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FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

UN-Habitat's Practices towards solutions

Preamble

This note discusses how working towards sustainable urbanization can provide scaled solutions to forced displacement. It further illustrates the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement in developing policies, strategies, and programs to address forced displacement in a territorial and integrated manner. Lastly, it illustrates how UN-Habitat's expertise and experience in fragile settings can add value to broader UN efforts.

1. Forced displacement: An increasingly urban phenomena

Among the root causes of forced displacement is the inability of national and local governments to manage drivers of displacement such as conflict, climate impact or other risks. Hence, the number of forcibly displaced persons is growing rapidly, increasingly seeking refuge in urban areas.

Since 2009, the number of displaced people has increased by 63.6%. Millions of forcibly displaced people live in protracted situations, placing immense pressure on host cities and communities already grappling with social, economic and development challenges. Women and girls are disproportionally affected by these circumstances.

Refugees	IDPs	Asylum seekers	Other people in need of international protection	Total forcibly displaced worldwide
36.4 million	75.9 million[5]	6.1 million	5.3 million	110.3 million

Source: IDMC, 2024; Mid-year trend 2023/UNHCR[6]

Forcibly displaced people are seeking refuge in urban areas, searching for better access to basic services, livelihoods, and living conditions. However, rapid influxes of people in cities pose challenges for governments, particularly local governments.
The latter struggle to supply the increased demand for essential services, infrastructure, and housing, often due to insufficient planning for growth. Cities already don't meet the needs of host communities, compounding chronic vulnerabilities.

The competition over resources often results in challenges to social cohesion, dependent on the socio-economic and cultural background of the displaced and their relationship with host communities. The lack of planning and housing accelerates informal growth and slum-like conditions. If not well managed, it can contribute to instability and conflict.

Framing UN-Habitat's work on forced displacement.
UN-Habitat's work on forced displacement is guided by global frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), the New Urban Agenda (2016), the Global Compact on Refugees (2018), the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2019), UN-Habitat strategic plan (2020) , the United Nations Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement (2022) and UN-Habitat Institutional plan on solutions to internal Displacement (2023)

The Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement

The action agenda on internal displacement has three overarching interlinked goals:
1. Help IDPs find a durable solution to their displacement.
2. Better prevent new displacement crises from emerging.
3. Ensure those facing displacement receive effective protection and assistance.

No solution is sustainable if another crisis is looming. No assistance will be sufficient if underlying drivers of displacement remain unresolved.

The Sustainable Development Goal 11 aims to promote compact urban growth and inclusion of all citizens, irrespective of their legal status, regarding access to housing, essential services and infrastructure, and public spaces. Implementing the New Urban Agenda accelerates progress towards the SDGs. It stresses the importance of supporting cities in addressing the needs of migrants (including IDPs and refugees) to ensure their socio-economic and cultural development, which includes 'supporting local authorities in establishing frameworks that allow migrants to contribute positively to cities and strengthen urban-rural links. It further stresses the importance of supporting subnational and local governments in fulfilling their crucial role in maintaining the interface among all segments of society, including IDPs and host communities, by offering dialogue opportunities, including age—and gender-responsive approaches.

The Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement emphasizes that forced displacement should be considered an integral part of sustainable development.

UN-Habitat has developed practical experience over the last decades in managing urban displacement as an integral part of urban development (e.g Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Mozambique, Somalia etc.)

One of the four impact areas of the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2020-2023 is focused on urban crisis prevention and response with specific outcomes relating to improving the living conditions of migrants, refugees and IDPs. This has allowed to strengthen the normative tools and support more impactful programming.

UN-Habitat's Institutional Plan on Solutions to Internal Displacement aims to maximize its contribution to UN efforts to scale sustainable solutions to internal displacement across the humanitarian, development, and peace nexus. To mobilize the agency's full capacity and mainstream internal displacement work, the Institutional Plan is built around three pillars:

· **Data, Knowledge, and Advocacy:** to address data and analysis gaps needed to understand and predict displacement trends and impact across territories and cities

· **Normative work:** to spearhead the creation of tools and guidance for assessing risks and developing sustainable solutions to displacement

· **Operations:** to develop an offer to manage urban displacement as part of UN efforts at the country level, whether the agency has a presence or not

2. UN-Habitat's Human Settlements Approach to Forced Displacement

This section briefly introduces the human settlements approach, illustrating UN-Habitat's experiences and contributions in the context of forced displacement. This approach was the basis also for a multistakeholder pledge at the second Global Refugee Forum in Geneva, 2023. Key components of the human settlements approach include:

a. Urban profiling: Ensures an inter-sectoral and integrated analysis of the chronic and acute vulnerabilities of the forcibly displaced and host communities and the impact of displacement on urban areas, including pressure on services and housing markets [people and place].

b. Housing, Land, and Property: Ensures displaced people have access to adequate housing and security of tenure.

c. Participatory Urban Planning: Integrates displacement in the urban planning process and urban development strategies gives forcibly displaced people a voice.

d. Integrated Territorial Planning: Maps out the dynamic nature of displacement across territories by understanding the flows of displacement, the pull and push factors, and combining forward-looking planning with territorial investment strategies.

e. Financing: Addresss financing challenges and to enhance the availability of resources for local development to address the needs of both host and displaced communities.

UN-Habitat's human settlement approach helps drive solutions for forcibly displaced people, allowing their inclusion into urban areas and creating co-benefits for host communities. It starts solutions during humanitarian response and facilitates early recovery interventions. It focuses on access to essential services, environmental sustainability, social cohesion, economic development, and the resilience of human settlements to shocks, including in response to the rapid influx of displaced people. It aims to address the diverse needs and priorities of all people living in urban areas while promoting inclusive and resilient communities.

The ambition is to drive sustainable, scalable solutions (beyond the scope of projects) and transformational (fast-tracking the achievements of the SDGs). An excellent example of the latter is moving away from retrofitting segregated informal growth to planned inclusive urban development.

a. Urban Profiling

Urban profiling is a collaborative process used to collect and analyse data on urban areas and neighbourhoods, the systems that organize them, and the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of their inhabitants, and the impact of displacement. It helps prioritize people and places most in need, considering chronic and acute vulnerabilities. It also informs decision-making and planning before, during, and after crises. Ultimately, it creates a shared understanding of the situation to build the foundation for more contextualized, coordinated, area-based, and holistic urban responses. It looks at the impact of the crisis on people and places and how they relate to each other.

UN-Habitat has used this comprehensive spatial tool to assess the impact of crises in cities experiencing conflict, looking at the impact of damages and forced displacement such as Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, and Somalia. It maps out the remaining functionality of neighborhoods to help prioritize humanitarian and recovery interventions, based on the diversity of neighborhoods and impact.

Urban profiles reveal how a crisis developed and enable government and urban actors, such as UN/INGOs, municipalities, the private sector, and communities, to coordinate resources and programs for humanitarian and recovery action across the humanitarian, development, and peace nexus.

Box 2

Using urban profiling in Syria to prioritize actions across the humanitarian-development and peace nexus.

In Syria, UN-Habitat has been using urban profiling to understand the differentiated impact of war across neighborhoods and conflict lines.

It allowed the identification of neighborhoods where humanitarian action remained a priority and others where the focus should be on early recovery activities, including to help sustain the pressure of increased populations due to internal displacement on essential services.As access to food for markets, electricity, or garbage disposal often required agreements across conflict lines, it created the basis for local agreements amongst parties at war. In some cases, such as the industrial area of Al Hasawia in Homs, the damage was minimal. Still, the area had been looted, and electricity and water needed to be restored to allow a restart of the local economy and job creation.

UN-Habitat and UNDP improved Dara'a streets, repairing sidewalks, asphalting 985 meters, and adding solar lights. This benefited 18,000 residents and 50 shops. © UN-Habitat.

b. Housing, Land and Property Rights

Land is often a root cause and driver of conflict. The lack of access to land and tenure security is a key bottleneck for return or local integration. It limits access to housing solutions for forcibly displaced persons and often creates severe protection challenges.

UN-Habitat has created frameworks to analyze land as a root cause and driver of conflict and to stabilize and strengthen the security of tenure in response to land disputes. For instance, in DRC, UN-Habitat supported the United Nations Stabilization mission to deal with land disputes in conflict-prone areas through dialogue and mediation, local community capacity development on conflict resolution, support to the land administration, and land reform processes. In Sinjar, Iraq, UN-Habitat implemented a comprehensive urban recovery intervention that utilizes its Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM) to recognize and address land ownership rights of Yazidi returnees.

Solutions to housing needs are complex, as there is often already a severe shortage of adequate housing, particularly for the urban poor. The development solutions to housing needs must include incremental, self-help, sites and services, and rental housing options. Through area-based assessments and neighborhood profiles, opportunities for housing solution pathways can be identified.

Self-reliance should be advocated for and enhanced through increased perpetuation of land rights and secure tenure for all vulnerable groups. Access to rights and tenure security can boost ownership over land and subsequent housing, enabling and incentivizing incremental improvements to housing for IDPs and refugees.

Box 3

Safeguarding Evidence of HLP Rights in Lebanon and Iraq

UN-Habitat has been implementing a project in Lebanon and Iraq to protect the housing, land, and property rights of Syrian refugees. The project records the information regarding the refugees' properties in Syria. It safeguards the supporting HLP documentation through a rigorous participatory and voluntary enumeration process at no fee for the beneficiaries. It uses the Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM), a participatory land tool for recording people-to-land relationships along the continuum of land rights independently from their level of formalization.

The intervention prepares the ground for property restitution (re-possessing properties illegally occupied and transacted) and compensation for damaged or destroyed properties. Therefore, it paves the way for a safe, voluntary, dignified return, justice, and social reconciliation. As of December 2023, more than 18,000 refugee households have been reached by the project. Over 38,000 refugees registered their claims and safeguarded the housing, land, and property documents for their properties in Syria. 17,500 HLP claims were recorded – of which almost 40 percent were submitted by women.

Supporting Documents List for assertation of rights and claims.
© UN-Habitat © Global Land Tool Network.

Box 4

Participatory, Inclusive, and Gender-Sensitive Sustainable Housing Delivery in Mozambique

In Mozambique, around 700,000 people fled to urban centres due to the armed conflict in the Northern Region of Cabo-Delgado Province.

Since 2017, UN-Habitat has been piloting a project on durable, gender-sensitive housing solutions in partnership with UN-Women. Women and girls have been actively involved in the implementation process of the housing projects and were continuously trained on technical adequacy. The active involvement of women and girls in the implementation process contributes to providing adequate, resilient, and safe housing.

On the International Day of Women, girls and women in Mozambique
set examples for empowerment and reconciliation. © UN-Habitat Mozambique

c. Participatory Urban Planning

In crisis situations, tailored urban planning and management approaches can help guide incremental decision-making on humanitarian and development responses. Urban planning expertise to help guide 'solutions from the start' during a humanitarian response. This allows also for area-based, multi-sectoral, and integrated responses that leverage the social capital of all urban stakeholders, including community groups and the private sector.

UN-Habitat supports national and subnational governments in designing urban development strategies and implementing urban planning interventions, including city extension projects, to integrate displaced people in urban areas.

It commits to supporting refugees and IDPs integration by scaling up its support to governments by strengthening policy and legislative frameworks related to forced displacement, urbanization, and administration and management at the national level. At the local level, it establishes and reinforces urban institutions and improves access to infrastructure services in forcibly displaced and host community areas.
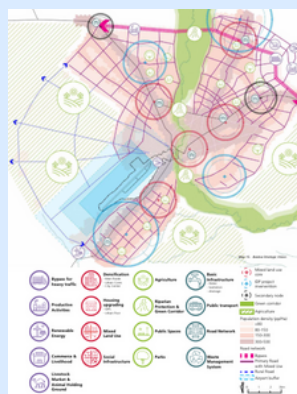
Location matters to facilitate access to adequate housing, shared essential services, and livelihoods while creating the conditions for better social inclusion with host communities.

Box 5

Integrating IDP Camps into the Urban Fabrics in Somalia

UN-Habitat has supported the Saameynta (Impact) programme in Somalia, which works with the Government of Somalia, UN agencies, the private sector, and civil society organizations to create conditions for displaced persons to contribute to sustainable development fully.

The programme helps selected cities (Bossaso, Beledweyne, and Baidoa) integrate IDP settlements into the surrounding urban fabric by developing strategies and legal provisions that prioritize women, youth, and climate change and by enhancing the technical knowledge of authorities and host community members. UN-Habitat's intervention supported cities in prioritizing accessibility and connectivity, which nurtured entrepreneurship and a strong local economy, making them more attractive for investment and growth.

Baidoa City Strategy & Extension Plan. which aims at physical,social,juridical and economic intergration of all settlements into the official planning and urban systems that govern the city. By knitting IDP settlements into their surrounding urban fabric,dwellers become physically,legally and socially part of the city.

© Baidoa City Strategy

UN-Habitat also utilizes urban and spatial planning to support transitioning from traditional refugee camps to integrated settlements and consolidated municipalities. It also supports the reinforcement of urban institutions and advocates for inclusion in urban policy and refugees' and host communities' self-reliance. This is central to the human settlement pledge launched at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 in Geneva.

This approach addressed the need to empower local authorities to carry out participatory urban planning processes to scale up housing and essential service provisions to timely and adequately address the impacts of massive internal displacement. It also creates environments that contribute to resilient communities through efficient land management and urban governance.

Box 6

Transforming Refugee Camps to Integrated Settlements in Kenya

UN-Habitat's support towards developing the Kalobeyei Settlement (hosting up to 60,000 hosts and refugees since 2017) in Kenya, a pioneering example of integrating the host community and refugees, marks a milestone for future sustainable development.

UN-Habitat has developed Spatial Profiles, Future Visions, and Regeneration Strategies in existing refugee camps, which established an understanding of existing challenges and opportunities, explored future scenarios, and proposed interventions and actions to realize the core components of the future vision, including integration, economic growth, sustainability, and self-reliance.

UN-Habitat has also helped cities along a major Kenyan transport corridor develop by building soft infrastructure to support a network of human settlements and cities and strengthening capacity at the local level to integrate migration into city development.

Kakuma-Kalobeyei host and refugee community discuss the proposed vision for Kakuma-Kalobeyei in an engagement session. © UN-Habitat
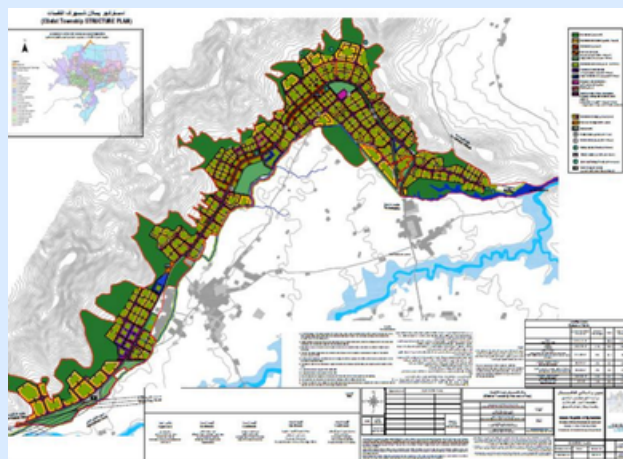
Box 7

Durable Solution Pathways for Returnees and IDPs in Afghanistan

UN-Habitat has implemented a local integration programme titled 'The Sustainable Human settlements in Urban areas to support Reintegration in Afghanistan (SHURA)' as part of its durable solutions programmes in Afghanistan.

The SHURA programme supports in the reintegration of vulnerable returnees, IDPs and host community families in Afghanistan by providing access to land, secure tenure, and improving urban neighbourhood's capacity to accommodate them.

The SHURA programme:
- Facilitated reintegration, through the provision of well-located, serviceable land in proximity to appropriate livelihood opportunities in proximity to urban centres, secondary and tertiary cities, and strategic district municipalities in provinces of high return.

UN Habitat settlement plan for Land Allocation Site.

- Filled the Humanitarian-Development Gap by facilitating the distribution of humanitarian/transitional assistance in locations that have been identified for durable solutions; where returnees and IDPs have security of tenure, providing a platform for self-reliance among others
- Augmented self-reliance through the delivery of permanent development interventions to ensure access to permanent housing.
- Mitigated the negative effects of unplanned influx of returnees and prevent further ad-hoc settlement in urban informal settlements.

Box 8

Community-Driven Services in Burkina Faso

UN-Habitat provided community-led and integrated solutions to IDPs and local populations in extremely vulnerable situations in Burkina Faso through the European Union funded project "Increasing resilience of communities impacted by internal displacement and Covid-19."

The project aimed to foster local integration of displaced people into urban communities by strategically selecting four project locations that were close to city centres and could be densified. It utilized a whole-of-government approach with multi-level governance, multi-sectoral cooperation, and a specific focus on enhancing the capacity of local authorities.

The project improved local government capacities and enhanced living conditions for local and displaced populations in project locations through improved access to basic social and public services. More than 1,800 people have now access to decent housing in the four project neighbourhoods, and 100,000 people have been benefitted by new schools, health centres and water service points.

UN Habitat community driven services which included provision of decent schools for the community
© UN-Habitat Burkina Faso

d. Integrated Territorial Planning

This approach contributes to mapping out the dynamic nature of displacement across territories by understanding the flows of displacement, the pull, and push factors, and combining forward-looking planning with territorial investment strategies to stabilize communities and develop the affected territories.

This approach utilizes more realistic, multidimensional responses to forced displacement that ensure coherence from the territorial level down and inform more effective humanitarian, development, and peace interventions. It also aims to create sustainable, resilient, and inclusive cities and human settlements by promoting balanced development across different spatial scales.
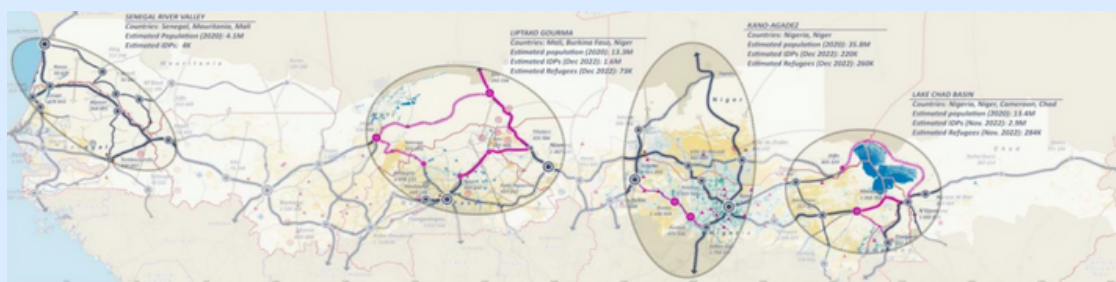
Box 9

A Regional Territorial Approach to Build Community Resilience in the Sahel

In the Sahel, UN-Habitat, in collaboration with UNDP, has developed a regional approach to building community resilience across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus, promoting inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable human settlements and reducing the gap between humanitarian needs and resources. The project analyzed urbanization, risks, and other factors that shape community and settlement resilience in the Sahel. It promotes joint decision-making and cooperation across HDP nexus actors for strategic and solution-oriented investments.

This multi-scale intervention:

- Applied enhanced territorial planning tools to support key decision-making, including the establishment of a monitoring system, such as a spatial/territorial observatory at the regional/national level.
- Strengthen institutional capacities at the level of local authorities to improve urban planning and management systems and processes, with an emphasis on land issues.
- Applied an integrated territorial approach at the intervention area/community level to strengthen social cohesion through participatory planning including host and displaced communities, essential services (water, electricity, sanitation, etc.), social facilities (schools, health centers, etc.), infrastructure (roads, drainage, etc.), and creating employment opportunities or income-generating activities, with a particular focus on women and youth.

Four priority transboundary areas for investments to maximise development impact in the Sahel

Box 10

Fostering Inclusive Cities and Communities of Solidarity in Colombia

UN-Habitat's initiative called 'Inclusive-Cities, Communities of Solidarity' aims to reduce the vulnerabilities that Venezuelan refugees and migrants face in Colombian host communities. It concentrates on areas carefully selected by UNHCR, IOM UN-Habitat, and local authorities in Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Cúcuta, and Villa del Rosario.

UN-Habitat has supported improving the economic and social inclusion of vulnerable migrants, refugees, and host communities. Using urban profile indicators, UN-Habitat has identified territories with high refugee and migrant populations, assessed local capacity, and defined areas with migration impactsUN-Habitat has developed a territorial intervention plan and capacity development program to support local governments in integrating refugees and migrants into cities. It has also formulated guidelines and toolkits for local leaders to implement urban strategies to improve social cohesion.

Host Community Center
Space where community action meetings take place and the development
of workshops for the community.
© UN-Habitat.

e. Financing

Enhancing local governments' financial position requires optimizing their own revenue sources. UN-Habitat has developed the Rapid Own Source Revenue Analysis (ROSRA) tool to identify revenue leakages and bottlenecks. This service supports local governments in addressing challenges in municipal finance, own-source revenue, government transparency, accountability and perception, and corruption.
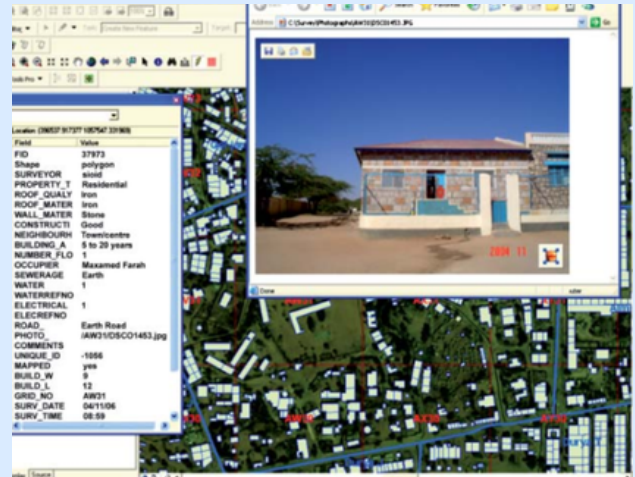
A land-based revenue stream is one of the most promising and underused revenue sources that can broadly strengthen urban management. UN-Habitat has also developed a set of flexible tools to enhance the availability of resources for local development by leveraging land. The service supports national and local governments, residents, and international and local partners to address challenges in municipal finance.

Box 11

Land-Based Finance for Good Governance and Inclusive Development

In Afghanistan, UN-Habitat supported 12 municipalities using innovative land tools to survey and register all properties within municipal boundaries. In just two years urban communities were involved in surveying 670,000 properties in eight municipalities and 2,000 occupancy certificates were issued to households in informal settlements. Based on the updated property register, target municipalities have collected USD 8 million in safayi (a property tax/municipal charge that is levied by municipalities) fees from 150,000 properties in two years.

UN-Habitat has supported Somaliland and Puntland authorities in Somalia in developing and enacting a relevant regulatory framework for municipal financial management, including a local government finance policy. Together with local authorities, UN-Habitat has established a Geographic Information System (GIS) property database where data on the location of properties and urban parcels are surveyed, catalogued, and regularly updated. In Somaliland and Puntland, 15 districts collect USD 3 million in property taxes per year, benefiting both local authorities and residents. This is a massive scale up of own resources which are being used to invest in basic services and infrastructure.

Computer screen view illustrating the satellite image with the properties marked, and the attribute data, including a hyperlinked ground photo of the property. This GIS database on property is regularly updated for collection of property taxes.

© Municipal Revenue Generation Through Property Taxation -The UN-HABITAT Approach

3. Added value in providing solutions to forced displacement

UN-Habitat can provide Humanitarian and Resident Coordinators and UN country teams with urban expertise to help design pathways to solutions in urban areas across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus. The agency has an important convening role in mobilizing and bringing together local governments, built environment professionals, and the research community with humanitarian and development actors. As outlined by the independent IASC review of the IDP response carried out by ODI, UN-Habitat's expertise is key as IDP contexts continue to be increasingly urban.

Urban profiling and area-based approaches can help to identify the specific challenges and opportunities of differing contexts, allowing UN-Habitat to intervene in a manner that accounts for the needs of populations and empowers local governments. UN-Habitat's expertise in urban contexts can allow for support in many facets. This includes facilitating livelihood opportunities, increasing access to essential services, and providing shelter and housing solutions. UN-Habitat's expertise is critical to inform humanitarian response to allow the initiation of 'solutions from the start'. UN-Habitat can help shape ensure the urban dimension of multi-year IDP response strategies for HCTs/UNCTs.

End Notes

https://unhabitat.org/un-habitats-global-institutional-plan-on-solutions-to-internal-displacement
https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-09/strategic_plan_2020-2023.pdf
https://unhabitat.org/online-reports/financing-sustainable-urban-development
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https://unhabitat.org/un-habitats-global-institutional-plan-on-solutions-to-internal-displacement

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United Nations Human Settlements Programme
(UN-Habitat)
P.O. Box 30030, Nairobi 00100, Kenya
Tel: +254 20 762 3120 Fax: +254 20 762 3477

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