



Extraordinary meeting of the HLP AOR - Evictions Response in COVID 20th May 2020 (via Zoom)

Facilitators:

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Participants:

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Depika Sherchan -HLP Coordinator- Bangladesh
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Guy Edoza – ICLA Coordinator Cameroon (NRC)
Hege Mork – ICLA Adviser AELA (NRC)
Hilmi Mohamed - Interaction
Ibere Lopes – HLP Adviser to Shelter Cluster - IOM
Jamila El Abdellaoui – Global HLP Adviser- UNHCR
Katrien Ringele – Global ICLA Adviser (NRC)
Khetib (?)
Lorena Nieto - UNHCR Venezuela Response
Maanasa Reddy - ICLA Specialist Syria Response (NRC)
Monica Ripso – ICLA Specialist Jordan (NRC)
Patricia Khierallah – ICLA Specialist Afghanistan (NRC)
Natacha Jaarim – ICLA Coordinator Libya (NRC)
Sanne Boswijk – HLP Adviser Iraq (NRC)
Shezanne Kabura Wambui - ReDss
Tania Marcello – ICLA PDM Libya (NRC)
Teri Smith – Urban Shelter Manager Jordan (NRC)
Tina Gewis – ICLA Adviser CWA (NRC)
Thiago Sothe – Protection Cluster South Sudan
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Notes:

Global updates from the GPC

- New HLP AoR Coordinator has been hired already - Jim Robinson, based in London.
- This is the time of the year when staff start reviewing HRPs and HNOs and begin drafting the ones for the upcoming year.
- We will review collectively the framework/guidelines for the review of the HRPs/HNOs.

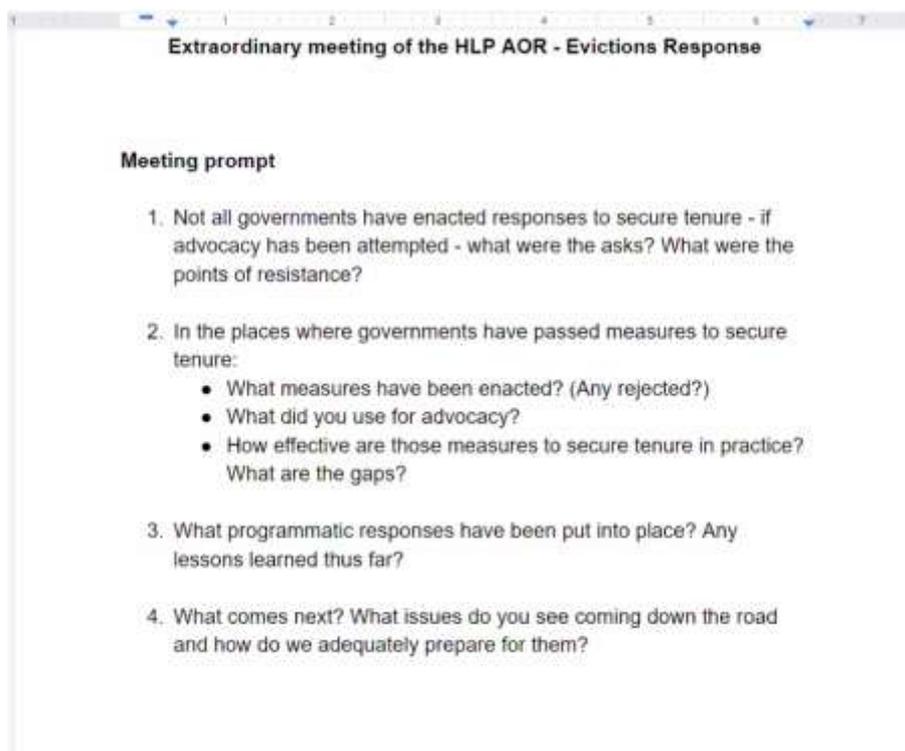
Eviction Response in COVID

Context: At the end of March, we had our first meeting regarding the response to Covid-19 and evictions was cited by participants as the most likely and largest potential HLP risk related to COVID.

This meeting is a follow up to that as the first waves of advocacy and project design have passed – to take stock of early lessons, and to discuss what comes next in terms of advocacy, programming and the needs for support from each other as we figure this out.

This the same theme as next week’s webinar – except that one will be a more formal setting with a few defined panellists whereas here, we can speak a bit more freely and do a collective brainstorming/sharing of ideas.

These questions are the main prompt for today’s discussion



Iraq:

- ✘ In March, there were declarations at the governorate level (and even the president) to urge landlords to go easy on rent collection and request landlords not to evict tenants. This was more of a suggestion and didn't have any enforcement power.
- ✘ Advocacy teams have been in contact with the crisis response cells at the governorate level in Kirkuk, Dohuk, & Anbar. There appears to be interest in some of the governorates – but It seems like they do not have the legal authority to impose these measures.
 - Measures to reduce or suspend rent collection brings some resistance from the local government, whereas eviction moratoria are less problematic.
- ✘ Are working to bring advocacy to central government but there have been some obstacles related to the handover in humanitarian coordination.

Platform for the Venezuelan crisis (covers several countries):

- ✘ Several governments have enacted measures to suspend evictions – there is no consensus between national and local authorities for how to compensate for lost rent, and to find solutions for evictions that have already happened.
- ✘ Evictions are still ongoing since a lot happens informally – especially for displaced persons and migrants, many who are staying in daily shelters where there is rent collected by the day used, rather than by the month. These are often managed by criminal organisations which adds its own dimensions of protection risks and complexity.
- ✘ We have searched for Good Practices in the region - there are some local peace judges (?) that may be used to mediate this, as well as some legal aid clinics.

ACB: I think this is an important question for us to reflect on – the gap between good legal measures being passed by jurisdictions and it being implemented – any ideas on this would be appreciated.

Nigeria:

- ✘ We've mapped all the informal sites where IDPs have settled, whose land is usually owned by individuals as part of creating a monitoring system.
- ✘ We have community-based workers in the field, are coordinating with IOM, and also work with community leaders. The workers inform us on what is going on.
- ✘ In the beginning, we used to pay cash for rent when people could no longer pay the rent so that they would not be evicted.
- ✘ Last week, we received 58 cases of HHs who had been evicted - we are in contact with them.
- ✘ Important to engage more at the local level, including with local leaders, since the central government is not interested in dealing with these issues.
- ✘ We continue to receive more cases of HHs being evicted by the day.

Somalia:

- ✘ Comment in the chat box: "Hi All, for Somalia we have been successful with the Moratorium and have received concrete feedback from the South West State; the mayor has agreed to the Moratorium and anyone found in violation of this will be held liable. We are now working with the Federal Government to ensure the Government issues a decree on the same."
- ✘ The follow-up question was whether this moratorium applied to only formal evictions or also informal evictions as well. Alex believes that the moratorium covers both.

Ukraine:

- ✘ In March, the central government adopted some decrees to protect people from protection risks emerging out of the pandemic.
- ✘ The government provided additional guarantees to IDPs (prior to COVID) –
 - if you're an IDP, you have the right to receive some financial assistance to cover utility bills. Previously, this only applied if you were employed (?) although due to the massive job losses during the crisis, this requirement has been waived.

- Utility subsidies: right to pay less if you're extremely vulnerable. Local social departments have no authority to cancel this status and benefits during this pandemic time.

Right not to pay mortgage bills too, if they have to.

South Sudan, HLP TWG:

- ✗ Main population groups at risk of eviction: people with reduced income due to restriction of movement and trading, and IDPs living in occupied lands, abandoned or unused buildings and congested camp like settings.
- ✗ We're trying to use existing legal framework for advocacy such as the land act to push for a due process for evictions (reasonable delay) , and a protection of existing land rights. Also pushing to pass the draft land policy whose passage is still pending.

ACB: If evictions do indeed happen, what measures, tools, plans do you have that can be mobilised to prevent people from being shelter-less?

South Sudan

- ✗ Ensuring legal approaches based on the Land Act are followed
- ✗ working with partners to find alternative sites and provide temporary shelter materials
- ✗ advocating for vulnerable IDP groups.

Nigeria:

- ✗ We keep negotiating with leaders when evictions take place.

Iraq:

- ✗ Legal assistance and referral to cash assistance are part of the Iraq response.
- ✗ Legal counselling is offered, and in extreme cases so is cash for protection.
- ✗ We're gambling on negotiations with landlords and community leaders, as the Iraqi context is very informal (often there's no formal structure present/existent).

IL: There appears to be a lack of hard data on the scale of the issue of evictions, so far, it seems like it is anecdotal – what information do you have in your countries from your monitoring?

Bangladesh:

- ✗ We're working in an intersectoral level. Monitoring 35 sites where refugees are residing.
- ✗ When there is an eviction, we would have Site management's/CCCM's help to find any additional land that may be used. Shelter also intervenes, providing construction support for new shelters and maintenance of existing infrastructures.
- ✗ One of the main issues in the country is the fact that the land used by refugees is often privately-owned. This will be a protracted situation, as the original owners may come back and demand the land is freed for agricultural purposes, and resist permanent constructions, so we must come up with a durable solution and approach to this.
- ✗ As the crisis draws on, negative coping mechanisms are already being adopted when eviction is looming, including extortion by landlords for sex from vulnerable tenants.

Jordan:

- ✘ Pilot response to evictions in 2019 - mediation approach didn't work very well, as there's little margin to negotiate the payment of rents to landlords – but cash for rent is effective at keeping people housed
- ✘ 2nd response – supporting people being evicted so they can leave the place in a dignified manner.
- ✘ Cash for rent emergency programme is what we would advocate for the most.
- ✘ Failing to pay utility bills and having civil debt may result in jail time in Jordan, so that's another issue of concern for us. We have to do more research on this – on the scale of imprisonment. Potential point for advocacy

Nigeria:

- ✘ 3 measures/strategies for us: ensure that people living in camps have secure documented tenure for a defined period to avoid the risk of new arbitrary threats
- ✘ Facilitate negotiations with landowners,
- ✘ We're also working with other CCs, so we can invest in bridging multiple sectors.

ACB: Given that displaced persons are often faced with a cash/liquidity problem and often sell vouchers for less than their value to have some cash (to then pay rent), is there a means to do advocacy to organizations distributing vouchers to just give cash?

Jordan:

- ✘ This was an issue, but has decreased in the past few years – mainly because WFP is now stricter when it comes to the use of vouchers and have reduced the amounts given to beneficiaries which reduced the incentive to sell. However, it still happens to some extent.

ACB: Final thoughts:

- ✘ given that governments are often unable to force landlords to suspend rent collection or reduce rents, is there a way that humanitarian actors and governments can work together to do advocacy toward landlords to help them calculate the minimum rent they need for subsistence (maintenance +insurance + mortgage) and proportionally reduce the rent? Somehow to make reducing rent patriotic/heroic? cultivating a sense of solidarity?
- ✘ When advocating for moratoria on evictions- try to push for longer than what you expect the health emergency to be – this way it can give a “cushion” for tenants to get back on their feet before the threat of eviction looms over them.
- ✘ Thank you everyone for your excellent contributions today.

Action Points:

- The HLP AOR has just created a [new dedicated site to collect and share evictions response resources](#).
- Please share any relevant resources with Alex (alexandre.bourque(at)nrc.no)