

ICCG Common Position on Relocation and Alternative Solutions to Gathering Sites

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Background

With the dramatic increase in internal displacement in Sudan, the number of ‘gathering sites’ sheltering internally displaced people (IDPs) across the country continues to grow. Displacement is now protracted. Return to areas of origin is impeded, and there are limited alternatives to gathering sites, which are not equipped or appropriate for longer term shelter. With the Government’s announcement to reopen schools, there is now an urgent imperative to find solutions that both support children’s return to education, and ensure access to appropriate, safe and sustainable shelter. The resumption of the use of schools for education puts into question the current use of these buildings as gathering sites. Any movement of IDPs from schools will need to consider protection risks and alternative shelter options given the displacement situation is likely to continue. According to information from the Site Management Sector, 991 gathering sites hosting over 183,010 people were identified and mapped between August and November 2023. According to DTM data, the total population of IDPs is estimated at 4,955,538 (973,444 Households) to date. The majority of IDPs are living within host communities. It is against this background and the commencement of relocation planning in some states that the ICCG has developed a common position on relocation of IDPs, in line with *Sites hosting internally displaced people in Sudan: ICG Guidance on mitigation, response and way forward* (ICCG Guidance Note).

ICCG Position on Relocation and Alternative Solutions to Gathering Sites:

1. The ICCG recognizes and supports the critical need for the resumption of education, but pragmatic planning is required that balances access to education with the need for safe and dignified shelter for displaced people. Alternative solutions should be fully explored before relocation is considered. The ICCG reiterates that all relocations should be planned and conducted in compliance with the principle of Do No Harm, international human rights and humanitarian law, and in a manner that protects in particular the rights to life, dignity, liberty and security of all people affected.
2. The ICCG opposes the establishment of camps and camp-like sites, unless as a measure of last resort after all alternative options have been exhausted.
3. The ICCG maintains that any relocation or alternative solutions to gathering sites be planned in full consultation with displaced people and relevant stakeholders and be within the existing capacities and resources of relevant line ministries and humanitarian partners.

Key Principles on Relocation of IDPs:

Consultation and Participation

- No relocation should occur without in-depth consultations with and participation from affected IDPs. IDPs should be included in all planning stages to share aspirations and intentions, explore suitable options, and develop and implement plans. The participation of diverse groups of community representatives is essential, including women, community members with disabilities, community members representing the interests of children and youth, and representatives of ethnic and religious groups.

- Conflict sensitive approaches should be incorporated into relocation strategies to address the unique challenges in conflict-affected areas. This should involve coordination with community leaders, community-based structures and conflict resolution experts.

Voluntariness

- IDPs have the right to make informed and voluntary decisions about relocation. They must be provided with timely, accurate and complete information about relocation plans, including location, prospective duration, relocation timelines, movement assistance and services available at relocation sites. Information must be communicated in ways that are accessible to all affected IDPs, accounting for varying educational levels, language, and experiences. IDPs must also be given reasonable time and support to evaluate their options. This includes facilitated visits for IDP representatives to prospective relocation sites to assess conditions, and adequate time for consultations with family members, community leaders, government officials and humanitarian agencies.
- All individuals must provide informed consent prior to relocation. Where authorities have a legitimate rationale and legal authorization for moving IDPs from their current gathering sites, IDPs must have the opportunity to freely choose from among meaningful alternatives, for example, self-relocation, facilitated relocation to another suitable site or host community integration.
- Recognizing that families often prefer to stay within extended family networks or community groupings, relocation plans should accommodate these preferences as far as possible. This includes ensuring families have freedom of movement to self-relocate or grouping shelter plots at new sites to enable family unity.
- Under no circumstances should force, the threat of force or other coercive measures be used to relocate IDPs. This includes physical harm, intimidation, reduction of essential services or other means designed to compel relocation.

Safety and Sustainability

- IDPs must be protected against forced relocation to places where their life, safety or health would be at risk. Safety requires prevention against harm to individuals and personal property, including non-discrimination safeguards and protection against harassment and psychological abuse. It also requires appropriate rehabilitative services to support people who have been physically or mentally harmed.
- To ensure relocation adheres to international standards and respects the rights of IDPs, comprehensive housing, land and property due diligence must be done before relocation to an alternative site. Each alternative site must be carefully evaluated to clarify land ownership and use rights, habitability, accessibility, and adequacy to maintain the dignity and safety of all IDPs.
- The presence of essential services and resources is a vital criterion in site selection. Relocation plans should ensure that displaced individuals have convenient access to livelihoods opportunities, markets, healthcare facilities, transportation, educational institutions, and WASH facilities of a minimum standard or better as determined by humanitarian agencies.
- Prior to relocation, humanitarian agencies should have full access to relocation sites and be permitted to monitor unhindered to ensure that infrastructure, services, site management systems, protection mechanisms, and other critical support is in place before relocation. After

relocation, humanitarian agencies should continue to have unhindered access to sites and residents to provide services, monitor conditions and respond to gaps and challenges.

Key Recommendations for Alternative Solutions to Gathering Sites:

- Local authorities, IDPs, host communities, and humanitarian actors must be equal partners in the identification of alternative solutions to gathering sites that promote more sustainable living conditions for IDPs and host communities.
- Solutions that enable IDPs to live within host communities should be prioritized. These may include regulating rental markets to enable greater access for IDPs without harming host community renters, and providing IDPs with cash for rent where feasible
- Alternative educational arrangements should be fully explored before IDPs are relocated from schools. These arrangements may include:
 - Establishing temporary learning spaces (TLS) around schools or at other appropriate sites to serve host community and IDP children and youth;
 - Repurposing unused public buildings to operate as temporary learning centres;
 - Allocating spaces in other public buildings, including Mosques, to act as classrooms; and
 - Using vacant classrooms in schools that are only partially inhabited by IDPs, and adopting double shifting (morning and afternoon) to enable more children and access to schooling.
- Site consolidation should be considered where it improves IDPs' access to humanitarian assistance and essential services, and provided land tenure is secure. In areas where schools are partially inhabited by IDPs, it may be appropriate for IDPs to shift to other schools to allow some schools to reopen.
- Beyond short-term solutions to restarting education and adequately accommodating IDPs, local authorities, IDPs, host communities, and humanitarian actors need medium-term solutions for addressing the challenges created by 'gathering sites'. This will require coordination with development actors to consider sustainable and phased approaches to the expansion of urban neighborhoods or other local integration measures.

Coordination arrangements, engagement with authorities

- To support local authorities to find solutions that balance both the right to education and the right to appropriate and safe shelter and protection, it is important that the humanitarian community present a unified position and consistent messages to government authorities and affected communities, and that the response be multi-sectoral in nature with full engagement of respective clusters.
- The ICCG recommends, aligned with OCHA's mandate for inter-cluster coordination, that the common position outlined in this paper be fully adopted at A-ICCG levels, and that OCHA and humanitarian partners represent this position in all discussions with local authorities on the reopening of schools, accompanied as appropriate, by relevant clusters such as shelter/NFI, protection and education.
- ICCG leads at sub-national level (OCHA or other partners humanitarian where agreed upon and relevant), will work with partners and clusters to develop agreed upon practical solutions, based on the ICCG guidance document as summarized in this position paper, that could be proposed for the resumption of education where the shelter and protection of IDPs may be threatened.

- To maintain a unified humanitarian position, OCHA will facilitate the implementation of A-ICCG level coordination plans to ensure timely and transparent information sharing across humanitarian partners, and accountability to commitments. Where OCHA is not leading coordination efforts, the agreed-upon alternate agency lead on coordination in a particular area, will lead efforts to discuss these with the operational coordination body in place (with support from the A/HCT),

Implementation steps

- Once the common position is endorsed at A-ICCG level, and potential solutions have been identified, discussed, and agreed, the A-ICCG should develop processes for consultation with affected communities and government partners, these should include:
 - Gender and age disaggregated focus group discussions with affected communities; and
 - Consultations with community representatives.
- Following consultations with affected communities in line with the principles articulated in this document and the identification of alternative solutions that integrate community feedback, the A-ICCG will explore solution options with the local authorities. The ICCG should only propose alternative solutions that are within existing capacities of the state to support and should never include encampment.
- Discussion with local authorities will be led by OCHA, and where appropriate, other key and relevant partners and/or clusters. Education, Protection and shelter/NFI clusters are key and must be engaged. Engagement of national partners should be encouraged to engage in these discussions.
- Follow on technical discussions with line ministries—for example, education—will be undertaken by cluster leads with support from key agencies and partners as appropriate and aligned with the A-ICCG agreed upon position and proposed solutions.
- Implementation actions should be agreed upon at the A-ICCG level, minuted, and progress reported upon at A-ICCG meetings.