might not be properly implemented for reasons ranging from a shortage of human or financial resources, and inadequate clarity on roles and responsibilities, to a lack of political will. There remains considerable room to strengthen operationalization of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement globally, and of the Kampala Convention at the level of African States.<sup>30</sup> As a result, people displaced in cities often face legal and administrative barriers that limit their ability to work, settle, secure tenure or access urban services. Difficulties can be especially acute for people arriving from the countryside: they may be unfamiliar with the legal and administrative system or may lack the necessary official documentation to gain access to services or State assistance, or to rent or buy a property; in fact, such documents might not have been necessary in rural areas, or might have been left behind or lost during flight. In places such as Iraq and Nigeria, where displaced persons are sometimes perceived as a security threat and where the government focuses on the return of displaced persons to their homes or areas of origin, the adoption and implementation of policies conducive to mid-term or long-term local integration, notably in terms of livelihood and security of tenure, is unlikely. For people who cannot or do not want to return, this makes it even harder to establish their lives in the place of displacement.

<sup>29</sup> Cotroneo 2017: 289–290.

<sup>30</sup> ICRC 2016a.

In all locations, displaced people lacked security of tenure. They typically rented their accommodation through a verbal agreement with the landlords and had no protection against evictions and arbitrary rent increases. In fact, evictions were nearly routine in the lives of some displaced persons in Baidoa. These most often resulted from people's inability to consistently pay their rent, sometimes because of unforeseen increases. Evictions not only force people to find new homes, but depending on how far they have to move, can dramatically jeopardize newly formed social networks and livelihoods, complicate access to services and lead to a loss of assets. They can also push people to return prematurely to insecure locations where living conditions and access to essential services are still difficult – as pointed by people in East Mosul who, because of dramatic rent increases, were considering going back to the shambles in West Mosul. Security of tenure and livelihood are intertwined. The absence of one or the other can have serious safety and protection ramifications. Without a stable income, people cannot pay for adequate accommodation. They may be evicted for failing to pay rent and/or may decide to settle in more dangerous and low-serviced neighbourhoods where they may still face eviction for occupying public land or private property without permission. Similarly, without legal protection and security of tenure, displaced people may be unable to pay for increasing rents with the same source of income and face eviction. By being forced to move, they may lose their livelihood, social networks or access to services.

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and protection ramifications.*

Social discrimination also impacts people's capacity to cope by amplifying the difficulty of finding a job or adequate housing. Displaced people sometimes commented on their feeling of being outcasts, such as this young woman in Maiduguri: "People look down on us because we are displaced and we don't have anything. They call us "thieves" or "witches" and they always blame us if something is missing from their house or if there is a problem. It is even worse for our children." Discrimination can be especially acute when people are displaced outside their ethnic, religious or political boundaries or seen as a menace.

Problems of access to services may not only be related to laws and regulations, policies or a lack of means. Sometimes, public services simply do not exist. In Baidoa and in parts of Maiduguri, there is no municipal water and wastewater network. In Mosul, the destruction and disruption of the electricity grid and municipal water supply system by the conflict meant that people no longer had adequate access to water and electricity. This was also true for health care, a point they kept making; prior to the armed conflict, people benefited from free public health care. Now they had to pay for treatment, some hospitals had been damaged by hostilities and part of the medical staff was gone, having been displaced or, sometimes, killed.

### *Locations of settlements visited in Maiduguri*



#### **Centre vs periphery**

The daily life of those displaced to central areas of cities tend to be different from that of those settling on the outskirts of cities, just as the reality of people hosted by relatives is not the same as that of people renting or occupying public or unfinished buildings. In the centre of a city, people who are not hosted by relatives often struggle to secure adequate housing, but may have greater access to livelihood opportunities and public services – except in slums and gang-controlled neighbourhoods that might be close to city centres, but may still offer limited services.

In Maiduguri, displaced persons living in the central neighbourhood of Bolori most often rented a room, but some also lived in unfinished houses or in makeshift shelters. Their living conditions were often difficult. Not only did they struggle to pay their rent and fear eviction, but because of poverty, many shared a single room with another family, enjoying little privacy. They dreaded sudden rent increases, stressing that because of the growing demand, rents kept rising, while wages were decreasing because of the increasing number of people looking for work. The vast majority said that despite having an income – women were cleaning, baking or selling food products, while men worked on construction sites, unloaded trucks or transported goods – they could not meet their basic needs. Some initially borrowed money, but long-term residents had stopped loaning to them as they were unable to repay their loans. The few who were hosted by relatives seemed to fare better than the others, but often said that these were temporary arrangements as their hosts were spread thin. Displaced people's access to services in Bolori was relatively better than in the city's outskirts. The government and humanitarian organizations had increased the capacity of urban services, but the only individual support that some had received was from the community or other displaced persons. People were somehow absorbed into the urban fabric, but did not really feel part of the community.

In contrast, in Dalori and Kusheri, two informal peripheral sites where displaced people from the same localities had recreated small communities, nearly everyone had slightly more room and privacy, having usually built their own shelters from straw, sticks, scavenged fabrics and metal sheets on loaned private lands – and they were not paying any rent. Yet, in the absence of a formal agreement with the landowners, they also feared being evicted. Their contacts with Maiduguri’s inhabitants were limited, and it seemed that the farther they were from the city centre, the more limited their access to services and livelihoods was. In Kusheri, closer to the city centre, people had access to a water point and latrines. In Dalori, in the absence of a borehole, people had to beg for small quantities of water from nearby residents. Latrines had been built by a humanitarian organization, but they were deemed too far away to be safe. In both locations, displaced people could seek primary health care in nearby camps and children could enroll in neighbouring schools. Some people were earning money, but fewer than in Bolori. In both places, displaced people stressed that they were critically short of food, despite a number of them receiving food rations. They explained that they had settled in the periphery of the city because living in the city centre was too expensive; the oldest generation also alluded to the intimidating nature of the city. But being further from the city centre limited their livelihood opportunities and access to services.

## A PLACE IN THE WORLD: DIGNITY AND DISPLACEMENT

“My grandchildren used to live around. Now, my family is scattered and I am alone, staying with my older brother.”

From Mosul to Baidoa, from Maiduguri to San Pedro Sula, people repeatedly conveyed that displacement resulted in a sense of dislocation, both literally and figuratively speaking – like the elderly woman, displaced to Maiduguri, quoted above. Some were poor already before being displaced, others were wealthier. But all recalled having had a roof above their heads and being able to fulfil their needs and those of their families. Depending on unreliable assistance and on the charity of others, living in miserable conditions, having to beg for water and not being able to put enough food on the table, secure accommodation or plan for the future was persistently portrayed as diminishing.

*People repeatedly conveyed that displacement resulted in a sense of dislocation, both literally and figuratively speaking.*

People often recalled how they had been gravely and intimately affected by displacement as well as by the violent events that had caused their uprooting. In Mosul, people voiced profound suffering associated with having witnessed and experienced extreme hardship and abuse, as well as with leaving their homes behind, not knowing what would happen next, and relying on the generosity of others. Fathers painfully brought up their inability to protect their families and provide them with the basic necessities of life. In Maiduguri, people recalled watching their houses being burned down, together with all of their belongings and a lifetime’s memories; they talked of having lost a way of life and of their longing to go home. Older men who had sold their animals to survive were too proud to say that they did not own the animals that they were looking after. In Somalia, people recalled that they used to have goats and camels, and their children would drink fresh milk every day. In San Pedro Sula, people who had sometimes been forced to flee multiple times described how violence had dispersed their families within and across borders and recalled being afraid of taking public transport or making their situation known to their neighbours.



In various ways, people spoke of their sense of having lost much more than their belongings through displacement. They talked of how they had lost their autonomy, their dignity, their self-esteem. They talked of how people devalued them and had grown tired of helping them. They talked of their sense of having lost their social place and identity in their world. Such considerations are not specific to urban displacement, but might be particularly acute in urban environments, where people often have difficulties in adjusting to a different way of life and regaining their autonomy. Addressing them is core to an adequate response.

### 3. RECEIVING DISPLACED PEOPLE: THE HOST PERSPECTIVE ON DISPLACEMENT

The impact of displacement extends well beyond displaced persons themselves. Not only is it acutely felt by people directly hosting displaced persons, but it also affects host communities – and more broadly, cities who may struggle to fulfil their responsibility towards displaced persons, in part for financial or legal reasons, although this is an aspect that is not developed in this paper.<sup>31</sup>

Cities and communities may receive multiple waves of displaced persons. A large influx of people from rural areas or other cities, such as in Baidoa and Maiduguri, translates into a significant population growth, while large-scale movements within the city, such as in Mosul, can increase the density of certain neighbourhoods. The new population is most often concentrated in relatively poor and often already crowded neighbourhoods, and in the outskirts of cities. Displacement tends to exacerbate pre-existing problems related to the housing stock, infrastructure, markets, employment, access to land, waste management and other public services, with varying impacts depending on the newcomers' location of settlement within the city. For example, the inner city of Maiduguri suffered from greater overcrowding than the peripheral districts, and the arrival of a large group of people was especially dramatic for the urban poor. The periphery faced difficulties in providing services such as water and electricity, and the presence of displaced persons was leading to environmental degradation.<sup>32</sup> Displacement caused by the violence perpetrated by gangs, such as in San Pedro Sula, has a less obvious impact on cities, as it happens gradually and, because of its intra-urban nature, the same area can be a place of departure and of refuge.

#### SHARING ONE'S HOME: THE PERSPECTIVE OF HOST FAMILIES

“Displaced persons are guests. We have to receive them. But their presence has caused an increase in rents and leads to scarcity of resources.”

This resident of East Mosul's Al-Intisar neighbourhood, Yusuf, expresses a common view: it is a duty to assist people in need, but with time, it becomes a burden. Most of the people in Al-Intisar have been displaced at some point. Upon return, some were unable to move back into their old homes as they were destroyed or had become unaffordable.<sup>33</sup> Some moved into other unfinished or abandoned buildings, rented a house or were hosted by relatives – or, in the absence of any other option, ended up living in the ruins of their houses. People were using their savings, selling their remaining possessions or taking on debt to carry out the most urgent repairs for the forthcoming

<sup>31</sup> For more on this, see ICRC 2015 and Büscher and Vlassenroot 2010:2.

<sup>32</sup> See also NRC 2015:8, Metcalfe *et al.* 2012: 35.

<sup>33</sup> In Al-Intisar, a February 2017 ACTED assessment indicates that 5 per cent of the houses were completely destroyed and 20 per cent suffered light damage in relation to the conflict.

winter. The very same people sometimes became hosts, in some cases, to many families. Yusuf, for instance, had been displaced for two months, fleeing from one neighbourhood to another with his 11 family members. He came back to a partially destroyed house and soon started sharing his home with five other families. He received sugar, flour and rice vouchers from the State, which had also just resumed paying his salary after three years – albeit a reduced one – but he was spread thin.

In Maiduguri, some resident families had been generously hosting relatives for several years. “Our food used to be for six, and now it must be shared among 15”, observed

*We had to cut the number of meals that we have. We also have privacy problems. We only have one room and have to share it.*

a woman. “We had to cut the number of meals that we have. We also have privacy problems. We only have one room and have to share it.” No one questioned the moral obligation to assist people, to act as first responders, but all noted that it was putting them under tremendous pressure, especially as the conflict was affecting everyone’s daily lives. People with more means had fewer troubles. A community leader in the Bolori neighbourhood was hosting fourteen people who had arrived since 2010, but he could afford to rent a place for six of them to whom he was not related. In all locations, people mostly welcomed relatives, but some were hosting strangers.

### SHARING ONE’S STREETS: THE PERSPECTIVE OF HOST COMMUNITIES

“When the crisis started, people started moving here, including from other parts of the city because they saw it as safe. People had to share the little food they had.”

This community leader in Bolori went on insisting that he had told community members that people should not be sent to camps and needed assistance. He was himself hosting fourteen people. He also talked of how, when displaced persons had started arriving, he had paid visits to humanitarian organizations. He had successfully approached the ICRC to rehabilitate the hospital and UNICEF for water points. He had not managed to secure food rations for the displaced and their hosts, something he struggled to justify to the temporary and permanent residents of the neighbourhood: “In other areas, people were assisted, but not here. People accuse [community leaders] of not having been able to mobilize humanitarian actors. People receive different support in different places. There is unfairness in the distribution of assistance across the city.” He had tried to understand the logic behind the distribution of assistance, but felt that he had been given no satisfactory explanation. Despite being convinced that welcoming displaced persons was a moral obligation, he was also starting to feel that the community was stretched to its limits: “The problem is that people are joined by other family members and the families keep getting bigger.” Despite these reservations, like many other community and neighbourhood leaders, he emphasized that not only were people welcome, but they were welcome to stay on after peace had returned, as long as they could sustain themselves.

Community members did speak of having to share already scarce water, of classrooms being overcrowded, of latrines filling up faster and of men marrying displaced women because of a lower bride price. People, such as this woman in Bolori, often remarked that displaced persons had been expected to be there briefly, but in the end, were staying for too long: “They talk about going back, but they don’t. Living with them is difficult. They are poor and it is a burden. It will be a relief when they leave.” When asked about the positive impact of the presence of displaced persons in the neighbourhood, people could only think of how they had learned to make carefully woven hats from the newcomers.

The burden of hosting displaced people was stressed not only in Maiduguri. It was also repeatedly brought up in Mosul and Baidoa, not only by communities, but also by



local authorities who underlined being overwhelmed by the magnitude of needs. Host community members mentioned security concerns less often, but some used veiled terms to refer to the perceived threat attached to the presence of strangers. Ammaya, a mother of two who lived in Kusheri, in the middle of an area where a large number of displaced persons had self-settled, was one of the few who dared to say explicitly that she feared for the safety of her family: “This used to be a quiet area. With the influx, the population has increased a lot. We don’t feel safe anymore. I have started locking the gate [of the yard] and after a blast inside the settlement, I stopped allowing people in and I don’t let my children play outside. Those people have not been screened, we don’t know who they are and if we can trust them.”<sup>34</sup> Amaya’s family had built a house in what used to be a sparsely populated neighbourhood just before displaced persons started arriving in large numbers. They had dreamed of a quiet life in their brand new house, but now live in a crowded area and the value of their house has gone down.

*This used to be a quiet area. With the influx, the population has increased a lot. We don’t feel safe anymore.*

## COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Relations between host communities and displaced persons often seemed to be getting tenser over time, in part because what was expected to be a temporary presence was lasting for years, but also because in some instances displaced persons were perceived as a threat. There are many reasons for the development of animosity among the host community towards the newcomers. Their presence might create further difficulties in accessing resources and essential services that might have already been insufficient. Displaced persons might be competing for livelihood opportunities with the residents and might have access to assistance that is not available for the resident population living in similar conditions. Rent increases that sometimes result from a large influx of people not only affect displaced persons themselves, but also the resident population, notably the urban poor, and returnees. This was the case in East Mosul, where substantial rent increases had prevented some returnees from going back to where they used to live, turning them into displaced persons within their own neighbourhood. At the same time, those residents who owned property sometimes took advantage of the increase in housing demand.

Potential positive impacts of displacement on communities and cities include the direct support of displaced persons for the local economy through spending and starting businesses, and the growth of the housing construction market, which creates a demand for materials and labour.<sup>35</sup> Displacement also brings humanitarian actors with resources and expertise to cities, who, in addition to supporting the local economy by providing jobs and buying goods and services, can contribute to local development agendas by enhancing urban services.<sup>36</sup> But these potential benefits rarely seem obvious to host communities and local authorities.

<sup>34</sup> Displaced people arriving in Maiduguri are normally screened on entering the city. This is the only screening undergone by people who settle within the host communities. Newcomers who go, or are taken, to one of the formal camps are screened again, as part of the security measures implemented by the authorities to protect camps from infiltration by members of the armed opposition. Additionally, daily screening exists in each camp for all persons entering or exiting (ICRC 2016b: 34–35).

<sup>35</sup> Guiu 2016: 28; World Bank 2017: 13.

<sup>36</sup> Branch 2013: 4; Büscher and Vlassenroot 2010: 10.

# MAIDUGURI

## NIGERIA

Nigerian photographer Rahima Gambo took photographs in Jiddari Polo, in Maiduguri. The displaced persons she met often talked of having had to leave their homes suddenly, with their children, and with nothing more than the clothes they had on their backs. They seemed disoriented and lacked a strong connection with their new environment. Some displaced people who had been interviewed and photographed in the past spoke of these encounters irritably, as they had led to nothing. Rahima suggested that they turn their backs to her camera, as an act of resistance.



A displaced family in Jiddari Polo, a neighbourhood of Maiduguri where significant numbers of displaced people have settled.





Isa Zakariya, 50, and his family have been living in this shelter in central Maiduguri for four years, after fleeing Bama. Back home, he sold medicines. Now he has to rely on his children, who sell food on the streets.



Furniture sold at the side of a street in an area where displaced people have settled.





Hawwa Musa, 31, and her daughter in Jiddari Polo.





Items brought by displaced people to represent objects that they left behind.





Maria Joseph, 32, has settled in Jiddari Polo.





Children play in the streets of Jiddari Polo.



## CHAPTER 2

# THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO URBAN DISPLACEMENT



Displacement creates clear needs, both for displaced people themselves and host communities. Humanitarian actors are well aware of this, but their response often falls short of sustainably addressing those needs. This section of the report considers the characteristics of the humanitarian response to urban displacement, reflecting on its limitations, in light of people's expectations and experience of displacement.

There are diverging views on what constitutes a suitable humanitarian response in urban settings. In Baidoa, in September 2017, both the authorities and United Nations agencies described the response to the crisis as adequate, in comparison with the response to the 2011 drought, which had been belated and ineffective in saving lives. While the worst might have been avoided, the response was far from perfect. It overlooked populations outside settlements, did not properly address urgent needs and lacked predictability and longer-term vision. Displaced persons had to cut their food intake, limit their water consumption, and those living outside camps faced repeated evictions and increasing vulnerability. Similar observations on the inadequacy of the response could be made in Maiduguri, East Mosul and San Pedro Sula.

Shortcomings in the humanitarian response in urban settings are often attributed to the scale and complexity of cities, with their interconnected systems and diverse social dynamics, their multi-layered governance amplifying the challenge of coordinating action between multiple stakeholders, and to humanitarian actors' limited urban expertise – as the response to urban displacement cannot simply replicate rural solutions.<sup>37</sup> Limitations also result from a lack of understanding of the role that humanitarians can play in such settings, the rigidity of planning and funding schemes, funding gaps, political interests and the dearth of reliable data that hampers planning. For instance, when the overall population of a city is not known – a common occurrence – it is difficult to estimate the water demand and in turn, assess if the water supply is adequate or if the health sector is able to cope. Without data, designing tailored programmes of the right scale is extremely difficult.

Failings also stem from the fact that the response is commonly built on unverified assumptions, most notably that displaced persons living in host communities fare better than those in camps, that they are difficult to identify and reach and that they face the same problems as the urban poor, hence, do not require specific support, and that the response to their problems is developmental. This reflects the challenges of regularly gathering reliable data, but also weaknesses in the analysis and use of existing data.

## 1. RESPONDING TO DISPLACEMENT IN CITIES: CURRENT APPROACHES

Three features characterize the typical response to urban displacement in countries affected by armed conflict: a focus on camps, when there are camps; a gap in the emergency response, as well as a lack of continuity and longer-term thinking, even in situations of protracted displacement; and overreliance on blanket responses rather than individualized ones. In contrast, in cities affected by violence, where camps tend not to be established, blanket responses are unusual. Only a small proportion of those displaced receive emergency assistance, the entry point being the individual or the household. This can be linked to the relatively individual nature of the phenomenon, as opposed to mass displacement, and to humanitarian actors' difficulties in engaging with affected communities in such situations.

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<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of urban systems, see Campbell 2016 and ICRC 2015.

## CAMP BIAS

In a displacement crisis, a significant proportion of displaced persons tend to settle outside formal and informal camps.<sup>38</sup> But in all locations studied in this report, the humanitarian response has focused on camps, with the obvious exception of San Pedro Sula. Baidoa, where relatively secure conditions allowed the presence of a vast number of humanitarian organizations, was the most extreme example of this. Displaced persons outside informal camps, or even those living in smaller informal gatherings inside the town, were simply overlooked. A fifth of the humanitarian assistance was aimed at the host community, a part of which might have reached some of the displaced living outside the camps. As in all other locations, humanitarian actors described people living outside camps as more privileged than those in camps, as they could count on the support of their host or otherwise afford paying rent; but there were no sound assessments to substantiate this claim. They also underscored the difficulty in identifying people dispersed in the city and the overwhelming and growing number of easily identifiable camps that humanitarian organizations were already unable to monitor, let alone properly support. This was true in all camps: despite the humanitarian focus on such sites, the assistance provided was never sufficient and consistent, partly because the coordination of the response was often flawed, leading to gaps and duplications.

Similar observations could be made in Maiduguri. Once the humanitarian response finally scaled up, more than two years into the emergency,<sup>39</sup> it focused on formal camps, as requested by the authorities, and, to some extent, on informal camps even if a majority of displaced people had settled in host communities – more than 60 per cent in January 2017.<sup>40</sup> Still, there have also been noticeable efforts to enhance the capacity of overstretched public services in areas of the city most affected by displacement. But access to food or cash assistance by people living dispersed in town was the exception. In Iraq as well, humanitarians have focused on camps, most often located in peri-urban or rural areas. In East Mosul's Al-Intisar, humanitarian access was seriously hindered by the prevailing insecurity. Host communities who were themselves profoundly affected by the conflict bore the brunt of supporting displaced populations. Some of the city's critical infrastructure was being rehabilitated by the authorities and humanitarian and development organizations, but people were still short of clean water, food and adequate housing.

*By directing their assistance almost exclusively to camps, humanitarian organizations seem to be pushing displaced persons with limited means to move there instead of settling with the host community.*

In all places, displaced persons were aware that they were more likely to receive assistance in camps, but most resisted moving to such settings, while some – such as in Baidoa – stressed that they were not allowed in because they belonged to the wrong clan. By directing their assistance almost exclusively to camps, humanitarian organizations seem to be pushing displaced persons with limited means to move there instead of settling with the host community. This focus on camps is not only inconsistent with people's needs and desires. It is also surprising given that humanitarians have long

<sup>38</sup> Several authors state that people displaced in cities mostly live outside camps (e.g. Beyani 2011: 7; World Bank 2017: 8; Lyytinen 2009: 9), but empirical evidence is scarce (Jacobsen *et al.* 2014: 21; Lyytinen 2009: 9).

<sup>39</sup> The ICRC started working in Maiduguri in 2012. Until early 2017, few other humanitarian actors were present, in part because of a lack of funding, but also because of a lack of political recognition of the scale of the crisis. By the end of the year, the humanitarian footprint was significant, with over 35 humanitarian organizations present. For reflections on the emergency gap in the response to the crisis in north-eastern Nigeria, see Edwards 2017.

<sup>40</sup> IOM Jan. 2017.

agreed that it is generally preferable for displaced people to live outside of camps, that camps should be the last resort and only a temporary solution, and that significant numbers of displaced persons do settle in communities.<sup>41</sup>

This seemingly counter-intuitive focus could stem from the common belief that displaced persons who settle outside of camps are less vulnerable than those in camps. In addition, in insecure areas, the somewhat controlled environment of camps can provide a feeling of safety to humanitarians and allow for economies of scale and a relatively straight-forward and standardized humanitarian response: populations can be registered – although registration is far from systematic – and the required food, water, shelter and services assessed accordingly. In some cases, especially if displaced persons are perceived as a potential security threat, governments may press humanitarian actors to focus on camps where populations are easier to control.

### THE EMERGENCY GAP AND THE CONTINUITY GAP

The humanitarian response to urban displacement appears imperfect in two contradictory ways: on the one hand, the emergency response is often belated and incomplete; on the other hand, the focus on emergency often hampers continuity and longer-term vision, which are crucial elements of an effective response in chronic or protracted crises and lasting displacement.<sup>42</sup>

In Baidoa, some programmes were carried out only temporarily or intermittently because of funding constraints even if needs were not durably addressed. For instance, there is a chronic water crisis in the city that affects displaced persons and permanent residents. To address urgent needs, water was being trucked to some of the informal camps for periods of time limited by the available funding. The trucking was then interrupted, even though the water shortage had not been solved. This was neither the first nor the last water crisis in Baidoa. Yet, no sustainable solution was being designed. In fact, the logic of the response seems to have consisted of injecting a relatively large amount of cash into the settlements, allowing displaced people to survive, but without genuinely trying to ensure adequate and consistent coverage of their urgent needs. Hence, when the ICRC conducted a rapid nutrition assessment in two of Baidoa's settlements in September 2017, the nutrition situation was considered critical in one, and serious in the other. In general, very little assistance seemed directed at preventing people from becoming completely destitute, let alone at helping them regain some autonomy and rebuild their lives by facilitating their access to livelihood opportunities. This can be explained in part by the often overwhelming size of the displaced population requiring support. But failing to assist people before they reach the bottom not only creates suffering, it is also inefficient, as they will take longer to recover. If helped rapidly to access employment opportunities, secure adequate housing and address potential legal hurdles to integrating into the host community, some displaced people would be able to normalize their situation and make progress toward a solution. This is especially true for those with skills adapted to urban contexts.

Similarly, in Nigeria, four years into a large-scale displacement, a significant part of the response remained focused on people's bare survival, although small-scale, longer-term projects to help people secure tenure, create stronger community networks to reach populations in need or help people re-establish a livelihood were being implemented. In East Mosul's Al-Intisar neighbourhood, there was no emergency response, which could have prevented some parents from sending their children to work or beg in the streets. In San Pedro Sula, given the difficulty of engaging with communities affected by violence

<sup>41</sup> See UNHCR 2009.

<sup>42</sup> The expression 'emergency gap' is borrowed from de Castellarnau and Stoianova 2018.

and, even more, with displaced persons seeking anonymity, humanitarian actors managed only to provide some emergency assistance to a very small portion of those fleeing the violence.

### *Balancing short and long term interventions*

Adequately responding to emergency needs is key. But long-term considerations must also be part of the humanitarian response because crises are often protracted and a number of displaced persons are likely to settle in cities in the long term, even if they struggle to meet their basic needs and face protection problems.<sup>43</sup> For instance, when surveyed about their intention to return in 2017, nearly half of the displaced persons in Baidoa stated that they planned to stay there.<sup>44</sup> In Maiduguri and Mosul, people coming from villages that had been fully destroyed were unlikely to go home. This was also true for people who had found a livelihood in town. Some Iraqis did not plan to return to their areas of origin where they feared retaliation. For those who had moved within Mosul, it seemed logical to stay in their new neighbourhood if they had managed to re-establish their lives there. Returning home was only a very remote possibility for displaced persons in San Pedro Sula, for whom local integration, if not relocation within the same city or elsewhere, was often the only option. In such cases, the hosting role of municipalities becomes permanent and displaced people need support to find ways to earn their living, secure stable accommodation and have access to urban services to integrate and regain their autonomy. Political will – and funding schemes adapted to longer-term programming<sup>45</sup> – to support such local integration and enable cities to absorb the increasing population is key.

*Adequately responding to emergency needs is key.  
But long-term considerations must also be part of the  
humanitarian response.*

Underscoring the longer-term vision that must shape the response does not consist in saying that humanitarian organizations should become development actors, but highlights that people should not be left to rely on emergency assistance for an extended period of time. They should be helped to rebuild their lives and make progress towards a solution as soon as possible, as their existence cannot be put on hold for months and years – although the emergency response itself might continue for an extended period of time when new displacement keeps occurring. For humanitarian organizations, striking the balance between short- and long-term needs and addressing these simultaneously rather than sequentially remains a major challenge, in part because of deep-rooted ways of working, but also because of the funding architecture. When repeated emergencies occur in a country, pressure related to time and resources often means that the tension between these two dimensions of the response is solved by simply postponing longer-term interventions.

<sup>43</sup> See Crawford *et al.* 2015.

<sup>44</sup> IOM 2017b.

<sup>45</sup> ICRC 2016.



### **Promising approach: Securing tenure and housing for displaced persons**

In Maiduguri, where evictions are a chronic problem, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) convinced landowners to formally agree to let displaced persons use their land for a year. In return, the NRC offered to drill boreholes that could be used by landlords and displaced persons, to provide reservoirs or to demarcate grazing or farming areas. After one year, some 70 per cent of the landowners renewed the agreement for a subsequent year. Displaced persons were provided with removable building materials. In the central neighbourhoods, where empty land was unlikely to be secured, the NRC focused on rehabilitating houses and completing unfinished buildings. In return, the landlords agreed to let vulnerable displaced households live in the buildings for free for a year, after which they could start asking for rent. To prepare for this eventuality, the NRC also helped people resume their livelihoods through start-up grants and training.

In other places, such as Colombia, informal settlements established on the fringes of cities by displaced people, without permission, have been legalized, thanks to joint efforts by municipal and national authorities, supported by UNHCR. Legalization not only addresses problems of tenure insecurity, but also allows the establishment of public services in the settlements.

It has long been acknowledged that needs generated by displacement clearly go beyond the capacities of humanitarian organizations.<sup>46</sup> In places like Mosul and Maiduguri, efforts to heal collective wounds, mend the social fabric and promote reconciliation and social cohesion, and rebuild infrastructure and the economy are badly needed to provide a solid foundation for social, political and physical reconstruction. In San Pedro Sula, State control, security and urban services in violence-affected neighbourhoods need to be strengthened, in addition to trust in the police and the judiciary. The adoption of national legislative and regulatory frameworks, policies and strategies on internal displacement consistent with the Guiding Principles is equally urgent.<sup>47</sup> Such measures – as well as economic development and poverty reduction initiatives – are needed not only to solve displacement, but also to prevent the emergence or perpetuation of conditions that lead to displacement in the first place.

*Humanitarian organizations have a role to play not only in meeting urgent needs, but also in supporting systems essential to people's survival and in helping people regain their autonomy.*

Development expertise ranging from urbanization to public services, housing, social cohesion or governance is required to sustainably and holistically address urban internal displacement.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, humanitarian organizations have a role to play not only in meeting urgent needs, but also in supporting systems essential to people's survival and in helping people regain their autonomy.<sup>49</sup> Such responses can be designed and implemented only by teaming up with municipal authorities, civil society, local service providers, professional associations, and representatives of displaced and resident communities, and in coordination with development organizations.<sup>50</sup> But differences in conceptual frameworks and operational approaches still hamper effective

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Crisp *et al.* 2012: 13; Metcalfe *et al.* 2012: 41; Williams 2011: 5.

<sup>47</sup> Beyani 2016: 19–22.

<sup>48</sup> Crisp *et al.* 2012: 13; Earle 2016: 215; Kälin 2017; Pantuliano *et al.* 2012: S15.

<sup>49</sup> ICRC 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Crisp *et al.* 2012:4; Earle 2016: 215.

cooperation between humanitarian and development organizations. For instance, in one of the locations studied, the ICRC has rehabilitated a water-pumping station based on the understanding that a development actor would restore the water-treatment plant. Months after the pumping station had been rehabilitated, the water-treatment plant was still not functional and the water flowing from people's taps was not drinkable.

#### **Promising approach: Helping people recover their autonomy**

In Maiduguri in 2017, the ICRC implemented a six-month project aimed at helping some 1,530 extremely vulnerable displaced and non-displaced households regain their financial autonomy. Heads of households – women, in 94 per cent of the cases – were provided with a one-off cash-for-livelihood grant, in addition to monthly cash transfers to address immediate household needs, allowing them to fully concentrate on establishing small businesses. Post-distribution monitoring showed that almost 85 per cent of the cash-for-livelihood grant was used to establish or expand an income-generating activity. Nearly all households said that their financial situation was better and that the monthly cash assistance had helped them access services and goods that they could not afford before.

In San Pedro Sula, the ICRC is considering how two programmes developed in Colombian cities to help displaced persons and other vulnerable residents earn their living could be tailored to local realities. One programme facilitates people's access to formal employment through partnerships with private and semi-private companies. The companies agree to hire candidates from those pre-identified by the ICRC. In return, the ICRC ensures their acquisition of the necessary 'soft skills' (e.g. how to interact with a superior or the importance of respecting work schedules) 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 labour certificate at the end of their contract.<sup>51</sup> This programme has highlighted the value of working with the private sector and within an established formal labour market to increase employment opportunities for displaced people and help them integrate in their new environment. This is crucial, particularly for those coming from rural areas, who, in the absence of adapted skills, official accreditation or social ties, otherwise fail to find employment.<sup>52</sup>

The second programme, also implemented with the Colombian Red Cross in coordination with the National Training Service, provides grants and vocational training to displaced persons for establishing micro-enterprises. Once recipients have established their business, they are encouraged to outsource some of their work to highly vulnerable people needing to work from home for protection or health reasons, identified by the ICRC. Both programmes have successfully helped households (with an 88 per cent income increase in 2016), but their impact is very modest compared to the scale of needs. However, they can be used to mobilize the authorities and other actors, and to explore ways in which displaced persons' socio-economic integration can be supported. Such approaches also show how humanitarian actors can integrate longer-term considerations into their responses and use partnerships to complement the efforts of development actors and ensure a more sustainable response.

<sup>51</sup> ICRC 2014.

<sup>52</sup> The ICRC estimates that a third of the beneficiaries keep their job after six months and another third move on to new opportunities.

## AN OVERRELIANCE ON BLANKET PROGRAMMES

In Maiduguri, just as in Mosul, the response outside camps often focused on affected neighbourhoods, aiming at enhancing urban services catering to the needs of displaced people and residents. These efforts translated into the rehabilitation and expansion of municipal water-supply systems, health facilities and schools and helped ensure access to services for entire communities. This certainly alleviated the pressure on host communities, helped people meet some of their basic needs and could contribute to lessening tensions between host communities and those displaced. This approach largely reflects the idea that in urban settings, it is necessary to embrace larger-scale interventions directed at interdependent urban services and infrastructure, rather than concentrate only on individuals or households.<sup>53</sup>

The lack of individual targeting outside camps was often explained by the overwhelming scale of needs and the difficulty of identifying displaced people in crowded urban settings, let alone those who are more vulnerable, hence more likely to require individual support. It was also assumed that displaced persons living dispersed in host communities experienced the same difficulties as their non-displaced neighbours, and thus did not require specific support. But this does not take into account specific barriers that may prevent displaced persons from accessing available services, such as the lack of official documentation. It also neglects some of their urgent needs and lets them spiral into extreme poverty and potentially life-threatening situations. In other words, relying only on blanket programmes fails to provide adequate support to the most vulnerable individuals and families displaced within the communities by leaving them to fend for themselves.

*Relying only on blanket programmes fails to provide adequate support to the most vulnerable individuals and families displaced within the communities by leaving them to fend for themselves.*

Ali in Baidoa, whose family was at constant risk of eviction and whose wife no longer produced enough milk for their baby, and Faiza in Maiduguri, who, in the absence of support, was sending her children to beg in the market, were vivid illustrations of what happens when there is no safety net. San Pedro Sula was, once more, the exception. There too, the response was limited, but unlike in other locations, it mostly targeted individuals and not communities. The few displaced people receiving assistance had often been identified outside the community setting when they approached humanitarian actors for help in seeking protection abroad, or when they passed through reception centres for returned migrants, upon being deported from the U.S. or Mexico. Some community-based projects aiming to address the root causes of the violence or its consequences, particularly for youth, were implemented by local organizations, but without a displacement focus.

Responses targeting whole communities, as well as urban systems, are essential. But they should be combined with approaches that ensure that displaced people's specific needs are addressed through interventions at normative and policy levels, as well as through individualized measures addressing specific vulnerabilities and supporting people's recovery.<sup>54</sup> Humanitarian actors can engage with local and central authorities to ensure that they recognize the reality and challenges of urban displacement, to remind them of their responsibility to protect and assist internally displaced persons, and to support the development of an institutional response. This includes the adoption of laws and policies upholding State's obligations and the rights of all internally

<sup>53</sup> Earle 2016: 223.

<sup>54</sup> Earle 2016: 223; Global Alliance for Urban Crises 2016a: 7.

displaced persons under international law, and their implementation. A sustained dialogue with authorities – who sometimes express reluctance to carry out individualized interventions, as they fear that these will facilitate the permanent settlement of displaced persons in cities – might also be necessary. Humanitarians can also support local civil society organizations, mobilize other actors and implement programmes to protect and assist displaced people in a coordinated manner, in place of the authorities until they become operational or to complement their efforts.

#### **Promising approach: Enhancing the operational resilience of urban services**

In Iraq, as in a number of other 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. Although a significant number of displaced persons might decide to go home at some point, such expansion of the infrastructure will not be wasted: as cities keep growing, an increased quantity of water for domestic use will be progressively necessary, even if people use it responsibly. In doing so, the ICRC does not specifically target displaced persons, but neighbourhoods where water is most needed – although the absence of reliable statistics on the size of the population always makes it difficult to assess water needs precisely.

In addition to ensuring that people have reliable access to safe water, the ICRC's water programmes tap into and contribute to maintaining and, if necessary, building local capacity by working closely with local service providers and training service operators to run and maintain the infrastructure. In other words, the ICRC's urban service approach factors in the personnel, infrastructure and consumables required to ensure a sustainable access to services during times of crisis. 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 or public bakeries. Providing longer-term support to municipal service providers helps to reduce, if not stabilize, the rate of service decline. Such an approach, combined with activities addressing people's specific assistance and protection needs, responds to the immediate needs of the population and works towards securing 'development holds' against the development reversals caused by lasting conflict and displacement.<sup>55</sup>

## **2. A CALL TO QUESTION ASSUMPTIONS**

The characteristics of the response to urban displacement notably result from a number of unverified assumptions – and routine ways of operating – that guide the development of programmes. Whole-of-neighbourhood responses without individual or household responses are favoured, in part because of the assumption that displaced persons in urban settings face the same problems as the urban poor but are harder to identify. The camp bias can also be explained by the assumed difficulty of identifying displaced persons in urban areas and by the assumption that people outside camps tend to be better off than those living in camps. The latter can also explain both the limitations in the emergency response and the lack of continuity in the response.

<sup>55</sup> For more, see ICRC 2015.

The dearth of accurate data on displaced persons outside camps and the limited use of urban profiling and multi-sector needs assessment methodologies makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to assess the validity of these assumptions in different displacement situations.<sup>56</sup> The available information, however, makes it clear that these assumptions are not universally true and should be systematically assessed against local realities.

### **ASSUMPTION 1: INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN URBAN SETTINGS ARE HARDER TO FIND**

It is often stressed that displaced people living outside camps in cities are harder to identify than those in formal and informal camps. They can be difficult to distinguish from migrant labourers and permanent residents. Some may wish to remain invisible for security reasons or to avoid discrimination. Some may be highly mobile because of continued insecurity or a lack of stable accommodation. Access to areas of settlement can be limited by insecurity or by the authorities, and people living in host communities may be dispersed across wide areas.

While it is true that displaced persons in urban settings may be less immediately visible than their counterparts in rural areas or camps, it is not impossible to locate them, while striking a balance between singling out people in need of support and respecting displaced people for whom remaining unnoticed is key to their protection.<sup>57</sup> In Mosul, Baidoa and Maiduguri, local informants – for instance, traditional, community or neighbourhood leaders, including displaced persons themselves, local authorities, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – could identify neighbourhoods hosting displaced populations, locate displaced persons themselves and be used as trusted intermediaries. The Joint Internal Displacement Profiling Service has supported the profiling of populations in displacement-affected cities, including Erbil in Iraq and Mogadishu in Somalia, and has published guidance for profiling urban displacement situations in which local actors play a key role. The Stronger Cities Initiative has also developed operational guidance on identification, mapping and vulnerability assessments in contexts of urban displacement.<sup>58</sup> Identifying displaced persons requires sustained engagement with communities over time, but is possible – although in San Pedro Sula, just like in other violence-ridden cities in Honduras, it proved more difficult because of the prevailing insecurity and serious protection concerns faced by some individuals.

*Identifying displaced persons requires sustained engagement with communities over time, but is far from impossible.*

As long as displaced persons are deemed invisible, and insufficient data collected on their demographics, basic needs, protection problems and coping strategies, their situation cannot be effectively monitored, understood or addressed. They also receive little donor attention as a result of being out of the public eye, and continue to be seen as less deserving of attention than people in camps.

The real challenge, particularly in cities of countries experiencing armed conflict, lies in the identification of people needing protection or assistance to address a specific problem or to prevent them from spiralling into extreme poverty. As simply put by an ICRC economic security specialist in Maiduguri: “All have needs. The problem is to identify

<sup>56</sup> Brookings-LSE 2013: 7; for urban profiling guidance, see Jacobsen *et al.* 2014; for an urban multi-sector vulnerability assessment tool, see Mohiddin *et al.* 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Mohiddin *et al.* 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Jacobsen *et al.* 2014 and Mohiddin *et al.* 2017.

those with the greatest needs.” This entails rethinking methodologies of engagement and, to some extent, reversing engagement dynamics: humanitarian organizations tend to physically go to populations affected. When populations are dispersed in urban settings, it might well be that humanitarian organizations must find ways to also allow populations to come to them to flag their needs and problems – for instance, by setting up community centres where people can seek advice, share problems, collect assistance or meet. This entails identifying and removing potential obstacles to people’s access, but also clearly promoting services that are being offered and to whom, including through digital means.

**Promising approach: Engaging with communities and grassroots organizations**

In all the locations visited, the importance of a sustained engagement with local communities and grassroots organizations to gain a greater understanding of social dynamics and the trust of communities has been highlighted, just as the need to rethink methodologies of engagement to allow populations affected to have access to humanitarian organizations to seek assistance and protection. In Maiduguri, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has created more than 25 protection action groups to act as an interface with the residents of selected neighbourhoods. These groups, made up of seven community members and displaced persons elected by the community, contribute to monitoring the implementation of activities and reporting protection problems. They also help the IRC understand people’s coping mechanisms, and they convey the views of the community in the development of action plans. For over two years, the IRC has been building the groups’ capacity through training and mentoring. They eventually set up centres staffed by the protection action groups where people from the community could obtain information on existing services, request assistance and file complaints. Mobile desks providing the same services were also set up for people unable to reach the centres for various reasons.

In San Pedro Sula, just as in other municipalities of Honduras facing generalized violence, the church, the Honduran Red Cross and other local civil society organizations with an established and trusted presence within affected communities serve as entry points. International organizations, including the ICRC, rely on them to gain direct access to violent neighbourhoods and to have cases referred to them of highly vulnerable persons who are threatened by gangs and need help to relocate elsewhere. As responses to displacement are still being developed, local outreach organizations are crucial partners for implementing projects that, while addressing the impact of the violence in some of the affected neighbourhoods, can also serve to reach displaced persons in need of support living within the same community.



## ASSUMPTION 2: INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN URBAN SETTINGS LIVING OUTSIDE CAMPS ARE BETTER OFF THAN PEOPLE IN CAMPS

When asked about the limited focus on people outside camps, humanitarians often state that displaced persons living in host communities are in a better situation than those in camps because they either receive support from relatives or friends or can afford to rent accommodation, and have better livelihood opportunities. It is true that host communities often assist displaced persons, but it is also true that host communities are often themselves poor, with limited resources to share and affected by the surrounding armed conflict or violence. North-eastern Nigeria, for instance, has long been experiencing food insecurity and poverty.<sup>59</sup> Mosul's inhabitants might have been fine financially before the armed conflict, but after years of fighting that destroyed their homes and the economy, their resources have vanished. People with relatives in a city are more likely to be directly and consistently assisted, at least for some time. Those without family links are sometimes left to manage on their own or might receive occasional support. In Maiduguri, Baidoa and Mosul, people from the host community underscored their obligation to help the displaced – and have generously welcomed newcomers – but also stressed that as temporary assistance turned into long-term support, they felt drained.

People displaced outside camps are not universally better off than people in camps. Ali, in Baidoa, might initially have been in a better situation than other displaced persons, having left his village with some capital. But after months in Baidoa, in the absence of a regular income and community or humanitarian support, his family was impoverished and fearing eviction. Faiza, in Maiduguri, did manage to cope until she had a new baby and had to send her young children to beg in the market. These are people who did not live in camps. But their vulnerability was obvious.

*People displaced outside camps are not universally better off than people in camps.*

People living outside camps can fare better in some areas of life, and worse in others. This varies from one person to the other, from one location to another, and over time, given that people's situation is not static and varies as stress and opportunities arise. People displaced in cities may be closer to livelihood opportunities, may have greater access to urban services and enjoy more freedom of movement than people in camps. But they also face unique struggles. They might live close to public services, but, in the absence of a stable income, may not be able to afford to pay for amenities, food or housing. They may also lack the necessary documentation to gain access to services. In Maiduguri, for instance, the International Rescue Committee estimated that some 80 per cent of all displaced persons did not have official documentation, which hampered their access to hospitals, schools and property, and could lead to their being arrested at checkpoints. People coming from rural areas might have had no identification documents before, but suddenly needed them in an urban setting. Displaced persons in cities are also less likely to have access to assistance, based on the assumption that they are self-reliant.<sup>60</sup> They often endure the constant threat of eviction because of their inability to pay rent or because they are illegal occupants. They can be at risk of secondary displacement owing to insecurity, hazards and limited police protection.<sup>61</sup> And they are often exposed to greater discrimination and exploitation than in camps.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Edwards 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Crisp and Refstie 2011: 6; Lyytinen 2009: 26; NRC 2015: 3.

<sup>61</sup> Alcayna and Al-Murani 2016: 17; Duijsens 2010: 15; Satterthwaite 2009: 299.

<sup>62</sup> UN-Habitat 2010: 156.



**Promising approach: Supporting access to government programmes**

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. 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.

**ASSUMPTION 3: INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS HAVE THE SAME PROBLEMS AS THE URBAN POOR**

It can be difficult to distinguish the needs and problems of displaced persons in urban settings from other populations affected or the urban poor. In East Mosul's Al-Intisar neighbourhood, for instance, nearly everyone had been displaced at some point during the military operation, experiencing hardship and exhausting their resources. Many of the families who were hosting displaced persons had previously been displaced or otherwise intimately affected by the military operation and faced similar difficulties as those displaced. In other places, such as Kabul, Nairobi and Abidjan, many of the poor experienced similar living conditions and challenges whether they were displaced or not.<sup>63</sup> Shared difficulties can explain in part why, when displaced persons receive support beyond that of their hosts, it is often as part of the urban poor. This addresses some of their needs and can contribute to easing tensions.

Yet, displaced persons can have particular difficulties that are not solved through blanket programmes. For instance, displaced persons and their non-displaced neighbours in Abidjan, Bogota, Khartoum or Santa Marta experienced the same stresses because of poverty and poor provision of essential services, but displaced people were poorer, more traumatized, experienced more insecurity and had fewer assets.<sup>64</sup> In Mogadishu, they faced higher risk and incidence of forced evictions than their neighbours, as they more often lacked tenure security.<sup>65</sup>

Numerous factors can put displaced people at a disadvantage compared to the urban poor: in addition to having experienced the stress of fleeing, and in some cases, of being separated from or even losing family members, they often lose their assets and social networks, have to find new accommodation and sources of income, and gain access to services, which can be hampered by a lack of official documentation. Those coming from rural areas often have lower education and lack skills relevant for urban livelihoods.<sup>66</sup> Several studies have found that displaced persons are more likely to be unemployed and if they are working, it is more often in the informal sector.<sup>67</sup> Some face discrimination and abuse on account of being displaced or may continue to be threatened by those who forced them to flee in the first place.<sup>68</sup> These elements challenge the idea that by the mere fact of living in host communities, displaced persons have socially integrated and do not require specific protection and assistance.

<sup>63</sup> Jacobsen 2011 ; Metcalfe *et al.* 2011 and 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Albuja and Ceballos 2010: 10; Davies and Jacobsen 2010: 13; Lopez *et al.* 2011: 58.

<sup>65</sup> Government of Somalia *et al.* 2016: 4.

<sup>66</sup> Aysa-Lastra 2011:299; de Geoffroy 2009: 517.

<sup>67</sup> Carrillo 2009: 538; Jacobsen *et al.* 2014: 7; UNHCR and OAS 2016: 4.

<sup>68</sup> Davies and Jacobsen 2010: 14.

This does not mean that humanitarian interventions should strictly or preferentially target displaced persons, but that the specificity of their situation must be understood and taken into account when designing programmes. Displaced persons must also be seen as a heterogeneous group, differing in gender, age and capacities: they may settle in the same urban area, but women, men, children, elderly persons and persons with disabilities have different needs and coping strategies, and may face specific protection concerns. Their needs and vulnerabilities will also change over time. Some remain in extremely difficult situations, others fare better. Skills and local contacts appear to be key for escaping destitution and isolation.<sup>69</sup>

*Numerous factors can put displaced people at a disadvantage compared to the urban poor.*

An adequate response that takes into account both the particular experience of displaced persons in urban settings, and the impact of armed conflict and violence and related displacement on other segments of the populations, relies on complementary and coordinated efforts by humanitarian and development organizations in support of the authorities and other central and municipal actors. Development organizations may be better placed than humanitarians to work with public authorities on broader structural issues of unemployment and poverty reduction, but are often not in a position to address specific vulnerabilities at the individual and household levels. Humanitarian organizations may also have a well-developed capacity in areas that remain out of reach for development organizations because of continuing insecurity or the absence of a functioning government.

In general, an effective response to urban displacement can be built only on evidence and context-sensitive analysis, not on unverified assumptions. This calls for improved data and analysis to inform humanitarian interventions, and for a better use of existing data.

**Promising approach: Facilitating the dialogue between various levels of authorities**

In Honduras, to enhance coordination between the various levels of government in responding to internal displacement, UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council supported a meeting between the Inter-Institutional Commission for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence and the municipal authorities of San Pedro Sula, which led to the adoption of a joint plan of action for establishing a referral system to support displaced persons. Similar meetings took place in other municipalities. Such initiatives can help build a constructive dialogue between different levels of government, ensuring that shared responsibilities are acknowledged and concrete steps envisaged to move forward in addressing displacement. Multi-level coordination is often challenging, but it is also essential for developing an adequate response to displacement and for ensuring that municipal authorities are not left feeling overwhelmed by the scale of needs. Coordination involves the sharing, in a timely manner, of information necessary to develop a common vision, effective inclusion of municipal authorities in planning and decision-making processes related to the development of legislative and regulatory frameworks, policies and strategies, and appropriate allocation of resources.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Agadjanian 1998: 284, 289; Metcalfe *et al.* 2012: 24; NRC 2015: 10.

<sup>70</sup> Inter-Institutional Commission for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence 2017 and nd.

# SAN PEDRO SULA

## HONDURAS

Honduran photographer Delmer Membreño met with three families who had been displaced within San Pedro Sula by gang violence. Some had resisted extortion by the gang in charge, and others had been directly threatened because of their relatives' activities. All of them had tried to leave Honduras for Mexico or the United States; but they had all either been unable to cross the border or had been returned to Honduras.



Five-year-old Maria was displaced with her mother and sister after her father was killed for refusing to pay 'war tax'. The family moved from the centre of San Pedro Sula to its outskirts, in search of safety. "There is no transportation, there is no work," says Maria's mother. "But now we feel peace and sleep better, without fear."





Inside Maria's family shelter.



Extortion is rampant in San Pedro Sula, including in public transport. Those who do not comply with the demands made of them might be putting their lives at risk.





Maria's mother prepares food for the family – most often, rice and beans. She makes chicken soup only on special occasions.





Before leaving for school, Rosa pets one of the dogs adopted by her mother to protect the family after they were forced to flee by the gang in control of the area where they lived.





Maria and her sister sometimes complain that they would like to live like other children: freely and safely.



A displaced woman visits a house built for her after she was forced to flee her old home for refusing to sell drugs for the gang in control of the area.





## CHAPTER 3

# IMPROVING THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO URBAN DISPLACEMENT

As internal displacement is increasingly urban, significant efforts have been made to develop an adequate humanitarian response to displacement in urban settings in the last few years. This is translating into a greater understanding of complex urban systems and recognition of the importance of enhancing access to urban services for affected communities and of engaging with municipal authorities and local actors.

Even so, this study has highlighted that the response to urban displacement caused by armed conflict or violence still needs significant improvements to address people's urgent needs and help them preserve their sense of dignity, regain their autonomy and plan for the future. It is essential to further unpack people's experience of displacement to develop responses based on reliable data and context-sensitive analysis, rather than assumptions.

People flee to cities hoping to find safety, but also access to services, livelihoods, social networks and support from relatives and friends, and, eventually, humanitarian assistance. Arriving in cities, most receive limited support and struggle to meet their basic needs. Many say that with relatively little assistance they would be able to resume an income-generating activity and would no longer need support, although their efforts to normalize their situation are often also obstructed by insecurity, direct threats and the social, legal and political environment.

People's experience is shaped by their location of displacement and situation in displacement, but it is also deeply influenced by their individual history and characteristics, their place of origin and patterns of displacement. Hence, within cities, people's situation can vary radically – that is, between people, but also for an individual, through time. For host families and communities who often show great solidarity in receiving displaced persons, displacement evolves into a burden when it becomes prolonged and support from the government or humanitarian organizations is minimal or nil. This can create tensions and evolve into protection problems for displaced people.

A holistic understanding of how to address individual or household needs in the short and longer term, in addition to tackling community needs and supporting urban systems, and how to bring these critical dimensions of the response together, is key to improving the response. Displaced people, host communities and local authorities are clearly core to that reflection and must fully participate in decision-making and activities directly affecting them. Developing a long-term vision does not mean that humanitarian organizations should be implementing programmes for decades, but that mobilization of other actors and programmes that can later be handed to other actors, including the authorities, the civil society or development organizations, must aim at enhancing the resilience of people and systems. And such a long-term vision must also inform continuous efforts to encourage, persuade and support authorities to assume their obligations more fully, notably with a view to engaging them on durable solutions as early as possible.

The Global Alliance for Urban Crises has already underlined the importance of recognizing the scale and complexity of urban crises, of working with the systems that shape cities and of managing urban displacement. Building on those very relevant recommendations, we call on humanitarian organizations – including the ICRC and other components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – and all other actors involved in the humanitarian response to concentrate on improving four core areas of the response through placing people at the centre, focusing on dignity and resilience, building responses on reliable data and exploring the opportunities created by urban displacement.



## 1. Place people at the centre

Humanitarian organizations have made significant efforts to enhance their engagement with populations affected in recent years. Yet most displaced people we talked to had not met with humanitarian or government organizations. They had not been consulted on how to adequately help them respond to their needs and become self-sufficient again. They did not know where to seek assistance or protection, nor what were the criteria for being supported. It seems obvious that people affected – their priorities, concerns, capacity and aspirations – must be at the centre of the humanitarian lens, but practice sometimes steers away from that, in part because consulting people is deemed to take time and likely to create expectations that cannot be met. And, in cities affected by armed conflict or violence, it can feel like an unsafe and overwhelming, if not impossible, endeavour.<sup>71</sup>

**Help people come to us** – Given that it can be difficult to reach people dispersed in urban settings, humanitarian organizations must find ways of ensuring two-way access to also allow people to safely come to them to share their views, express their needs and protection concerns, seek support and access assistance. Nurturing proximity involves providing safe meeting spaces, but also ensuring that people receive clear information on available services and criteria for accessing them.

**Take time** – Building meaningful engagement with displaced people and host communities to work together towards enhancing their protection and enabling solutions takes time. It requires developing community networks, gaining people's trust, listening to what they have to say and providing them feedback. Training staff to implement community-based approaches and methodologies may be instrumental in that regard. Humanitarian actors must be able to devote time and resources to this, which entails changing the current humanitarian architecture to ease the pressure to always show quick results. Donors must play their part to bring about this change.

**Assess humanitarian performance accordingly** – The ability to place populations affected at the centre, include them in the planning, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of interventions, and be accountable to them must be regarded as a key indicator of a successful response. It must be part of the criteria by which humanitarian organizations assess their performance and are assessed by populations affected and donors.

## 2. Focus on dignity and resilience

Ensuring that people survive is essential. But humanitarian action is also committed to helping people live in dignity. This goes beyond physical survival and relates to people's sense of autonomy, their ability to make choices, their feeling of being respected and valued by others. Displaced persons repeatedly conveyed their sense of having lost their dignity, their place in the world. Helping people preserve or regain their sense of dignity has to be at the centre of the humanitarian response.

**Stay by people's side as long as needed** – Focusing on dignity entails supporting people before they become completely destitute and until they can resume a dignified life. Humanitarian actors must also be able to anticipate situations that, if not addressed today, will result in serious risks for people's safety and well-being. This requires approaching emergency support and resilience building simultaneously from the beginning of displacement rather than as sequential times of the response. Integrating long-term considerations in the humanitarian response – not only

<sup>71</sup> For more on engaging with communities affected by armed conflict, see Jimenez-Damary 2017 and ICRC and HHI 2018.

through direct implementation, but also by engaging the authorities on assuming their responsibilities and mobilizing other relevant actors – can also help prevent development reversals, in view of future development interventions.

**Recognize that capital and income are key to people's recovery** – Assets and a stable income cannot solve all the displacement-related problems of people. Yet, it is essential for people to be able to meet their basic needs, secure adequate housing and, more generally, normalize their situation and re-establish a dignified life. Livelihood programmes are often deemed costly and time-consuming – and it is true that building people's resilience entails significant short-term investments, but in the long run, such investment helps people regain their autonomy, and lessens the likelihood of their having to endlessly rely on support from the government or humanitarian organizations. Capital and income may not address insecurity, discrimination or a lack of official documents, but they make people less vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and can protect them from resorting to harmful coping strategies.

**Consider the full spectrum of durable solutions** – The possibility for displaced people to express views and make choices over their own future is closely connected to durable solutions. It cannot be assumed that all people want or are able to return to what used to be their homes. It is therefore key to help people settle where it suits them from the onset. This requires proactive measures of municipal governance in which displaced persons are included in urban planning and the development of cities. Supporting displaced persons' access to livelihoods, essential services and adequate housing at their current place, and advocating for a comprehensive and voluntary approach to durable solutions with the authorities, are essential steps towards promoting all solutions, including local integration – often the preferred option for those displaced in cities, but not always welcomed by the authorities. Even if returning remains people's ultimate goal, such an approach allows them to normalize their situation, prepares them for rebuilding their communities if and when the opportunity to return arises, and helps reduce the risk of premature returns caused by unbearable conditions in the location of displacement.

### 3. Build responses on reliable data and analysis, rather than generalizations and assumptions

As repeatedly stressed in this paper, an effective response must be built on reliable data and not on unverified assumptions. Failing to contextually verify assumptions leads to significant weaknesses in the response. These have real-life consequences.

**Uncover the full picture** – To ensure that urban responses are based on existing needs, we need disaggregated data to better understand people's everyday experiences of displacement according to their gender, age, capacity and origin. Both location (urban or peri-urban, living in formal or informal camps or in a host community) and type of accommodation (individual, grouped, rented, hosted, etc.) are important, as is longitudinal analysis of how people's situation changes over time. The situation of host families and host communities must also be analysed to capture the impact of displacement on them. The profiling of urban displacement situations, which provides a methodology that suits dispersed, less visible populations and enables a comparative analysis between different population groups residing in similar areas, is extremely useful in this regard – and human and financial resources must be allocated for it.

**Work at different scales** – We need to understand the specific needs and vulnerabilities of people displaced in cities and the impact that their displacement has had on their host communities and cities, and address these by engaging at different levels

– city, community, household and individual – through structural interventions and tailored responses. By supporting all those affected by displacement, such responses can also contribute to easing tensions between displaced people and their hosts.

#### 4. Explore the opportunities created by urban displacement

Displacement in cities is portrayed overwhelmingly as a burden to host families, host communities and the cities themselves. It is true that it creates great challenges, but the arrival of displaced people in a city can also bring opportunities that are worth exploring – and large-scale arrivals can literally create new cities.

**Build urban knowledge while responding to urban emergencies** – An emergency response to displacement is a challenge, but it can also be used by humanitarian actors to quickly gain knowledge of an urban reality and establish key contacts with communities, grassroots organizations, authorities and other relevant local actors who are familiar with the city and the displaced populations, and are essential to the development of an adequate response in the short and longer term.

**Dare to fail** – To develop better responses to urban displacement, we need to explore new approaches. To innovate and test ideas, we need to allow ourselves to fail and learn from experience – and donors must be willing to support such essential exploration. In doing so, we need to collect and share good practices.

**Team up** – The challenges attached to responding to urban displacement cannot be met by a single organization or by humanitarian actors alone. They require a multi-stakeholder and holistic approach bringing together municipal and local authorities, civil society, the displaced persons themselves and host communities, the private sector, humanitarian and development organizations and donors. This is an opportunity to leverage existing capacities and expertise, based on the various mandates and responsibilities involved, and to promote better data, joint analysis, multi-donor approaches and multi-year funding cycles.

# MOSUL

## IRAQ

Iraqi photographer Hawre Khalid has spent long periods of time in Mosul in recent years, witnessing the war. For this project, he photographed people who had fled from West Mosul to East Mosul in search of safety. He writes: “The people in Mosul have suffered a lot, more than I could ever imagine. Most of them have experience pain, lost, sadness. Their life is hard, more than anyone can imagine, yet they prefer not to stay in the camps. They told me that outside the camps, they are at least freer, have more privacy, and can find a job.”



A woman walks past a car wrecked during the fighting in Mosul.





Safwan Ghafif takes a break from work at the fish market. He lost his wife and one of his legs during the war. The fish market used to be on Mosul's west bank, but because of the extensive destruction in the western part of the city, it was moved to the east bank.



Ahmed and Younis, both fishermen, used to live on the west bank of the Tigris river, but their houses were destroyed during the conflict. They moved to east Mosul, where they continue to fish.





Displaced children play on a car destroyed by the fighting.



Satar's family fled from west to east Mosul after their house was destroyed. He spent more than a year without a job, until he finally found one in a cafe, earning some 250 US dollars a month.





Muhammed Zedan prays at his friend's place. After the death of his father during the war, he took his family to east Mosul, where he found a job as a waiter.



Sana Ibrahim is looking after 22 of her grandchildren, as four of her sons were killed during the fighting and two were kidnapped. She fled from west to east Mosul.





Muhammed Aziz fled from west to east Mosul after his house was destroyed. He works as a tailor in a shop and because he doesn't have a home, spends his nights in the shop.



Adam is one of Sana's grandchildren. His father, who used to be in the Iraqi army, was killed during the war.

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# ANNEX A: METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATIONS CONSULTED

The research presented in this report was conducted through a desk review, selected case studies and interviews with key informants. The focus was on the experience of displaced people and receiving communities, and not on the prevention of conditions leading to displacement, in areas where the ICRC is either responding, or is in the process of assessing needs or developing a response. It did not focus on flash displacement, but on longer-term displacement.

The research followed two lines of inquiry:

1. What is the perspective of displaced people and host communities on their situation? What are their priorities, what difficulties do they face and what coping mechanisms do they adopt?
2. How are the perspectives of internally displaced persons and the host communities captured, and how pivotal are they, in the current humanitarian response?

Case studies were selected to reflect different patterns (rural to urban, inter- and intra-urban) and contexts of urban displacement (city affected by armed conflict, i.e. Mosul and Maiduguri; city affected by generalized violence, i.e. San Pedro Sula; city in a relatively stable area of a country affected by an armed conflict, i.e. Baidoa). Visits to the four sites for data-collection purposes lasted seven to fourteen days and were carried out between September 2017 and February 2018. In each site, except San Pedro Sula, a combination of focus-group discussions (men, women, youth, community leaders, host community members) and individual interviews with displaced persons and members of the host community were organized to gather qualitative data. In San Pedro Sula, in light of people's wish to remain anonymous, only individual interviews were conducted. Participants were identified through community leaders, local organizations, including the Honduran Red Cross in San Pedro Sula, and the ICRC. Some 155 displaced persons (57 female, 98 male) and 28 members of host communities (16 female, 11 male) were consulted for the research. When possible, people were met in their place of displacement. Access was limited in Baidoa for security reasons, which means that most displaced persons were interviewed on ICRC premises. People in San Pedro Sula were also met outside the community setting, to avoid drawing attention to their situation. Selected organizations responding to the displacement, and national and local authorities, were also interviewed (see tables below).

The literature review was conducted by Nadine Walicki, independent consultant. It aimed to determine the extent to which the literature supported or refuted common assumptions on urban internal displacement. It also compiled information on the motivations for internal flight to, between and within cities, the impact and challenges of urban internal displacement, and recommendations and good practices for addressing the phenomenon. In doing so, it tried to distinguish what is specific to urban displacement and identify the similarities in internal displacement from one urban context to another. The academic and 'grey' literature was gathered from academic journals, research institutes, urban-focused and displacement-focused organizations, using set search strings and inclusion and exclusion criteria. Key experts were also approached for their recommendations for pertinent literature. The first four pages of Google and

Google Scholar search results were also reviewed. The scope of the research was limited to articles published in English and Spanish after 1992. Out of 367 documents captured according to the research protocol, a final set of 105 documents with a main focus on urban internal displacement was retained, spanning from 1998 to 2018 (and, in most cases, no earlier than 2013).

The project has resulted in this policy report, and in an internal report focused on the response of the ICRC.

### Authorities consulted

| Honduras   | Mosul, Iraq   |
|--|---|
| Mesa de Protección de la Mujer y Niñez, Alcaldía, San Pedro Sula                       | Ministry of Displacement and Migration  |
| Secretaría de Derechos Humanos, Justicia y Gobernación y Decentralización, Tegucigalpa | Sheikh of Hay Al-Intisar  |
| Maiduguri, Nigeria   | Baidoa, Somalia   |
| National Emergency Management Agency   | South West State: <i>Acting President and Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resettlement and Diaspora Affairs, Minister for Humanitarian and Disaster Management, Deputy Minister for Planning</i> |
| Borno State Emergency Management Agency  |   |
| Area of supervision Maisandari ward, Maiduguri   | Bay Regional Governor   |

### Organizations and experts consulted

| Former and current special rapporteurs on the human rights of internally displaced persons | International organizations | NGOs                               |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Chaloka Beyani   | IOM                         | Casa Alianza, Honduras             |
| Cecilia Jimenez-Damary   | UNDP                        | Comision de Accion Social Menonita |
| Walter Kälin   | UN-Habitat                  | Danish Refugee Council             |
|  | UNHCR                       | International Rescue Committee     |
| <b>Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement</b>   | OCHA                        | Intersos                           |
| ICRC   | WFP                         | Joint IDP Profiling Service        |
| IFRC   |                             | Norwegian Refugee Council          |
| Honduran Red Cross   | <b>Donors</b>               | Pastoral de Movilidad Humana       |
| Nigerian Red Cross Society   | Switzerland                 | Save the Children International    |
| Somali Red Crescent Society  | USA                         |                                    |










## MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

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