Assessing durable solutions to internal displacement at the area level: a literature review (2010-2024)

Informed by consultations with practitioners and subject matter experts¹

Published February 2025

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Executive summary

The Inter Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Framework published in 2010 defines the achievement of a durable solution as when "internally displaced persons (IDPs) no longer have any specific assistance, and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement [...]". Return, relocation and local integration are identified as the three pathways to achieve such solutions. Despite the Framework's definition, a comprehensive, global understanding of solutions and their assessment has not yet materialised. Although assessment tools and approaches have significantly evolved over the past 14 years, gaps and limitations persist. This is evident as the number of IDPs continues to rise, reaching nearly 76 million by the end of 2023, with preliminary estimates indicating even higher figures by the end of 2024.

This literature review represents a compilation of key methodological references and examples of analysis conducted at the intersection of durable solutions assessment and area-based approaches to humanitarian and development programmes. While providing the background for the development of a new joint toolkit for the area-based assessment of solutions by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and IMPACT Initiatives, this report also acts as an entry point to key concepts, sources and practices for policymakers and practitioners working in interventions and programming on durable solutions, particularly at the local level.

The process of assessing solutions is a complex one, spanning multiple aspects of an IDPs' and a community's existence. Therefore, the development of any new tool must build on existing progress while addressing persistent challenges in durable solutions assessments. Fortunately, there are several good practices to draw from. First, there are several quality sources for data on durable solutions, which can inform analysis and help avoid costly data collection. Second, basic definitions and criteria for measuring or assessing durable solutions progress already exist and can be adopted, rather than reinvented. Third, fostering partnerships across the HDP nexus and beyond, including disaster risk reduction (DRR), private sector and other stakeholders, can enhance efforts when expertise and knowledge are systematically shared. These collaborations can lead to innovative joint initiatives and higher-quality evidence. Echoing the principles of the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and the closing remarks of the Office of the Special Advisor on Solutions, the involvement of national and local authorities and the participation of communities have proven essential in linking durable solutions assessments to public policy and ensuring the informed prioritisation of programming and interventions.

¹ Acknowledgments

This research was conducted with the generous financial support of the European Union's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG-ECHO).

IDMC and IMPACT Initiatives would like to thank the subject matter experts, HQ and in-country staff who took the time to provide insightful input to the research and report as key informants and workshop participants. We thank Steven Miron for his written input on durable solutions in disaster and climate change settings and colleagues Lena von Naso (NRC), Jason Bell (NRC), Amy Rodgers (DRC), Christelle Cazabat (IDMC), Alvaro Sardiza-Miranda, Margot Fortin and Elsa Perreau (IMPACT Initiatives) for their review.







Despite this considerable progress, several practical challenges remain in the assessment of durable solutions. First, the operationalisation of global definitions and guidelines, especially at local levels, remains a significant challenge. Second, the selection of indicators to assess solutions, or the choice of a specific population group to compare IDPs' conditions against, must be tailored to the specific context to align with the national and subnational application of the durable solutions concept and criteria. Third, volatile contexts often hinder adequate data collection, resulting in significant information gaps. Fourth, designing and implementing assessments in an ethical and sustainable manner requires specific consideration, resources and capacity, which are often limited. Finally, the full potential of partnerships across sectors and organisations has yet to be realised. This is even more pertinent when integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change into durable solutions assessments.

The achievement of durable solutions is ultimately a long-term, non-linear process, heavily influenced by the unique realities of each context. This is why area-based assessments (ABAs) offer valuable insights into solutions as they focus on specific areas as the primary unit of analysis. This aspect renders ABAs multisectoral, multistakeholder, and participatory, encompassing all population groups within an area. These characteristics make the ABAs particularly relevant for assessing durable solutions, which cover multiple aspects of IDPs' lives, while also evaluating the readiness or conduciveness of an area to enable such solutions. Drawing on household or individual level data, community and contextual information on services, infrastructure, and the environment, among others, ABAs can help identify entry points to facilitate and support durable solutions across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding (HDP) nexus. Furthermore, they directly inform and influence the design and implementation of local programmes. In doing so, ABAs have the potential to address many of the above-mentioned recurring challenges associated with the assessment of solutions.

While ABAs for solutions offer clear advantages, they are not a silver bullet. Area-based approaches, in general, must be applied critically, particularly in contexts where local government and communities buy-in is present, as their success depends heavily on such demand and engagement. Considering their complexity and resource intensive nature, ABAs for solutions must also be conflict sensitive from the start, to avoid triggering new imbalances or exacerbating existing tensions within affected communities. Finally, while close multi-stakeholder and cross sectoral partnerships can enhance the quality and impact of these assessments, they are inherently more challenging to manage, requiring significant coordination.

The analysis of available literature and consultations with a community of experts on durable solutions identified several general considerations to tackle the above-mentioned challenges and leverage good practices to make better use of ABAs for solutions to inform local planning and programming. Key considerations include:

- Clear audience: Assessments must identify a clear audience from the start. The information needs and programming capacities of end users, whether local or external actors, should guide the assessment. For ABAs that are primarily aimed at informing local authorities, it is essential that they are involved from the start. Such engagement serves to ensure alignment with existing local policies, frameworks, plans and strategies related to durable solutions.
- Human impact of data collection: The timing and scope of data collection must consider the human impact on affected communities. Early identification of data requirements is essential, whether it is at the community level through key informants (KIs), from documents on services and infrastructure, or from individuals and/or households. Data collection efforts should match the needs and size of humanitarian and development response capacities. Ethical considerations such as avoiding false expectations or assessment fatigue in affected populations should also inform the choice between longitudinal and one-off study designs.
- Resource allocation: Maximizing data collection and/or collation outcomes requires careful resource allocation. This includes striking a balance between the use of available secondary data and a feasible primary data collection plan. Such a plan should aim to incorporate qualitative inputs from affected communities to complement quantitative survey data.
- Operationalisation of results: To ensure data and results from ABAs translate into actionable interventions, they should inform the development of area-based or local action plans or strategies, where these do not already exist. Where such references exist, ABAs should align with them to ensure contextual relevance and support for policy implementation. This approach facilitates the operationalisation of assessment results at both the local and national level, convening decision-makers and key stakeholders across the HDP nexus and supporting a common understanding drawn from the available information. This alignment promotes effective coordination and complementary responses towards durable solutions which leverage respective capacities and mandates.

In line with these recommendations, IDMC and IMPACT Initiatives are devising a mixed methods toolkit to enable the collection, analysis, and dissemination of data for the area-based assessment of durable solutions readiness and progress. This will support tailored interventions at the local level by bringing together new and existing quantitative data with qualitative inputs from affected communities.







Introduction

The Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons (hereafter referred to as the IASC Framework) remains the seminal reference for a global definition of durable solutions and a way to measure progress towards them.² Since its publication in 2010, dozens of initiatives, tools and methodologies have emerged to identify, measure progress towards and assess durable solutions. The IASC framework outlines how a durable solution can be achieved, namely through:

- Sustainable local integration in places of refuge
- 2. Return and sustainable reintegration in the place of origin
- Relocation -originally called settlement- and sustainable integration in a third location

While this concept is clear, translating it into practice for the assessment of solutions remains difficult. Durable solutions go beyond the physical movement of an IDP to a preferred location. They represent a gradual and complex process.3 Progress is measured in months and years, spanning the humanitarian response, recovery, and development timelines.

Global frameworks such as the IASC Framework and the International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS) are starting points in the measurement of progress towards durable solutions and the development of indicators to monitor them. However, efforts towards realising durable solutions have shown that these are different for communities, households and individuals within and across countries, highlighting the need for contextualisation and tailored indicators and methods at the national and local levels.

Internal displacement is a complex phenomenon, with triggers, impacts and solutions that cut across a wide range of social, economic, environmental and political factors. As a result, durable solutions cannot be pursued in the same way across groups of IDPs or geographical areas, even within the same country. A way to account for such variations is the use of area-based assessments (ABAs), responding to the need for granular data and context-sensitive analysis by humanitarian and development actors working locally and policymakers. The value added of such assessments was recognised by the Data for Solutions to Internal Displacement (DSID) Taskforce, created in 2021 by the OSA. In 2024, the overall efficacy of area-based coordination and approaches in displacement settings was highlighted on multiple occasions. First through the Independent Review of the Humanitarian Response to Internal Displacement and second in the report on the United Nations System-wide Approach to Internal Displacement, which delineates "an area-based (programming) approach to solutions" as a course of action for the UN at country and subnational levels.5

ABAs provide a detailed understanding of the complexity of the areas surveyed, the lives of the people residing in them, the governmental and non-governmental actors supporting them, the infrastructure and services available and their local capacity. 6 ABAs differ from other assessment and programme approaches, which might focus only on the individual, the household - and their displacement status -, systems and infrastructure, or separate sectorial needs.⁷ They consider the specificity of IDPs' multisectoral needs and enjoyment of rights compared to the non-displaced population, their capacities and vulnerabilities, connecting them to the "bigger picture" of the economic, social, governance, and spatial reality of the community.8 Finally, their design matches many of the principles set out by the UN Secretary General in the 2022 Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and supported by the OSA's work in its 30month mandate.9 These principles include, for instance, the coordination with local stakeholders, including local authorities, local response actors, and community representatives. Furthermore, ABA's embedding within local and national coordination structures and policy processes increases their likelihood of being sustained over time, while remaining sensitive to community tensions and dynamics. 10

While examples of ABAs of and for solutions exist, there is no global initiative to systematise their usage, with actors operating locally having varying analytical capacities and needing guidance in implementation of such potentially complex processes.11 They need to evaluate many thematic areas and report lacking data on sensitive topics like conflict dynamics and security, protection and social cohesion, but also on basic service provision, and host populations' needs and capacities. 12 To bridge this gap, IDMC and IMPACT Initiatives, based on their respective experiences in internal displacement monitoring and research and technical expertise in ABAs, collaborate to design, pilot and share with in-country practitioners a user-friendly toolkit for the area-based assessment of solutions.

The toolkit targets humanitarian actors and supports the inclusion of durable solutions considerations into displacement responses from the start. However, informing and implementing sustainable solutions to internal displacement remains a collective process that goes well beyond the responsibilities and capacities of humanitarian actors. Their engagement with communities, development, governmental, peacebuilding, and private sector actors, who are also a secondary audience for the toolkit, remains essential.







What is the purpose of this report and who is it for?

This literature review is the result of an extensive stocktaking of tools, initiatives, approaches and studies for the assessment of durable solutions on the one hand, and the application of area-based approaches on the other. It covers the period between 2010, when the IASC Framework was published, and 2024. While the ultimate focus is on the areabased and "local" tools, global, regional, and national methodologies and use cases are mapped and analysed considering their importance in shaping ABAs. The review, which is based on the analysis of approximately 350 documents and consultations with around 70 subject-matter experts (SMEs) and in-country practitioners, has a double objective.13

First, the literature review puts together recommendations to inform the development of the IDMC-IMPACT Initiatives toolkit. Second, the report fills a gap as a publicly available, state of the art review on assessment of solutions for IDPs, particularly at the area level. It responds to the need, voiced by multiple key informants, for an overview of different durable solutions initiatives being conducted, often in parallel, of what lessons were learned and what challenges faced in the assessment of solutions, including at the area level.14

The report audience are IDMC and IMPACT Initiatives staff developing the toolkit, as well as humanitarian (primarily), development, academic, and government stakeholders (secondarily), using and/or producing data on solutions for programming and policies.

The report is organised in three sections. Part I outlines the progress made in the assessment of solutions at the global, regional, national, and subnational levels, flagging good practices, but also challenges and data gaps remaining. Part II makes the case for the use of ABAs for solutions to address some of these challenges. It first introduces what areabased approaches are and then presents how ABAs can specifically inform the advancement of durable solutions locally. Use cases of ABAs are highlighted, along with the complementarity of ABAs for solutions with global, national, and subnational tools and mechanisms. The final section contains recommendations on ABAs, drawing from inputs provided by key informants (KIs) and guidance from previous lessons learned documents and events.

Review Methodology

A broad thematic approach to durable solutions was adopted, which included documents on urban recovery, relocations, self-reliance, and social cohesion, when they referred to one or more of the three solutions pathways, along with other publications on measurement of progress towards solutions and their assessment, overall. Additionally, a set of sources on the formulation and implementation of area-based approaches, whether related to durable solutions or not, was analysed. While the report's focus is internal displacement, it briefly highlights potential for learning from refugee contexts, too. 15 For review purposes, we considered durable solutions to internal displacement resulting from two triggers, namely disaster and conflict and violence.

Three kinds of documents were reviewed, for a total of around 350 publications:

- 1. Grey literature published by NGOs, UN agencies, and think tanks on tools, frameworks, methodologies and instruments to plan for and implement an area-based approach, to measure progress towards or globally assess solutions, or an area's conduciveness to them. 16
- 2. Academic literature on the IASC Framework, the conceptualisation of durable solutions and related areas of academic enquiry such as managed retreat, planned relocations, sustainability, and urban recovery.
- 3. Policy tools and frameworks issued by international, national, and subnational authorities on durable solutions.¹⁷

This literature review is the result of a scoping exercise involving review planning, document searching and screening, extraction and analysis of data and findings from selected documents, and reporting. 18

This literature review was complemented and informed by interviews with 17 key informants (KIs) including six practitioners and 11 subject matter experts, in addition to two validation workshops on the report and a third workshop on the toolkit, which were attended by approximately 70 stakeholders. This input helped identify reference tools and documents and thematic areas for further search. A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted using NVivo and IMPACT Initiatives' data saturation analysis grid for qualitative data. A more detailed explanation of the methodology is provided in Annex B.







A note on terminology

To avoid repetition, we use the umbrella term "assessment" of durable solutions to refer to the measurement of IDPs' progress towards solutions, durable solutions analyses and profiling, the tracking of durable solution indicators in programme and policy design and/or implementation, one-off or repeated mixed-method overviews of durable solutions in one or multiple localities, or of evaluations of areas' readiness and conduciveness to solutions.

We consider area-based assessments (ABAs) as part of area-based approaches. The assessments inform the subsequent phases of an area-based approach, namely participatory planning, coordination, and implementation.

In part 2, some of the tools and approaches reviewed, while not being formally classified as area-based, are still considered as such in the analysis, if they share the defining features of area-based approaches listed under section 1, part 2.

Limitations

This is not a systematic review. As such, it does not mention all sources on area-based approaches and durable solutions assessments. It casts a wide net on initiatives and tools, rather than going into the details of each or including in-depth quality assessments of the documents. The report draws mainly from English sources, considering Spanish and French for the review of policies only.







Part 1: Progress and challenges in the assessment of durable solutions

Progress and good practices

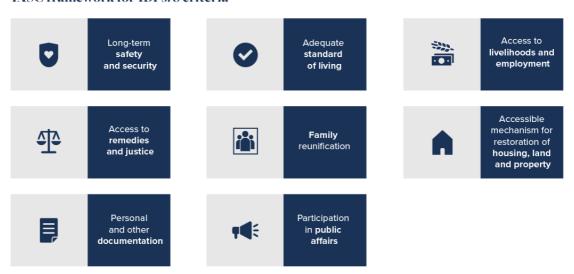
In the 14 years since the publication of the IASC Framework, the way practitioners and SMEs talk about durable solutions assessment and the methods used to follow IDPs' journeys towards solutions has evolved to better reflect the reality of forced displacement at all levels of analysis, from the global to the local. Yet, it is not just the increased availability of data, its disaggregation and sophistication of the analysis that count as progress. ¹⁹ Other milestones are the understanding that durable solutions measurement and assessment are part of humanitarian AND development ecosystems, that they need to engage governmental and non-governmental actors, whether international, national and local, and, most of all, communities themselves. New learnings are also emerging from work of the DSID Taskforce and the mandate of the Special Advisor. ²⁰ The progress highlighted below, however, should not be taken for granted. Good practices must be applied time and again to be continuously improved and/or to become a standard beyond a few promising cases.

Conceptual and definitional progress

Embracing complexity: understanding key features of durable solutions

International discussions and policy processes involving practitioners, scholars, and decisionmakers have clarified some of the foundational aspects of what durable solutions are – or aren't. It is important to integrate these hard-won, agreed-upon minimum common denominators in new measurement and assessments tools to ensure their results feed into conceptual progress and policy, programmatic, and theoretical conversations. In the word of one KII, there is no need to "reinvent the wheel".²¹

IASC framework for IDPs: 8 criteria



Source: IASC Framework

Global references exist and include the IASC Framework, with its definition of durable solutions and its eight macrolevel criteria, listed below, to assess to what extent durable solutions have been achieved.²² The 2020 International Recommendations on Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (IRIS) further outline 18 sub-criteria to enable national statistical offices and international organisations to measure IDPs' progress towards solutions, over time.²³ They can be used in association with the Durable Solutions Indicators Library to select specific indicators, with the related Analysis Guide providing additional guidance on how to operationalise the IASC Framework.²⁴

Drawing from these global references, there is increased awareness of the pain points and common misunderstandings of the concept of durable solutions. First, it is now widely understood that location and movement alone do not say much. That is why intention surveys are frequently complemented by 'big picture' analysis. Second, recent publications do not look at one way to achieve solutions, namely return, but three, conceiving them as pathways rather than one-off events. This allows for a variety of programmes and policies to be formulated and implemented compared to a historically disproportionate focus on returns. By conceiving of durable solutions as pathways, IDPs' own intentions and commitments have more space and visibility.

Durable solutions are now treated as a multifaceted phenomenon in operational and scholarly publications, considering both the needs and rights of IDPs, as per the IASC Framework. Besides access to housing, land and property, food and jobs, intangible assets like social capital, social cohesion, political participation and civic engagement are analysed.³⁰ Tools and studies also integrate subjective measures of perceptions and feelings of populations affected on belonging, integration, safety and security, and community satisfaction, to complete the solutions picture.³¹







Progress in data availability and analysis methods

Capitalising on available data and resources

Recent methodologies use available data on -mostly- humanitarian needs to give a multi-country overview of durable solutions informing policymakers and programme staff at the global level and cross-country initiatives. For example, IDMC' Severity Assessments compare the needs of displaced and non-displaced populations across 13 countries using Multisectoral Needs Assessment Data (MSNA) from REACH.³² The Periodic Global Report on the State of Solutions to Internal Displacement (PROGRESS) published by IOM's Global Data Institute and Georgetown University, instead integrates global quantitative analysis of internally displaced household survey data with qualitative analysis of focus group discussions with displaced people.³³

One size does not fit all: disaggregated data and analysis

No two pathways to solutions are the same, whether for individuals, households, or entire communities. The literature highlights how not only displacement status -and its duration- can impact solutions, but also gender, age, ethnicity, indigenous status, social class, level of education, and place of origin.³⁴ This intersectional lens led to stand-alone publications on specific population groups such as Save the Children's Durable Solutions for Children toolkit, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)-funded research on long-term integration of female IDPs in Ukraine and IOM's gender and ethnoreligious analyses of durable solutions in Iraq. 35

Looking at publications displaying multiple levels of disaggregation, the World Bank made its first large-scale methodological contribution to durable solutions analysis and to inform policymaking through four country case studies on Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.³⁶ The case studies identify different IDP profiles among respondents based on temporal factors such as past conditions, present situation and future intentions to further disaggregate findings.37

Disaggregation across the above-mentioned variables, however, is not yet systematically consistently applied across organisations, with some population categories, such as people with disabilities, receiving less attention.³⁸

More than just an audience: effective involvement of communities and authorities

Communities

Durable solutions assessments frequently draw from communities' experience and local knowledge to contextualise research, monitoring, and programme design. For instance, IOM's Solution and Mobility Index (SMI) assesses which factors show a statistically significant association with the perceived stability of communities.³⁹ Affected communities also helped set out programming priorities on durable solutions in Somalia, ensuring their contextualisation. 40 While guidance on community involvement in durable solutions analyses and planning has been provided by JIPS, much remains to further IDPs' agency in assessments and translate the insights from affected communities into actions. 41

Authorities

The Guiding Principles from 1998 highlight the key role authorities play in enabling IDPs' "return, resettlement and reintegration".42 Echoing the Principles, informants recognised the role political will and ownership play in collecting, analysing, publishing and using data on solutions. 43 Colombia's Victims Unit leads the monitoring of basic needs and access to rights of conflict-affected residents and their overcoming of vulnerabilities down to the municipal level. 44 For other countries, such as Honduras, Mexico, and Somalia, the implementation of the IRIS, which effectively started in 2023, is a step towards governments-led data collection and analysis on solutions. ⁴⁵ Nigeria's Bureau of Statistics is also deploying its own survey to inform response on solutions. 46 Å holistic approach to assessing solutions engages authorities nationally and sub-nationally, clarifying terms and ideally ensuring the interoperability of data from nongovernmental operations and national statistics. 47

In fact, any assessment of solutions, regardless of its geographic focus, cannot prescind from national and subnational policies. 48 Policy tools outline how durable solutions and their achievement is conceptualised in the country and what data authorities need, indicating clear pathways to collaboration with national and international organisations. Somalia's National Policy on Refugee-Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons adopts benchmarks, adapted from the IASC Framework, to measure IDPs' progress towards solutions and highlights the connection of this measurement with the determination of the end of one's displacement. 49 Policy tools, such as Honduras' Law for the Prevention, Assistance and Protection of Internally Displaced Persons, can already include input from non-government actors and DACs in the legal text, providing an early opportunity for alignment of priorities and interventions.⁵⁰

Multi-country methodologies leverage the analysis and monitoring of existing legal and policy frameworks to measure progress towards solutions. IDMC's Internal Displacement Index (IDI) analyses the progress of 46 countries towards addressing displacement and finding solutions by combining figures on the scale and impacts of displacement, a country's socioeconomic, environmental and conflict conditions with information on state policies and capacities to address displacement.⁵¹ Adopting a development-oriented perspective, UNDP and JIPS have published an indicator framework to periodically monitor the implementation of solutions at the national level.⁵² The tool is intended to support national governments' monitoring and evaluation of existing policy frameworks on internal displacement, including durable solutions strategies, as well as inform the formulation of national and local development plans.⁵³







Building solid partnerships and exchanges across agencies, sectors, and disciplines

Assessing solutions can become very complex, very quickly. With several areas of needs and rights issues to be analysed, assessment of solutions can benefit from pooling resources across organisations and sectors. Regional platforms on durable solutions such as the NGO-led Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) in East Africa and the Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) covering the forced displacement of Syrians within the country and in neighbouring states can enable this sharing of resources.⁵⁴ They have provided guidance on how to contextualise global indicators for the assessment of solutions to the regional and country dynamics observed, catering for the needs of programme actors for rapid overviews, while keeping a consultative approach to the analysis.55 They have acted as catalysts for the exchange of good practices and lessons learnt by programme actors within a region, boosting the impact of member organisations in informing and influencing national and subnational policies on solutions.⁵⁶ For example, Ethiopia's Somali Regional State Durable Solutions Strategy 2022-2025 references the data and analysis from IOM and ReDSS as sources to inform its own monitoring of communities' progress towards solutions. 57

Global collaborations across the HDP nexus have also showed promise to innovate the ways solutions are assessed and fill data gaps. For instance, the World Bank collaborates with UNHCR through the Joint Data Centre, collecting and analysing socioeconomic data for solutions programming, building on each organisation's expertise.⁵⁸ Its latest assessment of poverty in the Central African Republic, run in collaboration with government bodies, considered IDPs' specific challenges.⁵⁹

Finally, developers and users of tools for the assessment of durable solutions do not need to refer exclusively to internal displacement resources. While the dynamics of local integration for IDPs are not identical to those of refugees, aspects such as language, ethnicity, livelihoods, market integration, and hosts' perceptions, along with personal life stories and pathways are relevant to both. 60 IOM Iraq's series on "Cities as Home" reviewed the OECD/European Union 83 Indicators of Immigrant Integration and the Migrant Integration Policy Index for its methodological development. 61 Some informants, working on solutions to forced displacement, highlighted analytical approaches applied in refugee and internal displacement contexts, such as the Self-Reliance Index. 62 Refugee-focused tools can also be a reference to address outstanding methodological challenges in internal displacement settings, such as community participation and agency. For instance, NRC has developed a refugee-led framework for measuring progress towards solutions in Jordan, adopting four "safety" dimensions to orient programming. 63 Its approach to displaced people's agency can be very relevant for internal displacement settings.

Gaps and challenges

Despite these many advancements, the assessment of durable solutions still present challenges. There is no silver bullet: results for the same country and/or communities can vary noticeably, depending on methodology.⁶⁴ Many of the obstacles are related to, if not the same as, the areas of progress. This shows that stakeholders started answering foundational questions on solutions, but much remains to be addressed to fill gaps.

Conceptual and definitional discrepancies

Definitions

The IASC Framework and the IRIS provide a common understanding of solutions. Due to their global nature, however, they could not be as detailed or provide an agreed-upon shortlist of indicators for measurement. 65

The Guiding Principles give a definition of internally displaced people, but national authorities use different legal and non-legal criteria to determine who is an IDP or a returnee. Non-governmental actors must consider these definitional discrepancies which often hinder cross-country comparisons.⁶⁶ They might themselves have different conceptions of durable solutions which need alignment before undertaking joint analyses and/or planning.⁶⁷ They might also lack guidance when adapting global frameworks to country contexts, particularly when global criteria are not applicable or difficult to measure, or they are faced with context-specific political priorities. 68

The academic debate on solutions mirrors this lack of definitive answers by broaching conceptual issues such as what a durable solution is and to what extent the three pathways are fit for purpose, i.e. accurately reflect IDPs' reality and

Benchmarking when measuring progress towards solutions

IDPs' needs, vulnerabilities, and enjoyment of rights are usually compared in the literature with those of non-displaced people to measure progress towards solutions. Deciding the exact terms of this comparison, however, has proved not straightforward.

While the IRIS recommends NSOs use national averages for the population as a benchmark to compare data on internally displaced residents, other actors have chosen different terms of comparison. One collect data from the so-called host community, i.e. people living in proximity of IDPs or even materially hosting IDPs, with "close proximity" being variously defined.⁷¹ Others use concepts like "stayees", i.e. residents who never departed the area origin, adding to the terms of comparison available. In rare cases, sufficient data is available to allow for chronological comparisons of pre- and post-conflict displacement conditions, as in a JIPS-led durable solution study in Syrian cities. 72 Without an unequivocal definition of host community, limited comparisons can be made across studies. 7







There are cases where comparison creates programming and targeting dilemmas. For instance, when disasters strike people with the least resources or capacities might be forced to stay behind, IDPs can also move to communities where conditions are worse than the areas of origin and fare better than the non-displaced, displacement duration also alters vulnerability patterns.74 To address these issues, the World Bank has disaggregated displacement profiles based on past conditions, present situation, and future intentions of people surveyed. 75 Contextual analysis also provides some clarity on unexpected solution dynamics.

When drawing such comparisons, the impact of humanitarian and development programmes must also be considered to avoid giving a misleading picture. Humanitarian, development, and governmental support for displaced households might bring durable solutions indicators for displaced and non-displaced residents to the same level.⁷⁶ With support withdrawn too soon, however, the living conditions and/or access to rights of displaced people might rapidly worsen, showing that durable solutions are unachieved.77

Data challenges

Primary data collection and dissemination

The different tools for measuring progress towards solutions set comprehensive standards for overcoming displacement-related vulnerabilities, which however require much data to report on. 78 IDPs might also not fully meet all of requirements, even decades after displacement, leaving international organisations and governments with cumulative numbers of IDPs and returnees merging new and historical displacements.⁷⁹ It might not be always feasible to conduct such large-scale data collection that would allow for the measurement of progress towards solutions for this number of people. Some organisations must thus rely on predetermined time frames (e.g. five years since return to location of origin) or physical movement, to identify returnees and IDPs.80

Additionally, the precariousness of crises and fragile contexts hinders the answering of many questions on solutions.⁸¹ Baseline and comparative data on populations for early recovery, on displaced and non-displaced residents, might not be available, particularly when it comes to economic security and microeconomic aspects.⁸² Even once data collection starts, sudden disruptions affect assessments.83 Conflict and violence, for instance, hinder enumerators' access to communities for regular data collection, limiting insights drawn from analysis and posing additional challenges to longitudinal or panel measurement of progress towards solutions.⁸⁴ Partly or fully remote coordination of data collection in conflict contexts can lead to messages "lost in translation" between staff, including on the aim of the exercises. 85 In other cases like Sudan, conflict re-erupts and years of analytical and programmatic progress on solutions come to a standstill.86

Sampling is often challenging. For findings to be representative of the population, a sampling strategy might include different levels of representativeness.87 For example, in a city some results can be representative at the city level, but others might accurately depict the situation in neighbourhoods only.88 Nationally owned data on IDPs and other sensitive information are needed to draw sampling frameworks but are not easily available for non-state actors.89 Even when such data is collected, it might not be statistically representative of the displaced and non-displaced population.90

Assessment of solutions can be resource intensive, particularly when not much data was previously collected and/or study results must be representative. 91 Operational analyses relying on key informants cover much ground quickly but might miss out on nuances raised by household, individual and/or community-wide consultations, or contextual analysis.92 For technical assessments, multidisciplinary professionals might be needed and/or partnerships across organisations formed to enable robust data collection and analysis. 93 To portray the complexity of solutions, assessments risk becoming too cumbersome or costly to be fully run by any one organisation. 94

Finally, the most adequate format for the dissemination of durable solutions assessments must also be identified. For example, several tools reviewed are indexes, which make the assessment of solutions more digestible, but also run the risk of oversimplifying reporting.95

Relevance of secondary data

When secondary data is available, it might not meet the needs of actors working on solutions. Secondary data often focuses on immediate needs rather than longer-term issues for solutions, such as participation in public affairs. 96 When governments collect data on the population, this might come too late or sporadically for responders to act upon. 97 Another gap in secondary data is information on the implementation of laws and policies. Often there is no data about how these are implemented and whether displaced and non-displaced residents are granted equal rights and opportunities in practice.98

Ethics and sustainability

Humanitarian work typically has a short-term focus, even though in the last thirty years humanitarian workers mostly responded to cyclical or protracted crises. 99 A tension lingers between the need to assess solutions and its sustainability over time. This is why the HDP nexus and, in general, collaboration with authorities, private sector and other local actors is crucial for the long-term. 100 Involvement of private sector actors was, however, rarely if ever encountered by informants. 101 Longitudinal and panel studies of solutions remain scarce, considering they are resource intensive. 102

While there are examples of collaboration, partial or full handover of assessments from humanitarian to development actors or governments is not standard practice. Whereas some might argue this separation works best, this limits the impact of initial assessments. 103 A lack of trust between actors and the absence of institutionalised data sharing







agreements might explain this lack of cooperation, especially due to - perceived or actual - partiality in data collection and analysis and missing protection safeguards for people affected. 104 Different data and ethical guidelines by humanitarian, development, and governmental actors widen these gaps. 105

In other cases, development and government actors, national and local, struggle to mobilise resources for assessing solutions for lack of means, competing priorities, or changes in country circumstances. 106 In yet other situations, governments are party to conflicts triggering displacement and/or have no interest in pursuing a durable solutions agenda, hindering any handover or sharing of responsibilities. 107

These are not the only ethical concerns, though. Studies which are too time-consuming can trigger assessment fatigue and frustration when residents feel the assistance received does not match the time given, are unclear about the goals and outcomes of the exercises, and/or run risks in answering questions on safety and security when data privacy and safeguarding standards are low. 108

Missed opportunities in coordination, collaboration, and learning

With the attention on durable solutions and the number of actors involved increasing, coordination becomes difficult in a potential "solutions arms race". 109 Even in global organisations, ensuring a systematic approach to solutions measurement in country operations is not without difficulties. 110

There were promising initiatives enabling practitioners to share experiences and challenges, such as JIPS' Learning Community on Durable Solutions Analysis. 111 Programmes and initiatives also published lessons learned and good practices to advise colleagues, authorities and development actors. 112 However, learning is not systematised, with lessons learned gathered ad-hoc, scattered across platforms or only kept within the same organisation. 113

Finally, the concept of "durable solutions" might have less traction outside of the humanitarian and development sector, with other terms such as recovery, or "liveability" more easily understood. 114 The issue of language, the ambiguity of terms like "host community" and the need to open the humanitarian-focused dialogue on solutions, starting from the terms used, was highlighted in literature and consultations. 115 Without analytical frameworks and indicators including HDP issues and more explicit inputs from development actors into existing tools, cross-sectoral connections might not deepen in the future. 116

Recurring gaps: connecting solutions with DRR and climate change considerations

Disaster displacement in the context of climate change and/or DRR is often a 'blind spot' in the assessment of solutions. 117 There are a few recent examples which go towards filling the gap. For example, IOM's Solution and Mobility Index in Libya and Burundi incudes, respectively, indicators focused on disaster risk reduction and level of damage from weather-related hazards. 118 On the policy level, the Displacement Addendum to the Disaster Resilience Scorecard in Cities developed by UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), IOM, IDMC and the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) assesses the inclusion of durable solutions considerations in disaster recovery planning, drawing from the IASC Framework's criteria with an explicit focus on housing, land, property and related judiciary and documental issues. 119

Despite these recent advancements, many of the existing frameworks still fail to include disaster risk reduction indicators, such as those that aim to address multi-hazard exposure (especially slow-onset events), consider long-term climate risk and recognise vulnerabilities related to climate change loss and damage. 120 Additionally, scholars and practitioners analysing disaster displacement recovery, planned relocations (or 'managed retreats') and resettlement infrequently deploy the vocabulary of 'durable solutions'. 121 As such, their work is under-represented in the literature

The emerging body of research and practice on understanding, measuring and addressing 'loss and damage' can contribute much to durable solutions assessments in the context of climate change. 122 For example, given that solutions are considered comprehensive and lasting only when the ability to enjoy human rights is restored, addressing noneconomic losses and damage from climate change, including those affecting cultural rights, is necessary. 123 Relatedly, there is an opportunity to adopt into durable solutions frameworks and toolkits emerging 'good practice', such as valuebased approaches to assessing loss and damage, which empowers communities to establish programmatic priorities and the integration of "climate justice" considerations when analysing displaced and non-displaced people's enjoyment of basic rights. 124

With the operationalisation of the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage and the Santiago Network for Loss and Damage at COP28 in 2023, 'displacement' and 'relocation', (along with 'migration'), are now central to the Fund's scope and workstreams of other UNFCCC bodies and expert groups. 125 While there are promising new efforts to mainstream 'durable solutions' into the loss and damage policy and practice, clearly, more must be done to address the gaps in knowledge and practice mentioned above. 126







Part 2: The case for area-based approaches to the assessment of durable solutions

In this second part of the report, we will explore how ABAs can offer unique advantages in terms of contextualisation and analysis of the complex, multisectoral topic of durable solutions. By informing local policies and programmes on solutions and leveraging the expertise of a wide variety of actors across the HDP nexus working locally, ABAs have the potential to meet some of the challenges encountered in the measurement of durable solutions so far and effectively integrate the emerging good practices. Nonetheless, they should be used in contexts which are conducive to such a comprehensive approach and where results can be immediately put into practice. Awareness of recurring implementation challenges is also essential to ensure the smooth and successful completion of ABAs for solutions.

The key features of an area-based approach

Before making the case for ABAs of solutions, it is necessary to define what area-based approaches are and their key features. Adopting the definition of the Shelter Cluster, "Area-based approaches provide multi-sectoral support and work with multiple stakeholders, considering the whole population living in a specific geographic area with high levels of need".127 Born out of the regional and urban planning exercises rolled out in poor and vulnerable contexts in the 1960s and 1970s, the common features of area-based approaches in humanitarian settings, particularly in urban contexts, were highlighted by Parker and Maynard in 2015 and the Urban Settlements Working Group, under the Global Shelter Cluster, in 2019.128 In alignment with the Cluster, this report also includes settlement-based approaches, which share the features of area-based approaches, emphasising the socio-cultural boundaries of the settlement, besides the administrative ones.129 A settlement is defined as "The place where people live as a socially defined and spatially bound unit" and can be rural or urban.130

Whether defined as settlement-, place- or area-based, these approaches share four distinguishing features. First, the geographical boundaries of the area can be determined by physical, social and/or administrative factors.131 As such, area-based approaches can cover entire municipalities, villages and cities, or collective sites, such as shelters or camps. Practitioners implementing "local" and area-based programmes also did not share one definition of "local" or area.132 Therefore, it is important to draw from local knowledge and systems in the identification of the area targeted, rather than imposing a foreign delimitation that communities, local, and national actors would not recognise.133 It also enables smoother implementation of programmes and interventions to strengthen existing service provision, and support systems.134

It is not merely a smaller geographical scope (admin level 3, 4 or below) that makes an initiative an area-based one, but its approach.135 Going beyond the individual and household level, area-based interventions include the whole population, target multisectoral needs and rights issues, and involve a variety of stakeholders in the response.136 As a consequence, assessments often use mixed methods and rely on the collaboration of the community and humanitarian, development, private, and governmental actors.137 These stakeholders are ideally placed to act upon results by issuing policies or devising evidence-based programmes, highlighting the operational nature of assessments.138 The joint leadership of these approaches, and their attention to affected people's participation respond to priorities in international humanitarian policy processes, such as UN-OCHA's Flagship Initiative: Rethinking Humanitarian Response, launched in 2023, and can help provide increasingly people-centred and holistic responses to communities' needs and rights issue.139

Area-based approaches allow for the convening of actors across different mandates and area of expertise for collaboration and coordination in the response, ideally leading to a better usage of resources and more aligned interventions, which complement rather than replace what services and support is already provided by governments and do not trigger new tensions in the population.140 In fact, area-based interventions helped improve connections between authorities and local populations and successfully involved communities in addressing problems across different programmatic phases, from needs assessments, to mapping, coordination, and monitoring, enhancing local levels of trust, ownership, and social cohesion.141

Application in urban contexts

Reflecting their initial usage in urban settings, area-based and settlement-based approaches have often been developed and applied to address the complex and multi-layered needs of people living in cities, towns, and other urban centres.

Area-based approaches allow to readily integrate the analysis of conflict impacts on people and assets. An example are the urban profiles of Syrian cities led by UN Habitat, which enabled the prioritisation and planning of short-, medium-, and longer-term recovery interventions in different neighbourhoods.142 Built out of these experiences in urban profiling, UN Habitat's Urban Recovery Analysis Framework provides general guidance on how to use area-based knowledge and action plans to effectively inform and deliver multisectoral interventions in conflict-affected urban contexts.143

In urban displacement contexts, area-based and settlement-based approaches integrate spatial analysis to unlock insights on needs, response capacities, and longer-term development challenges for refugees, IDPs, and host community members. UN-Habitat's Settlement Profiling Tool, for instance, integrates spatial information with administrative data and consultations with local authorities and community to inform urban policymaking in contexts of







protracted displacement, bridging relief and development interventions.144 It suggests overlaying population density data with mappings of service availability to easily spot underserved areas.145 When formal mapping and demographic data is missing, for instance in informal or unregulated urban settlements, community mapping and local knowledge provides information on population displacements, their concentration in neighbourhoods, land tenure and

Area-based approaches in cities, by identifying and addressing the challenges of displaced and non-displaced residents, can highlight the problems common to all urban poor but also make visible the specific difficulties of internally displaced people.147 These might go unnoticed otherwise, in highly populated neighbourhoods with a variety of residents' profiles 148 In support of these efforts, the 2014 Guidance for Profiling Urban Displacement Situations issues by UNHCR, JIPS, and the Feinstein International Centr outlines key logistical, security, and political considerations for the analysis of displacement and its solutions in cities.149

Adopting area-based approaches for the assessment of durable solutions: from theoretical advantages to practical examples

Area-based approaches to research and analysis provide advantages in the assessment of durable solutions due to their:

- 1. Specificity to the area and contextualisation: while the borders of the area under analysis vary, ABAs provide granular data and information on people, places, and local, national, and international actors' capacities and the availability and quality of services. This specificity enables the production of findings which are actionable by community, national, and international actors working on solutions, if not necessarily replicable or generalisable.150 Area-based evidence can inform design and delivery of "last mile" programmes and activities, which directly support displacement-affected communities (DACs) and meet IDPs where they are on the journey towards solutions.151 In some locations, and according to the specific context, ABAs can focus on identifying entry points for solutions, enablers and obstacles affecting an area's readiness to sustain returns, integration, or relocation, while in others the solutions process is well under way and progress measurement is more needed.152
- 2. Whole-of-population approach: whether durable solutions can be achieved by return, local integration, relocation, or a mix of the three, solutions are rarely an exclusively individual or household matter. Community attitudes, along with service availability and local policies can influence IDPs' progress -or lack thereoftowards solutions. That is why area-based approaches are highly suitable for investigating solutions. With the appropriate design, ABAs allow for the comparison of conditions of displaced and non-displaced populations in the same location, highlighting whether and how IDPs' needs and access to rights differ from the rest of the population.153 By integrating the opinion of different community groups on pathways to solutions and the future of the area, ABAs can unearth existing or potential conflicts around solutions and threats to social cohesion.154 Finally, communities might experience multiple, simultaneous forms of forced or voluntary movement, hosting refugees, IDPs, returnees, and migrants.155 An area-based approach to assessing solutions reflects this complex reality and helps break down the monolithic concept of "community" by disaggregating data based on, for example, on sex, age, location, education levels, and/or intentions.156
- 3. Multisectoral scope: it matches the nature of durable solutions as a topic, understood through cross-cutting analysis of multiple aspects of community life. Having different sectoral experts analyse durable solutions issues in the area can also facilitate the identification of overlaps in response and innovative, joint approaches to tackle obstacles to solutions.157

Multistakeholder involvement: by involving humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, and government actors, along with DACs in the research design, ABAs can provide evidence at different stages of solutions planning and programming, as recommended in the Action Agenda. ABAs are ideally a response to local demand and, once implemented, keep residents' perceptions and opinions at the centre, resulting in actionable and accountable research.158 Data collection tools can be tailored to the local context and deliver precise insights, for example, on IDPs' intentions and durable solutions options they consider feasible.159 Moreover, ABAs have contributed to capacitybuilding of local authorities, whether incidentally or by design 160 Capacity-building, when requested, is key to more sustainable assessments, where local authorities are direct implementers, provided that adequate resources and political will exist.161

Different actors have used area-based approaches for analysing and assessing durable solutions, most often in conflict settings. The Joint IDP Profiling Service have provided technical support to durable solution analyses in Darfur, Sudan, and in Somalia, while IMPACT Initiatives have completed ABAs in a variety of contexts, including collective sites in Ukraine, areas of return in Iraq, and DACs in CAR and Niger, under the AGORA partnership with ACTED. 162 On the capacity-building side, ReDSS facilitated trainings on durable solutions planning for local actors in the Somali State of Ethiopia.163 These analyses and tools follow the IASC criteria in combination with data on population's core demographics, people's intentions on solutions, and urban and/or spatial analyses outlining infrastructure and services in the area and their functioning. Another common point is the usage of Local/Community Action Plans or local Joint Response Plans to translate findings from ABAs into comprehensive programming and facilitate the prioritisation of interventions in areas conducive to solutions.164 These Plans reflect communities' own priorities and proposed solutions after consultations.







ABAs of solutions can also pertain only to specific programmes and projects, with the data collected and analysed going to inform the adaptation of interventions and targeting. In Somalia, IOM-UN Habitat's MIDNIMO (Unity) project was informed by area-based urban analysis and community consultations and provided evidence for urban recovery and resilience to be used by authorities and other development and humanitarian actors.165 Also in Somalia, the Danwadaag consortium of NGOs and UN agencies used its own data collection and analysis on durable solutions through the Local (Re)integration Assessment (LORA) to inform and steer area-based interventions.166 This kind of ABAs can complement more traditional form of data collection on solutions spearheaded by the Consortium, together with the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, including the recent Durable Solutions Readiness Assessment of over 170 IDP and host sites to identify those most likely to benefit from development activities.167

Anticipating and planning for challenges

While area-based approaches offer many advantages, their usage should be critically evaluated. They might not suit areas undergoing far-reaching and rapid changes or where national and international capacities and buy-in are insufficient to manage them.168 Additionally, they can consider but cannot fully address structural issues requiring state intervention and ownership, such as large-scale development interventions or peace processes.169 Finally, ABA tools, because of their targeted and granular nature, always need a degree of re-adaptation when replicated in new

Involving a larger number of stakeholders, with different priorities and levels of interest in internal displacement and solutions, can slow down and complicate decision-making and allocation of tasks in area-based approaches.171 These multisectoral initiatives have many moving pieces, in terms of projects and programmes at different times and in separate "zones", which assessment parties might not fully grasp.172

One of the strengths of area-based approaches, namely their conflict sensitivity when dealing with different populations within the community, might also turn into an ethical challenge.173 Residents of nearby communities might see the concentration of resources in only one area as unfair.174 Furthermore, the provision of support in high-risk areas and/or where residential development was not anticipated could motivate more people to move and entail new risks.175

Finally, ABAs entail unique reporting challenges. Some indicators are measured at the individual level, others at the household, community, place or governance level, with the challenge to combine these different layers of analysis and logically report on results.176

Complementing other approaches to assessing and planning for durable solutions

ABAs for solutions should not be developed in a vacuum. Their potential to integrate principles and definitions from internationally agreed-upon guidance and frameworks on durable solutions has been tested in some countries, as mentioned above, but it is yet to be systematised globally.

Government-led policies and planning

Area-based analysis and recommendations can also increase their impact and relevance by linking with and feeding into higher levels of durable solutions planning.177 Taking South Sudan as an example, the 2024 Durable Solutions Strategy and Plan of Action for Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons, Returnees and Host Communities accepts the eight IASC criteria as benchmarks in the progressive achievement of solutions, recognising area-based approaches as key to contextualise and deliver the Strategy. 178 This national directive is reflected sub-nationally, for example, in the Solutions Strategy for Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (2024–2026) in Upper Nile State.179 The Strategy has an area-based approach to coordination and delivery and identifies intention surveys for IDPs and returnees, vulnerability analyses, and conflict sensitivity assessments as sources for the planning and implementation of durable solutions programmes.180

When ABAs for solutions cover cities, towns, or parts thereof, an additional policy layer to consider are urban planning documents, including cities' master plans and land use policies.181 They enable better targeting of the area-based analysis and enable a smooth connection of outcomes to longer-term urban development and/or recovery. A couple of examples from Somalia show, on the one hand, how data and analysis on solutions can respond to new urban planning developments and, on the other hand, how existing city policies can inform ABAs of solutions. IOM and the Danwadaag Consortium supported authorities in running a Durable Solutions Progress (DSP) Survey right after the formalisation of neighbourhood boundaries in cities.182 Survey results can now inform programmes and targeting at the neighbourhood level and allow for cross city comparisons of IDPs' and hosts' conditions.183 The Baidoa City Strategy, developed through the collaboration of Somalia's Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development with a multi-agency UN partnership is an example.184 Its extensive analysis of the legal, financial, socio-economic, and environmental conditions of the city makes it a reference for any prospective ABAs. The Strategy connects the urban development challenges of Baidoa with durable solutions considerations, highlighting the need to shift from a relief-centred terminology and approach to durable solutions (e.g. shelter) to an urban-development one (e.g. housing).185 Importantly, it identifies a use case for area-based approaches in developing participatory upgrading plans in peri-urban areas, where many IDPs live.186







Humanitarian and development coordination fora and assessment tools

ABAs for solutions insert themselves in a rich policy and data environment with well-established coordination structures at the global, national and subnational level covering different aspects of solutions analysis and programmes. These policy fora and coordination structures provide a foundation for collaboration and alignment also within ABAs. A few examples include the Data for Solutions to Internal Displacement (DSID) Taskforce, the Expert Group on Refugee, IDP and Statelessness Statistics (EGRISS), national Durable Solutions Working Groups, and subnational coordination mechanisms implementing solution plans, such as the governorate-level Joint Coordination Forums in Iraq.

Furthermore, ABAs can benefit from a secondary data review of existing measurement and analyses, including at the national and subnational level. Some of the granular and disaggregated data needed for an ABA can only be obtained through primary data collection. This notwithstanding, secondary data can simplify and/or speed up an ABA's completion of key measurements, such as household needs and enjoyment of rights, IDPs' intentions, the policy, economic, and environmental context, or the availability and quality of infrastructure, services, and support currently provided to the population. A few examples of these secondary sources and what categories they cover are displayed below.

Household needs and rights

- · Multisectoral needs assessments (MSNAs), REACH Initiative
- · Severity assessments, IDMC
- · IOM Solutions and Mobility Index

Intentions

- · Intention surveys, IOM DTM
- · Intention surveys, UNHCR
- · Ad-hoc intention surveys by humanitarian clusters or durable solutions working groups

Laws and policies

- · IDP Law and Policy Platform, UNHCR
- Monitoring progress towards solutions to internal displacement: A development-oriented indicator framework, UNDP and JIPS, 2024
- · Internal Displacement Index (IDI), IDMC

Secondary sources can also help with triangulation of newly collected area-based information and enable the contextualisation of area-level dynamics within national and subnational trends in IDPs' progress towards solutions or the conduciveness of different locations to solutions.

Progress towards solutions

- · PROGRESS report, IOM and Georgetown University
- · Durable Solutions Progress Survey, IOM DTM

Locations' conduciveness to solutions

- Return Index, IOM Iraq
- · Displacement Index, IOM Iraq
- · Durable Solutions Readiness Assessments, IOM and REACH Initiative

These multi-country, national, or sub-national tools for the assessment of solutions are often the outcome of extensive consultations with HDP stakeholders, extensive methodological refinement and field testing. While their geographical scope is different, their choice of indicators and methods can still inform the formulation of ABA tools to be deployed in the same country and/or region.







Conclusion & recommendations for the area-based assessment of durable solutions

There are many ways to measure and assess solutions given global references such as the IASC Framework and the IRIS. The design and methodology depend on the purpose of the assessment, the expected level of impact, geographically and beyond, and the capacities and resources available to the stakeholders conducting it. Area-based approaches are a powerful way to gain in-depth insights on DACs in urgent need. They accommodate the complexity of assessing solutions through their multisectoral and whole-of-community coverage, integrating the perspective of displaced and non-displaced residents on durable solutions and the future developments of the area. They provide operational actors and local governments with the granular data and contextualised analysis they need to ensure policymaking and interventions match and evolve with community needs and enjoyment of rights. Even before measurement of progress towards solutions is set up, ABAs can identify entry-points for solutions to orient local programming.

Yet, they are not systematically used. In fact, their benefits can be reaped only if they are properly planned and implemented. Conducting ABAs of solutions requires anticipation of several common challenges and careful management of resources. Such insights, however, often come from global methodological and policy processes on durable solutions, from which local actors might be far removed. They might also lack the technical skills and guidance for the successful completion of an area-based analysis, as well as dedicated resources to develop methodologies.

That is why IDMC and IMPACT Initiatives have developed and are field-testing the new toolkit for the area-based assessment of durable solutions. The toolkit, or parts thereof, can be deployed by local actors, when information on solutions is fully or partly lacking and evidence-based programming and decision-making difficult. Providing technical guidance which is tailored to the needs of locally operating organisations, the toolkit is intended to increase uptake of area-based approaches for the assessment of solutions, where these would be a suitable option and by a growing number and variety of actors.

The report lists below some general recommendations on the ABA of durable solutions, emerging from the literature and/or consultations. These recommendations have informed IDMC and IMPACT Initiatives' staff in the development and field testing of the toolkit. They are now shared for actors interested in or already involved in the local assessment of durable solutions and the wider community of officials, practitioners, and scholars working on durable solutions to internal displacement. They should not be perceived, however, as "easy fixes" to what is a substantially complex issue that no one toolkit can perfectly and fully quantify. Compromises in implementation are often inevitable and expected.

Design

- Assessing and managing resources: once an area is identified for assessment, it is vital to consider the kind and amount of resources available for a potential area-based assessment. If an area-based approach is suitable but resources are limited, the methodology should be adapted accordingly, with some trade-offs between methodological rigour and feasibility, or another approach considered. For example, if quality administrative or non-governmental data on displacement in the area is available, it can facilitate the exercise. Lower-cost data collection methods, such as key informant interviews, can also make the assessment more manageable, albeit less comprehensive.
- Identifying and involving the primary audience(s) and considering their capacity to respond to findings: it is important to identify early who the primary audience(s) are, what actionable insights they are missing, and how they intend to respond to findings, based on their capacities and mandates. A stakeholder mapping and the input of service providers and institutions should steer assessment design and ensure this smoothly translates into services and support for those in need.
 - Local authorities as primary audience: buy-in from local authorities should be pursued from the start of the project. Accounting for their interest and information needs can also help ensure support in data collection later. Analysis of national and subnational policies on displacement, local land laws, and urban development plans and their implementation for displaced and non-displaced residents should inform assessment design. This ensures the exercise supports existing priorities and initiatives on durable solutions.
 - b. HDP actors as primary audience: the technical information obtained should be translated into practical guidance, for instance through Plans of Action or area-based strategies to facilitate the coordinated delivery of assistance. This is especially true of humanitarian actors, who most often design programmes and projects based on sectoral needs assessment and individual organisation guidelines.187
- Evaluating sustainability: a durable solutions assessment can be a snapshot or be repeated to track IDPs' progress towards solutions, or changes in one area's conduciveness towards solutions. The frequency of assessment influences its design and depends on the demand for information from communities, authorities, and responders working locally, resources available, and/or the capacities and willingness of development actors, local governments and/or local NGOs to bring these initiatives forward. This means ultimately evaluating the ownership of the assessment process.







- Identifying priority indicators to measure: besides the eight criteria of the IASC Framework, the sub-criteria specified in the IRIS, and the Durable Solutions Indicator Library, ABAs might need to collect additional data on DRR, non-economic loss and damage, social cohesion, policies and laws, human rights issues, etc. Global, national, and subnational assessment methodologies on solutions can provide relevant guidance for indicator selection and development.
- Calibrating thresholds and terms of comparison to determine the overcoming of displacement-related vulnerabilities: the choice of an appropriate term of comparison for IDPs' vulnerabilities within an area (i.e. host community, "stayees", state/government/district average) must be carefully evaluated and justified in reporting. The final threshold for the overcoming of displacement-related vulnerabilities should not be so high as to indefinitely inflate the population monitored, or so low as to give a misleading picture of solutions achieved

Data collection and analysis

- Accounting for complexity of intentions and decision-making: answer options should not be binary or excessively simplify what is the complex reality of people's mobility. The assessment should allow for the identification of individuals' and households' status on durable solutions pathways before measuring their progress, taking into consideration potential differences in preferences over the short to medium or long-term, recognising the often non-linear nature of solutions pathways and preferences.
- Highlighting intersecting vulnerabilities: while the area is the entry point for analysis of solutions, intersecting vulnerabilities and rights issues and differentiated needs must be highlighted. Data disaggregated by displacement status and duration, age, gender, ethnicity, indigenous status, and/or social class, ensures the population of the area is not "lump[ed] together" in analysis. 188
- Ensuring coherence of analysis across different samples and types of information: ABAs use household surveys, KIIs, focus group discussions, participatory mapping, administrative data, mapping of infrastructure and of governmental and non-governmental capacities to inform evidence-based service provision and support. With accurate planning of data collection and analysis, the insights generated from different levels (household, community, neighbourhood, city) can "talk to each other" and provide a cohesive overview of solutions. Without such planning, the risk is to analyse each data type separately and end up with a "mix and match" analysis.

Partnerships and collaboration

Leveraging strategic partnerships: The more comprehensive the durable solution assessment, the higher its complexity. While sustained multistakeholder collaboration can be challenging to manage, it also facilitates exchanges of capacities and expertise, ultimately strengthening the quality of results. Partnerships across the HDP nexus, DRR, and other sectors can grant visibility to results and inform action in new policy and decision-making fora.

Participation

Considering the ethical implications: the participation of communities should be managed using high ethical standards, making efficient use of residents' time, ensuring their full understanding and buy-in of assessment objectives and protecting their safety. Too frequent requests for participation can lead to fatigue and raise community's expectations for support that may not be met. A conflict-sensitive approach helps prevent accidental trigger of tensions among residents of the area and between neighbouring communities.







Annexes

Annex A: Definitions

| Term | Definition | Source |
|---|--|---|
| Area-based (tool/methodology/asse ssment) | Tool/methodology/assessment focusing on a neighbourhood, village, town, municipality, city, collective centre and/or other delimited location using a "multisectoral, multi-stakeholder, geographically targeted" approach "and consider[ing] the whole population within that location" | Full Case Study Compendium of Area Based Approaches, Shelter Cluster |
| Assessment of durable solutions | The phrase refers to tools and approaches with a broad scope, encompassing (besides or instead of) progress measurement, also the identification of entry points for durable solutions and the contextualisation of the concept. It includes durable solutions analyses and area-based assessments, as well as tools and approaches in topical areas | |
| | relevant to solutions such as urban recovery, managed retreats, adaptation, "liveability", IDPs' wellbeing, etc. | |
| Displacement-affected community (DAC) | "Anyone living in an area where internal displacement has taken place, and may include IDPs, host community members, refugees, returnees, ex-combatants or others whose living conditions are impacted by the presence of IDPs." | UNDP and SOAS, Towards Development Solutions to Internal Displacement |
| Durable solution (or solution) | "A durable solution is achieved when internally displaced persons no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement." Note: The three commonly identified durable solution pathways based on the Framework are return, local integration and relocation (called resettlement in the Guiding Principles). | IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons |
| Global | Pertaining to the world or countries across two or more regions. | |
| Internally displaced person (IDP) | "Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border." | Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement |
| Local | Pertaining to a sub-national area (e.g. admin level 3,4) | |
| Local Integration | "Sustainable integration in areas where forcibly displaced persons take refuge." | IASC Framework on Durable Solutions |
| National | Pertaining to one country. The list of countries considered includes UN member and non-member states. | |
| Operational actor | Governmental or non-governmental agencies and organisations implementing in-country programmes, projects and/or interventions related to durable solutions. | |
| Refugee | Someone who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling | Article 1(A)(2) of the 1951 Convention, as |







| | to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." | amended in the 1967 Protocol |
|----------------|---|--|
| Regional | Pertaining to one of the six geographical regions used by the UN DESA Population Division: Africa; Asia; Europe; Latin America and the Caribbean; Northern America, and Oceania. | |
| Relocation | "Sustainable integration in another part of the country (settlement elsewhere in the country)." | IASC Framework on Durable Solutions |
| Return | "Sustainable reintegration at the place of origin." | IASC Framework on Durable Solutions |
| Returnee (IDP) | "The term returnee carries a broader meaning outside the refugee context, and may include, for example, internally displaced persons who return to their previous place of residence." As for the UNHCR definition of refugee returnees, IDP returnees or simply returnees in this report are those with the intention of remaining permanently in their previous place of residence and who are yet to be fully integrated. | UNHCR's Master Glossary of Terms |
| Tool | In this report, it refers to a product with a distinct research design and methodology, that other actors could either partially or fully use for the measurement and assessment of durable solutions. A paper or report without methods and steps, which could be followed and implemented by others is not considered a tool but rather an approach. | |

Annex B: Full overview of review methodology and limitations

This report is based on the review of around 350 sources and the information provided by 17 key informants consulted, complemented by input gathered in three validation workshops on 24 and 30 October and attended by approximately 70 participants. These discussions led notably to the expansion of the report section on area-based approaches. Below are more details on both data collection and analysis processes.

Key informant interviews

17 key informants including humanitarian and development professionals and scholars were conducted between May and June 2024. Of these, six were practitioners, i.e. humanitarian or development workers, who might not have expertise in research and analysis but use data and information in programming to address IDPs' needs and vulnerabilities, and consequently durable solutions, in a variety of ways, and 11 were SMEs. The latter had expertise in durable solutions research, analysis and/or measurement and assessment. Thematic analysis of the transcripts was conducted in NVivo and using IMPACT Initiatives' template for qualitative research.

Literature review steps

1. Searching for sources

The search included repositories of grey literature from humanitarian and development actors, academic databases, Al-assisted mapping of scholarly resources, and consultations of organisational websites.

| Category | Website |
|--|--|
| Repository of humanitarian and development grey literature | Reliefweb |
| Repository of publications within organisations' websites | IOM, UNCHR, UNDP. UN-Habitat, IRC, DRC, MMC, IDMC, JDC |
| Scholarly databases or platforms | Google scholar, Semantic scholar |







The search was conducted using Boolean and other operators allowed on each website. For Google Scholar a sample search string was: "durable solutions" (measure OR measuring OR measurement OR analyse OR analysing OR analysis OR assess OR assessing OR assessment OR evaluate OR evaluating OR evaluation OR indicator OR indicators OR index OR indexes)

For organisational websites, durable solution categories were set as filters and documents reviewed or simple keywords such as "durable solutions" or "return" were input.

2. Screening of sources

Over 2,000 sources were identified, while just below 1,000 were screened for eligibility against a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria agreed upon within the project team. The final, more detailed review focused on approximately 350 sources, mostly on IDPs with a smaller section of relevant refugee literature.

Data extraction and analysis

Data was extracted from the documents, also through Al tools, Information extracted focused on the key findings. analytical frameworks, methodologies, good practices and lessons learned. A qualitative thematic analysis was then completed, bringing together findings from across documents and experts' input.

4. Reporting

The report highlights the findings of the thematic analysis. The choice to report some examples rather than others is informed by discussions with KIs on relevance and usage of documents in the sector, but also considerations on the status and impact of different tools and methodologies (e.g. whether suspended or discontinued).

Research questions

The breakdown of the original research questions is provided below.

1. Overview and mapping

- What literature exists for the measurement and assessment of durable solutions to internal displacement at the global, national and local/area level?
- How have durable solutions to internal displacement been measured and assessed so far at the global, national, and local/area level?
- How is "local" currently defined and operationalised in tools and literature on the measurement and assessment of durable solutions to forced displacement?

2. Progress, challenges, and operational needs

- What is considered as progress in the measurement and assessment of durable solutions since 2010?
- Which best practices have emerged since then?
- What challenges were identified in the measurement and assessment of durable solutions since 2010?
- Which data and methodological gaps remain?
- What data do operational actors need to better tailor their initiatives and programs towards durable solutions to internal displacement at the global, national, and local/area level?

3. Conclusions and recommendations

- [Which categories of core indicators relevant for early recovery and HDP contexts should be included in a globally relevant tool to assess solutions to internal displacement at the local level?]¹⁸⁹
- Which lessons learned and good practices should the tool integrate or consider?
- What are general recommendations and considerations for actors developing and/or using tools and methodologies for the measurement and assessment of solutions?







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 ¹⁵ For some of the instruments reviewed, the refugee population is included within the umbrella term "immigrants" 16 With grey literature we intend "information produced on all levels of government, academia, business and industry in electronic and print formats not controlled by commercial publishing" i.e., where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body." Third International Conference on Grey Literature in 1997 (ICGL Luxembourg definition, 1997 - Expanded in New York, 2004) 17 A key reference for internal displacement policies is UNHCR's Rights Mapping and Analysis Platform (RÍMAP) for IDPs laws and policies. Those marked as having an explicit reference to durable solutions in the mapping were included in this review and the most relevant featured in the report $\frac{\text{https://app.fabric.microsoft.com/view?r=eyJrljoiYjJjMjlkZjqtOTNiNy00NjJmLWEzNWYtZTlyZmQ1YWM1NTJiliwidCl6ImU1YzM3OTqxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSlslmMiOjh9}{\text{https://app.fabric.microsoft.com/view?r=eyJrljoiYjJjMjlkZjqtOTNiNy00NjJmLWEzNWYtZTlyZmQ1YWM1NTJiliwidCl6ImU1YzM3OTqxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSlslmMiOjh9}{\text{https://app.fabric.microsoft.com/view?r=eyJrljoiYjJjMjlkZjqtOTNiNy00NjJmLWEzNWYtZTlyZmQ1YWM1NTJiliwidCl6ImU1YzM3OTqxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSlslmMiOjh9}{\text{https://app.fabric.microsoft.com/view?r=eyJrljoiYjJjMjlkZjqtOTNiNy00NjJmLWEzNWYtZTlyZmQ1YWM1NTJiliwidCl6ImU1YzM3OTqxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSlslmMiOjh9}{\text{https://app.fabric.microsoft.com/view?r=eyJrljoiYjJjMjlkZjqtOTNiNy00NjJmLWEzNWYtZTlyZmQ1YWM1NTJiliwidCl6ImU1YzM3OTqxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSlslmMiOjh9}{\text{https://app.fabric.microsoft.com/view?r=eyJrljoiYjJjMjlkZjqtOTNiNy00NjJmLWEzNWYtZTlyZmQ1YWM1NTJiliwidCl6ImU1YzM3OTqxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSlslmMiOjh9}{\text{https://app.fabric.microsoft.com/view?r=eyJrljoiYjJMjlkZjqtOTNiNy00NjJmLWEzNWYtZTlyZmQ1YWM1NTJiliwidClf6ImU1YzM3OTqxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSlslmMiOjh9}{\text{https://app.fabric.microsoft.com/view?r=eyJrljoiYjJMjlkZjqtOTNiNy00NjJmLWEzNWYtZTlyZmQ1YWM1NTJiliwidClf6ImU1YzM3OTqxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSlslmMiOjh9}{\text{https://app.fabric.microsoft.com/view?r=eyJrljoiYjJMjlkZjqtOTNiNy00NjJmLWEzNWYtZNJQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSlslmMiOjh9}{\text{https://app.fabric.microsoft.com/view.fibr.fabric.$ 18 The Graph below does not include sources without a clear publication date and sources exclusively focusing on refugees and migrants. ¹⁹ Key informant interview a, 14 June 2024 ²⁰ PROGRESS 2024 | Displacement Tracking Matrix. (n.d.). Retrieved January 12, 2025, from https://dtm.iom.int/products/progress-2024 Osa_final-action-agenda-progress-report-december-2024.pdf. (n.d.). Retrieved January 12, 2025, from https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/osa_final-action-agenda-progress-report-december-2024.pdf ¹ Key informant interview, 19 June 2024 ²² IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons, April 2010.pdf. (2010). https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2021-03/IASC%20Framework%20on%20Durable%20Solutions%20for%20Internally%20Displaced%20Persons%2C%20April%202010.pdf
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189 Answers to this research question were provided in a set of internal recommendations shared with IDMC and IMPACT Initiatives project staff to inform toolkit development.





