



Shelter/NFI Cluster
X-Border Operation - Turkey Hub
ShelterCluster.org,
Coordinating Humanitarian Shelter



Dignified and Safer Living Conditions for IDPs in Protracted Crises NORTH WEST SYRIA

Dignified and Safer Living Conditions for IDPs in Protracted Crises: North West Syria



Why Dignified Shelter?

After a decade of conflict, the shelter sector in Syria needs to reflect a range of humanitarian shelter options that provide safety, dignity and protection in a context of protracted displacement. These options should also support the choices made by IDPs themselves in finding adequate shelter. Adequate humanitarian shelter options can vary according to the needs, urgency and circumstances of the IDPs themselves.

This document outlines some of the main current approaches to dignified shelter, including tents and tool kits, self-built shelters, RHUs, prefabricated shelters, and Temporary Dignified Shelters with a value range of between USD 100-1,200. All of these options can be used to address different shelter needs at different times.

It is crucial to acknowledge that shelter is a process. Families may move between the options that are outlined here as their circumstances change. Within this range of options, it is important to consider both immediate life-saving shelter needs as well as Temporary Dignified Shelters that can have a longer life span and afford greater levels of protection.

All of these options represent forms of humanitarian intervention intended to provide adequate, safe, private, and dignified shelter in a context of protracted displacement. They are ultimately temporary in nature, pending a cessation of hostilities and a process of return.

Current Shelter Response

- Shelter kit (100 USD)
- Locally made emergency shelter (200 USD)
- Family tent (400-600 USD)
- Prefabricated shelter (800-1000 USD)
- Repair and rehabilitation (800-1000 USD)
- Improved humanitarian shelter unit:
 - Refugee housing unit (1,250 USD)
 - Temporary dignified shelters / self-built shelters (600-1,500 USD)



Refugee Housing Unit (UNHCR) implemented in partnership with Watan.

Guiding Principles and Minimum Standards

- ✓ Careful land identification
- ✓ Safer more resilient shelters, adapted to harsh weather conditions
- ✓ Safer IDP settlements
- ✓ Better access to multi-sector services
- ✓ Adaptable shelters, improved self-reliance and impact on the local economy
- ✓ Improved living space and enabling self-quarantine
- ✓ Stronger protection, more privacy, dignity and accessibility
- ✓ Facilitating access to adequate shelter



Unplanned IDP settlements after a few years, Azaz subdistrict.

Key Concerns and Mitigation Measures

What are the key concerns?

- Security situation in NWS
- Demographic changes and local conflict dynamics
- Housing, Land and Property
- Independent interventions
- Rent seeking behaviour

Full report is available on the SNFI Cluster website, via [this link](#).

How to mitigate these concerns?

- **Strict Housing, Land and Property due diligence**
- **Protection mainstreaming and accountability to affected populations**
- **Fair and transparent beneficiary and location selection**
- **Contextual analysis: stakeholders, population, environment**
- **Exit strategy**

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1. Context

Displacement and Shelter in North West Syria

After a decade of conflict and forced displacement, there are currently **more than 2.7 million people internally displaced in North West Syria**, including approximately one million people newly displaced between January and February 2020¹. According to OCHA, approximately 80% of those displaced were women and children. Conflict and deterioration of the security situation continues to trigger alarmingly high levels of internal displacement.

Displacement into a shrinking territory has increased over recent years. This has reduced housing options as housing stock in urban areas that have been repossessed by the Syrian regime was no longer available to IDPs. More IDPs have now moved to predominantly rural areas in North West Syria with lower levels of available housing stock. This has placed increased pressure on available land and resources. Figures also show that a large number of people remain in displacement for an extended period of time. In November 2019, 75% of the internally displaced people (IDPs) in Aleppo and Idlib governorates had been displaced over one year ago or more². As more people remain in protracted displacement in areas with reduced housing stock, a range of emergency shelter options is needed.

According to HNAP, **more than half of all IDPs in North West Syria live in inadequate housing**. Nearly 150,000 live in makeshift shelters and more than 175,000 in sub-standard buildings³. Moreover, 59% of the IDPs living in solid/finished buildings, damaged buildings and in unfinished buildings are obliged to pay rent. The remainder are either hosted for free, are squatting or own the property⁴. As housing is becoming increasingly difficult to find and many households cannot afford to pay rent, a growing number of people have had to settle in camps or informal settlements. According to the CCCM Cluster and HNAP, there are 1,654,000 million people in North West Syria living in IDP settlements and reception centres⁵.

There are **inherent protection and privacy issues related to overcrowded and lack of shelter**, especially for women and girls, including forced marriages as a result of many unrelated people sharing the same households⁶. Lack of privacy, in addition to other triggers like poverty and lack of resources, can lead to an increased risk of violence within the home. Overcrowding is a key issue and violence risk factor that can impact humanitarian actors providing shelter and camp management⁷. The physical and psychological discomfort of living in a tent has also been highlighted⁸, specifically the lack of privacy, being vulnerable to theft, impact of weather conditions, and increased exposure to harassment or assault. Overcrowded and inadequate accommodation also contributes to the spread of COVID-19. When asked about the experience of living in a room that has walls, a ceiling and locked door all shelter assessment respondents stated that it was safer, more comfortable, and offered more protection.

In the complex humanitarian setting of North West Syria, a range of shelter options is needed to respond to immediate humanitarian needs of newly displaced people, support individuals and families in the shelter choices that they are already making, and encompass Dignified Temporary Shelter solutions that are more appropriate to longer term displacement.

In this complex context of mass displacement and multi-faceted needs, humanitarian organizations have to respond both to large waves of displacement that happen in a very short period of time, as well as assisting protracted IDPs who have already been living in camps or informal sites for several years.

¹ According to HNAP, 342,078 people have been displaced in January 2020 and 742,078 in February 2020.

² HNAP Baseline Population Assessments November 2019.

³ HNAP Baseline Population Assessment July 2020.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., CCCM Cluster ISIMM July 2020.

⁶ Voices from Syria 2020 – Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Maram Foundation, UNFPA – SAMS, Focus Group Discussion Findings (September 2020).



Refugee Housing Unit (UNHCR) installed in partnership with Watan Foundation, 2020.



Unplanned IDP settlements after a few years, Azaz subdistrict

Conceptual Framework

This exploration into safer, more dignified shelter solutions seeks to ensure the rights of IDPs in alignment with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, against the backdrop of ongoing conflict, emerging humanitarian shelter needs and protracted displacement. The conceptual framework derives from the IDP Guiding Principles relating to shelter and also acknowledges the centrality of contextual analysis and a 'do no harm' approach, especially in contexts of armed conflict. Key IDP Guiding Principles include: **'Every human being has the right to dignity and physical, mental and moral integrity'**, and **'All internally displaced persons have the right to an adequate standard of living.'**⁹



IDP settlements in Dana: IDPs improved their shelter when they manage to find financial resources.

⁹ Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: Principle 11, 1. 'Every human being has the right to dignity and physical, mental and moral integrity'. Principle 18, 1. 'All internally displaced persons have the right to an adequate standard of living.'

2. Current Shelter Response

In order to respond to the complex context and myriad of needs in North West Syria, a multi-faceted shelter response is required. Large-scale displacement in and out of North West Syria due to the active conflict situation must be considered, while also responding to the needs of protracted IDPs. The following shelter options are currently being implemented by the Shelter/NFI Cluster.

Shelter Kit

USD 100
Average unit cost

This option is a cost-effective solution that can be provided in the short term, when it is expected that IDPs will return to their houses within a couple of weeks. The kit includes plastic sheeting, rope, duct tape, nails, wood and tools. It requires a technical team to assemble, as well as HLP due diligence since latrines and other infrastructure are also necessary for newly displaced people.

Compared to other shelter types, the protection (especially GBV) risks are considered higher due to weak materials, lack of privacy or lockable door, as well as limited protection against weather conditions.

The Shelter/NFI Cluster does not recommend the shelter kit for female headed households, or for implementation during the winter. It is an immediate and cheaper solution in the short term and will need to be supplemented with improved shelter materials such as tents at a later stage. Because of this need for replacement, the Shelter Kit does not offer good value for money. It is recommended in certain circumstances where tents or more durable shelters cannot be implemented. It is also an appropriate option to help repair or upgrade makeshift shelters¹⁰.



Shelter Kit

Locally Made Emergency Shelter

USD 200
Average unit cost

This solution is interesting for its potential impact on the local economy. It is made by IDPs and it includes recycled materials that can be found locally. However, the quality of the shelter depends on the welding quality of the metal structure, as well as the quality of the plastic sheeting. HLP due diligence is required as latrines and other infrastructures would also be necessary for newly displaced people. The floor needs to be raised to avoid water going inside the shelter during heavy rains.

¹⁰ Shelter/NFI Cluster's Shelter Solutions Report 2019.

The emergency shelters made by IDPs are usually larger than the tents provided by humanitarian actors, at least 30m². Such a solution also has a better impact on the local economy than tents. However, the number of artisans with the required skill set is limited and therefore cannot respond alone to the significant caseload of newly displaced people.

A small shelter/livelihood project is being piloted in order to know if such a solution could be promoted by the Shelter/NFI Cluster (unconditional and restricted cash modality).



Locally made emergency shelter in Dana subdistrict, 2019

This option also offers weak protection as the plastic sheeting is easy to cut into so even if the doors are lockable, it offers limited safety for women and girls. Doors can however be strengthened with plywood or strong panels and partitions could be added.

Family Tent

USD 400-600
Average unit cost

As part of the emergency response, tents provide a critical and immediate solution, intended for a short period (up to one year). Part of the on-going response is replacing damaged tents with new ones and using tarpaulins to improve waterproofing. Gravelling and HLP due diligence are required, again noting the need for latrines and other infrastructure. In 2020, Shelter/NFI Cluster members reported that some local authorities are preventing the establishment of new IDP sites with tents and similar emergency shelter. However, it is important to reiterate that shelter activities must be implemented based on the assessment of needs by the NGO as independent actors.

Tents can be assembled and dismantled quickly by a team of two. However, there is a lack of data about IDPs moving with their tents even though the majority have been displaced multiple times¹¹.

There are possible protection (especially GBV) risks with tents as they cannot be securely locked, the canvas can be easily cut, and there is a lack of privacy. Tents therefore do not offer adequate safety and privacy for women and girls and the thin walls can be transparent at night when the tent has internal lighting. Continually replacing tents rather than investing in more durable shelter solutions is not cost-effective¹².

Although tents are an important part of the emergency response, tents do not offer adequate shelter over a long duration, in a situation of a protracted crisis and may not be cost effective as they need to be replaced regularly.

¹¹ According to H NAP's Monthly Need Monitoring Overview (August Overview), the majority (88%) of the IDPs displaced in August 2020 have been displaced three times or more.

¹² Shelter/NFI Cluster's Shelter Solutions Report 2019.



Prefabricated Shelter

USD 800-1000
Average unit cost

As with RHUs, prefabricated shelters offer a more dignified and safe shelter solution than the tents and basic shelter kits, but there are higher initial costs to take into consideration. The unit cost is much higher than the tent, but after four years the value becomes cheaper as the tents need replacing each year.

Prefabricated shelters can be built by a team of six in 12 hours. The benefit of this mid-term shelter is that it can be moved, however, it must also be noted that IDPs cannot move or assemble the prefabricated shelters themselves. HLP due diligence is required and a high certainty about the land ownership is required given the impact on the land.

The protection (especially GBV) risks are better mitigated compared to other shelter types, as the prefabricated shelter is made of stronger materials and has lockable doors and windows, with the option of adding bars to the windows too. One partition is included which improves privacy by creating two rooms. Moreover, there is improved protection against weather conditions and the caravan is more fire retardant than other shelter options.

The Shelter/NFI Cluster is currently monitoring ongoing caravan projects to inform future interventions.



Prefabricated Shelters

Repair and Rehabilitation

USD 800-1000
Average unit cost

The repair of damaged buildings, rehabilitation of non-habitable buildings and upgrade of unfinished housing units is another core part of the shelter response. The main objective of these interventions is

to improve the living conditions of IDPs, returnees and host communities in areas affected by conflict. It can also increase the housing stock by converting collective shelters, garages and or commercial units into habitable shelters. As with shelter interventions that involve establishing a new shelter, repair and rehabilitation interventions must also take into account HLP risks and due diligence guidelines.

Improved Humanitarian Shelter Unit

USD 1250
Average unit
cost

a) Refugee Housing Unit (RHU)

Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) offer more durability and safety than tents or the shelter kit, with an expected lifespan of at least three years with basic maintenance¹³ (compared to tents that have one year). HLP due diligence is required, and it is recommended to raise the floor in case of heavy rains, and to provide a foundation.

Regarding mobility, the unit can be assembled by a team of four without additional tools in five to six hours and can be dismantled in two to three hours with four people. It can be moved, but not as easily as tents.

In terms of protection (especially GBV) risks, the RHUs have a lockable door and semi-hard plastic panels. However, the materials are still not strong enough to avoid penetration from outsiders or offer the required privacy¹⁴. There are also high transportation and installation costs to consider, noting that the RHUs are produced in Poland and do not directly benefit the local economy. On the other hand, compared to tents or the basic shelter kit, RHUs offer a more dignified solution and are better value for money after two years.

The Shelter/NFI Cluster is currently implementing a pilot project with RHUs in North West Syria.

Refugee Housing Unit (UNHCR) implemented in partnership with Watan.



¹³ UNHCR Shelter and Settlement Section: Refugee Housing Unit Factsheet.

¹⁴ Shelter/NFI Cluster's Shelter Solutions Report 2019.

b) Temporary Dignified Shelters/Self Built Improved Shelters



USD 600-1500
Depending on type of roof, foundations, etc.

IDP settlements in Dana: IDPs have improved their shelters with local materials when they manage to find financial resources. These provide greater safety and dignity but are still clearly temporary, unplanned constructions.

Within the situation of protracted conflict in North West Syria, some NGOs, as well as IDPs with the financial capacity, are already constructing more dignified shelters. While still temporary, these shelters provide an alternative to a prefabricated shelter and RHUs. They should all be considered together in the same overall category as an 'Improved Shelter Unit' although the materials used may differ. They are a temporary shelter option and are possible to implement where there is relative security of tenure. As of September 2020, SNFI Cluster estimates that 10,974 Improved Shelter Units have been built by eight organisations in North West Syria. This is currently being implemented without clear guidance and recommendations are needed to guide such programmes in line with international standards.

For example, close to 90% of Atmeh Camp now uses self-built Improved Shelter Units. The Coordination Team is monitoring the ongoing implementation. The findings from Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) reports also indicate that IDPs found the self-built Improved Shelter Unit to be an appropriate solution. The PDM reports suggest that this solution allows for flexibility of use, efficiency of design, and could withstand local hazards. Moreover, having two separate rooms and private toilets/showers help to mitigate the risk of GBV. Further, dedicated cooking spaces will mitigate fire incidents in camps. It is considered as a very cost-effective solution considering the lifespan and the flexibility of the design that could be adapted to meet family needs. Materials were used that could be incorporated into longer term recovery shelter options or easily removed.

Overall, it is best to have a variety of shelter solutions. While tents and emergency response activities are certainly still required for those who may be newly displaced, and humanitarian actors need to be prepared in case of new waves of displacement. After a decade of conflict and displacement, emergency shelter solutions like tents are not always a suitable shelter option given protracted displacement. Where practicable, safer, more dignified shelter solutions should be an available option to response agencies in the SNFI Cluster. This Conceptual Framework will be supported by further detailed technical guidance to support Shelter Cluster agencies develop a range of Dignified Shelter options.

3. Guiding Principles and Minimum Standards

The following guiding principles and minimum standards aim to provide a guide for implementing safer, more adequate and dignified shelter and settlement solutions in protracted crises; including using shelter types that would offer better protection against weather conditions and intrusion compared to emergency response activities like the family tents and basic shelter kit.

Land Identification

Given the complexity and challenges of the context, an in-depth HLP due diligence process should be undertaken in the programme design and implementation with the objective of mitigating the risk of forced evictions and human rights abuses, and to protect those not in the area. Due diligence should be carried out independently given the increasing role of de facto authorities in such processes. The implementing organization should achieve as much certainty about tenure as possible (the “secure enough” approach), given the context and constraints. Documentation, such as tenure agreements, should be properly prepared and should reflect the rights of all parties (for example host communities, IDPs, landowners).¹⁵

Appropriate land identification is vital to ensure a Do No Harm approach. Moreover, it is central to interventions, to enable IDPs to return and to prevent future displacement, population growth and the increase of food insecurity related to competition over land.

There are major risks associated with not doing HLP due diligence. These include:

- The real owners come forward after the intervention has begun, potentially resulting in (forced) eviction and/or exploitation of IDPs; delays to, or cancellation of, the intervention; court proceedings against the humanitarian actor; and removal of infrastructure installed during the intervention.
- The humanitarian actor breaches the HLP rights of the owner and their action leads to violation of the HLP rights of beneficiaries if they are forcibly evicted.
- Increase in conflicts over land/property.
- Increased tension between host communities and displaced populations.
- The humanitarian actor’s obligation to DO NO HARM is breached.
- Considerable time, money and resources are wasted.

Safer, More Resilient Shelters, Adapted to Harsh Weather Conditions

Regular incidents affecting IDP sites in North West Syria are frequently reported by the CCCM Cluster, related to fires, floods and high-speed winds. Between January 2020 and September 2020, the CCCM Cluster reported 80 incidents as a result of which 121 camps were affected and 1,276 tents were destroyed. 19 people were injured, and 12 people lost their life due to fire incidents.

The weather conditions in North West Syria must also be taken into account, as the summers are often hot and rainless, while winters are rainy and cold. For example, in Idleb, record high temperatures can reach 44 degrees, and record low temperature can reach -5 degrees¹⁶. Humanitarian organisations regularly report IDPs’ loss of consciousness due to high temperature in tents.

¹⁵ Sphere Standards 2018.

¹⁶ Time and date - Past Weather in Idlib, Syria

Providing shelters that avoid weak and flammable materials would help to protect IDPs, or at least to mitigate the impact, of these incidents and weather conditions when compared to tents. Ensuring adequate, and preferably natural, ventilation also helps maintain a healthy internal environment, prevents condensation and reduces the spread of communicable disease which is of utmost importance given the current COVID-19 pandemic. Making sure there is access to natural light inside the shelters also helps improve the comfort and well-being of beneficiaries.

Safer IDP Settlements

The location, planning and design of shelters and settlements are incredibly important, especially in situations of protracted crises. Well planned and coordinated shelters and settlements can contribute to the safety and well-being of the affected population. In line with Sphere Standards, shelters and settlements are inter-related and need to be considered as a whole.

In consideration of the ongoing conflict and complex contextual factors, shelter actors should conduct a risk assessment to ensure that they select the safest location for their interventions. A safe and secure location that offers adequate space and access to essential services and livelihoods should therefore be selected¹⁷. Rainfall or floodwater drainage planning and fire safety should also be included in site selection and settlement design. It is also important to consider investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience.

Better Access to Multi-sectoral Services

Ensuring access to multi-sectoral services is a key element in providing safer, dignified shelter. IDP settlements in general should include basic services such health, education, safe spaces for women and children, water and sanitation. These elements need to be incorporated in the site planning phase, in line with Sphere Standards. Shelters should be connected to the drinking water and/or black water networks whenever possible.

Adaptable Shelters, Improved Self-reliance and Impact on the Local Economy

Shelter solutions have the potential to have a positive impact on the local economy, by creating jobs, drawing on local knowledge and techniques, and where appropriate use local resources. This is of particular importance in the current economic climate, where the devaluation of the Syrian pound has led to severe economic hardship for people in North West Syria.

Increased self-reliance, dignity and well-being can be facilitated by incorporating flexibility into the shelter design for livelihood opportunities and potential for IDPs to adapt the shelter.

Improved Living Space and Enabling Self-quarantine

Applying COVID-19 mitigation and response measures, such as self-quarantine, is particularly difficult in overcrowded sites, where families are staying in tents and makeshift shelters. The establishment or installation of safer, more dignified shelters for protracted IDPs would have the potential to improve living conditions and facilitate the implementation of COVID-19 measures. Psychological considerations, such as beneficiaries' wellbeing, could also be improved, especially if accommodation layout and design include open public household living spaces that increase options for socialising. In line with Sphere Standards, shelters should aim to include:

- 4.5–5.5 square meters of living space per person, including cooking space and bathing and/or sanitation facilities.
- Internal floor-to-ceiling height of at least 2.6 metres at the highest point (as per Sphere Standard recommendations for hot climates).

¹⁷ Sphere Standards 2018

- Minimum of two rooms for a household of five persons.
- Living space should be adequate for daily activities such as sleeping, preparing and eating food, washing, dressing, storing food and water, and protecting household possessions and other key assets. It is best to facilitate privacy and separation as required between sexes, different age groups and families within a given household according to cultural and social norms.

Stronger Protection, More Privacy, Dignity and Accessibility

As is outlined in the In line with the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action as well as the Protection Mainstreaming Principles, all humanitarian actors are responsible to ensure the protection of affected populations, and to not exacerbate existing vulnerabilities or do no harm. For example, the Protection Cluster highlights the need to, ‘Provide safety and privacy through well-designed facilities and shelters’¹⁸ through the use of adequate infrastructure (for example interior locks on public facilities such as latrines) and gender-segregated facilities including water and sanitation areas (that do not intensify existing vulnerabilities). When possible, including basic services within shelters would have a significant impact on reducing the GBV risks, as women and girls continue to report sexual harassment and violence incidents when accessing far away latrines that often lack lighting and locks in camps¹⁹.

Prior to interventions being carried out, actors need to assess the protection risks that the intervention may have, specifically groups with specific needs who may face heightened levels of risk, such as women and girls, female headed households, and people with disabilities. Including affected populations through the different phases of the program cycle is one way to ensure participation and identify and mitigate potential protection risks.

Facilitating Access to Adequate Shelter

A potential risk when providing shelter is the perceived disparity of assistance if some beneficiaries are seen to be provided with a more adequate shelter solution than others. However, it is preferable to raise the shelter standards for all IDPs, and not keep the standard at the emergency level for IDPs who are displaced for longer than the emergency phase. Furthermore, some IDPs who have the financial capacity are already upgrading their shelters themselves. Therefore, providing assistance to vulnerable families who cannot afford to upgrade their shelters themselves may facilitate access to adequate shelter.

¹⁸ Guidance Note on Mitigating Protection Risks in IDP Sites Exclusive to Widowed and Divorced Women and Girls (p6).

¹⁹ Voices from Syria 2020 – Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview

4. Key Concerns and Mitigation Measures

Given the complex environment for humanitarian intervention in North West Syria, which impacts all types of interventions from emergency response activities to more robust shelter solutions; key concerns and mitigation measures must be examined.

Key Concerns

- **Security:** North West Syria is not a stable context and there is still a high risk of violence. There are inherent risks operating in a situation that is changeable, such as sudden and mass displacement, IDPs moving and leaving shelters empty, loss of investment and disruptions to projects, or restricted access. These risks are relevant for the implementation of all types of shelter solutions, including tents, but when stronger, more protective shelter types are implemented, the investment and risk of loss are higher.
- **Demographic changes and local conflict dynamics:** Humanitarian actors need to be extremely cautious when providing assistance in areas where there have been demographic changes, particularly regarding different population groups, in order not to solidify displacement. Concerns also relate to impact on communities and dynamics of all internal displacement. As outlined in the Shelter/NFI Cluster's HLP Due Diligence guide.

'Changes to the ethno-demographic landscape of conflict affected areas with conflict situations often causing the formation of mono-ethnic blocks in areas that were multi-ethnic prior to the conflict. This can in turn prevent displaced populations from returning to their usual place of residence'²⁰.

In consideration of the myriad of actors and interests at play in North West Syria, there is a risk that 'Shelter provision can easily be co-opted to strengthen ownership claims on the part of an incoming group'²¹. This is especially important to consider when there have been conflict-induced changes to the demographic composition, like the displacement of entire population groups.

- **Housing, Land and Property:** HLP is a key concern and challenge facing humanitarian actors across sectors in North West Syria. Key HLP dynamics have been outlined in IOM-CCCM's HLP Due Diligence Guidance:
 - 'Destruction of property and infrastructure.
 - Emergence of new authorities dealing with HLP.
 - Undocumented and illegal HLP transactions and fraudulent property documentation.
 - HLP disputes, in particular around rental agreements and inheritance issues.
 - Tensions between IDPs and host community members over access to land.
 - Lack or loss of HLP documents.
 - Very weak tenure security, with multiple displacements being the norm for most IDPs.
 - Absentee landowners/landlords and competing ownership claims.
 - Secondary occupation of property without the consent of the original owner.'²²

Regarding the implementation of shelter activities, there are further concerns about potential disputes about the land once the crisis is over, and the related issues of forced evictions and making sure that the rights of both the landowners and beneficiaries are protected. Especially given the contextual challenges and limitations in verifying HLP documents with complete certainty.

²⁰ Shelter/NFI Cluster's HLP Due Diligence Guidance

²¹ Shelter/NFI Cluster's HLP Due Diligence Guidance

²² IOM-CCCM Cluster's HLP Due Diligence Guidance

- **Independent interventions:** An additional concern is interference from local authorities, in areas such as beneficiary selection, which is especially difficult to monitor in North West Syria as it is a context where remote management is necessary. It is important to ensure access for persons in specific situations of vulnerability and risk (such as female headed households, child headed households, minorities, etc.).
- **Rent-seeking behaviour:** A further concern is rent being asked to live on a site although humanitarian assistance is supposed to be free of charge/unconditional.

Mitigation Measures

- **Housing, Land and Property:** To mitigate potential HLP issues, strict HLP due diligence²³ in line with international standards is critical. As outlined by IOM on behalf of the CCCM Cluster, ‘Due Diligence is a process of research, analysis and monitoring to ensure the protection of HLP rights throughout the program cycle.’²⁴

In the same regard, it is important to consider the variety of HLP dynamics that could be impactful on interventions; and to utilize guidance and resources²⁵ to identify, mitigate and respond to land-related concerns. Ongoing contextual developments also have an impact on HLP and must be taken into account and monitored (since they could be changed or updated); such as the recent restrictions on permits being given for private lands in North West Syria.

It is therefore important to undertake due diligence in programme design and implementation and achieve as much legal certainty about tenure as possible (the “secure enough” approach), in consideration of the complex context and constraints. Due diligence should include **community verification** to ascertain if the land is public or private, or to identify potential land disputes. Supporting ownership documentation should also be attached to the lease agreement or Memorandum of Understanding.

Whether public or private lands are used, it is essential to clearly outline how the land will be used, with what materials and infrastructure, and how they would be removed afterwards if requested by the landlord. Prior to the implementation phase, details of the intervention need to be clearly indicated in the agreement and communicated to respective parties.

- **Protection mainstreaming and AAP:** Protection risks and mitigation measures need to be considered throughout the program cycle. Site planning strategies can help to mitigate protection risks, like GBV, through the design and layout of the settlement and shelter unit, using measures such as lockable doors, good lighting and gender disaggregation options.

Involving beneficiaries, to learn from their experience and receive feedback on shelter designs, can also help make sure shelters are safe, comfortable and culturally acceptable. It is also important to make sure that there are enough female staff members on board to facilitate this interaction. IDPs including women, girls, elderly and people with specific needs should be consulted before, during and after the implementation of the project to make sure that their views and needs are accommodated. Likewise, the design of the shelter and the settlements should respond to the needs of the people with disabilities.

²³ IOM-CCCM Cluster’s HLP Due Diligence Guidance, ‘This requires a double focus: To 1) identify rightful landowner(s) of the land and obtain their consent prior to any intervention, and 2) provide the greatest degree of tenure security to beneficiaries feasible in the given context (‘secure enough’ approach).’

²⁴ IOM-CCCM Cluster’s HLP Due Diligence Guidance.

²⁵ IOM-CCCM Cluster’s HLP Due Diligence Guidance (Checklist); Shelter/NFI Cluster’s Housing, Land and Property Rights in Shelter: Due Diligence Guidelines.

It is also important to ensure that beneficiaries are provided with sufficient information on the situation as well as their rights and responsibilities, so they can make an informed decision about moving into a shelter. Highlighting that they have the right to make a voluntary decision on this move.

- **Beneficiary selection:** Fair and transparent procedures need to be closely monitored as much as possible given the remote management context, to avoid external interference. Independence in the selection of beneficiaries is therefore a key mitigation measure and implementing partners can request support from OCHA's Access Working Group in case of interference.

One of the concerns raised by partners and highlighted in the Protection Cluster's Guidance Note on Mitigating Protection Risks in IDP Sites Exclusive to Widowed and Divorced Women and Girls²⁶ is the risk of inadvertently creating additional protection risks by targeting and separating households according to vulnerabilities only. In this guidance that explores the situation of sites in North West Syria where only widowed and divorced women and girls live, protection violations were highlighted such as movement restrictions and economic violence and abuse, GBV risks such as sexual exploitation and abuse, and forced and early marriage, as well as child protection risks like family separation and forced recruitment, and child labour. Targeting only vulnerable families, such as female-headed or child-headed households, could lead to stigmatization and risk increasing the household's vulnerability rather than enhancing their quality of life.

- **Location selection:** While tents continue to be recommended as a necessary emergency shelter solution, more adequate and dignified shelter options can be appropriate in protracted situations of displacement. Especially when implementing such shelter options, selecting locations away from the frontlines, in areas that are as safe and secure as possible, is advised. Access to basic services, and protection against natural hazards, also need to be considered in the selection of the location and the site planning process.

As with the selection of beneficiaries, autonomy is also required in the selection of the location. Intervening in locations without ethno-demographic concerns is advisable to help mitigate risks related to local conflict dynamics and demographic changes. Likewise, conducting a risk analysis on a case-by-case basis is recommended prior to an intervention.

- **Contextual analysis:**
 - **Stakeholders:** It is important to consider the possible interests of different parties, to make sure that interventions are not being manipulated, and that the Do No Harm and impartiality principles are complied with. Analysing the potential risks on a case-by-case basis (as with the location and beneficiary selection) is also needed in relation to different stakeholders.
 - **Population:** Information about the impact of the conflict on the population composition in the targeted locations should be obtained prior to intervening. In scenarios where entire ethnic or other population groups have left, implementing only emergency shelter activities would be more appropriate.
 - **Environment:** To mitigate risks such as detrimental impacts on the land, which may cause disputes with landowners or host communities; it is important to assess the environmental impact of the intervention in advance.
- **Exit strategy:** Each IDP settlement should have an exit strategy in place that was discussed in advance with local stakeholders. Exit strategies should take into account the handover and a plan for the decommissioning of sites. Appropriate environmental rehabilitation measures can enhance the natural regeneration of the

²⁶ Protection Cluster's Guidance Note on Mitigating Protection Risks in IDP Sites Exclusive to Widowed and Divorced Women and Girls.

environment in and around temporary settlements. Conducting rigorous due diligence in advance of interventions, as well as developing relations with landlords and host communities can help to mitigate potential future tensions or eviction risks.

It is important to note that the principles like Do No Harm, and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement should be integrated in all phases of the project, including the exit strategy.

5. Conclusion

After a decade of conflict, the shelter sector in Syria needs to reflect a range of humanitarian shelter options that provide safety, dignity and protection in a context of protracted displacement. These options also need to support the choices made by IDPs themselves in finding adequate shelter. Adequate humanitarian shelter options can vary according to the needs, urgency and circumstances of the IDPs themselves. This document outlines some of the main current approaches to dignified shelter, including tents and tool kits, self-built shelters, RHUs, prefabricated shelters, and Temporary Dignified Shelters with a value range of between USD 100-1,200. All of these options can be used to address different shelter needs at different times.

It is crucial to acknowledge that shelter is a process. Families may move between the options that are outlined here as their circumstances change. Within this range of options, it is important to consider both immediate life-saving shelter needs as well as Temporary Dignified Shelters that can have a longer life span and afford greater levels of protection. All of these options represent forms of *humanitarian* intervention intended to provide adequate, safe, private, and dignified shelter in a context of protracted displacement.

6. Resources

- [Guidance Note: Mitigating Protection Risks in IDP Sites Exclusive to Widowed and Divorced Women and Girls \(February 2019\)](#)
- [Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#)
- [HLP XB Turkey Due Diligence Guidelines](#)
- [IASC Guidance on GBV Mitigation](#)
- [IASC Guidance on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [IASC Minimum Standards for Child Protection](#)
- [IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action](#)
- [Land and Conflict, Lessons from the field on conflict sensitive land governance and peace building, UN-Habitat, IIRR, GLTN](#)
- [Protection Mainstreaming Principles](#)
- [Shelter Solutions NWS 2019-12-05](#)
- [Sphere Standards, 2018](#)
- [Supporting HLP-Sensitive CCCM Interventions in Informal Sites in NW Syria December 2019](#)
- [Time and Date – Past Weather in Idlib](#)
- [UNHCR Shelter and Settlement Section: Refugee Housing Unit Factsheet](#)
- [Voices from Syria 2020 – Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview](#)

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