

SYRIA SHELTER NFI ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY - FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS - APRIL 2017

SUMMARY

- UNHCR and the Shelter/NFI Cluster, with the support of REACH, have undertaken a comprehensive assessment of shelter and NFI needs across Syria, covering opposition controlled areas in 83 of the 156 sub-districts within Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Homs, Deir-ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa, Dar'a and Quneitra governorates.
- The assessment aimed at identifying current shelter status of populations, availability of and access to NFIs, and priority shelter/NFI needs, in order to inform Shelter/NFI Cluster member's programming and contribute to an improved sectoral understanding across Syria.
- Primary data for this assessment was collected between 29 October and 31 December 2016, using a mixed methodology approach to cover as wide an area as possible:
 - 6,635 household (HH) surveys were conducted in Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Idlib, Dar'a and Quneitra. The household sample enables findings to be a) representative at the governorate level with a 99% confidence level and a 5-7% margin of error, and b) representative at the sub-district level with a 95% confidence level and 10% margin of error.
 - 36 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in each district where access and security permitted, to explore specific themes of interest noted before the assessment started, as well as to supplement information gathered through household level interviews. Two FGDs were conducted per district assessed, one with IDPs and one with non-displaced populations to determine the different perceptions and challenges faced, as well as to create a conducive environment for an open dialogue. Pre-selection criteria ensured, to the extent possible, diversity in terms of gender and socio-economic profiles. In total, 216 participants engaged in the sessions.
 - In Deir-ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa governorates, security and access considerations rendered these methods unfeasible; as such, direct purposively sampled Key Informant (KI) interviews were the primary method of data collection. Findings should therefore be considered indicative rather than representative. In total, 234 KI were interviewed, 139 in Deir-ez-Zor and 85 in Ar-Raqqa.
 - A separate sample of 80 collective centres was surveyed in Aleppo, Idlib, Homs, Deir-ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa governorates¹. This separate sample used indicators developed in coordination with the CCCM cluster to capture issues which may be uniquely experienced by populations living in collective centres.
- **This summary report outlines findings from the FGDs, which have been included in the full report, [available here](#), concerning (a) availability and access to shelter; (b) documentation and Housing, Land and Property (HLP) issues, (c) shelter adequacy and damage, (d) NFIs availability as well as (e) Shelter and NFIs assistance.**

¹ Collective centres in Dar'a and Quneitra were not assessed as this was not deemed a priority information need given the high level of INGO/NGO engagement in these shelters

METHODOLOGY AND COVERAGE

- **Coverage:** 36 FGDs were conducted in each district where access and security permitted, with respondents reporting at the sub-district level. A total of 18 sub-districts were covered across Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Idleb, Dar'a and Quneitra governorates (see Table 1)
- **Objective:** To supplement information gathered through household level interviews.
- **Design:** FGD questionnaires were designed to explore specific themes and to gather information, which required more nuanced and open discussion. FGDs were divided in five sections:
 - i. Availability and access to shelter
 - ii. Housing, Land and Property (HLP) documentation and disputes
 - iii. Shelter adequacy issues
 - iv. NFIs available
 - v. Available assistance and priorities
- **Training:** REACH team leaders in Turkey, who are responsible for liaising with field teams inside Syria, were trained in person by REACH assessment staff who devised the research design and questionnaires in collaboration with UNHCR. Subsequently training was cascaded to all enumerators on the ground through an online training platform. The training lasted approximately two hours and covered two main modules. The first included sections on FGD preparation (selection of participants, identification and set up of the venue, etc.), as well as guidelines on FGD management, note-taking and de-briefing; while the second provided an in-depth analysis on the FGD tool and on the assessment objectives and indicators.
- **Roll out:** A facilitator was responsible for conducting the FGD session, enhancing interaction among the participants, guiding the approach to respect basic principles such as giving space for each participant to speak, and ensuring that every indicator was fully discussed. When needed, the facilitator probed participants on aspects of particular interest that required further discussion. The facilitator was supported by a note-taker, whose task was to transcribe the session and note down observations on the behaviour and dynamics among the participants, whether there is generally consensus, as well as non-verbal communication. The transcripts were then translated, coded and analysed by REACH. The sessions typically occurred in public venues such as community centres and lasted approximately one hour and thirty minutes.
- **Participation:** Two FGDs were conducted per district assessed, one with IDPs and one with non-displaced populations, to determine the perceptions and challenges faced by these different population groups, as well as to create a conducive environment for an open dialogue. Participants were required to report at the sub-district level, as districts were considered as a too wide area to gather reliable information. Participants were purposively sampled by team leaders based on the following criteria:
 - Area of residence, in order to have participants living both in rural and urban communities. The rationale behind this criteria was to explore whether urban and rural populations have different needs in terms of shelter. The threshold for identifying a specific community to be either rural or urban was set as follows²:
 - 3,000 residents (or less): rural community
 - More than 3,000 residents: urban community
 - Socio-economic background, to ensure participants were as diverse as possible in terms of income and professional status. Profiles included representatives of local authorities (local council members, community leaders), salaried workers (teachers, carpenters, mechanics, drivers, etc.) and independent professionals (shop owners, farmers, traders, etc.), as well as unemployed and students. In terms of age, the range was 18-60 years old.

² [Population figures were based on the Humanitarian Needs Overview 2017.](#)

Challenges and limitations:

- The initial target was to conduct two FGDs per district, however, due to access and security restrictions, it was not possible to conduct FGDs in As-Salamiyeh (Hama) and Al Bab (Aleppo) districts. A total of 36 FGDs were conducted in the other 18 districts assessed, with participants reporting at the sub district level.
- Despite the efforts to ensure gender balance, female participation was not possible in all sessions, due to context and culture-related constraints. Nonetheless, questions in each session were designed to take into account gender dimensions, e.g. assessing whether specific groups were more likely to face challenges, including women.
- While it is best practice to stop FGDs when data saturation is reached i.e. information gathered stops bringing new insights, it was not feasible to translate all forms on a rolling basis. As such, in many areas, data saturation was reached prior to the completion of data collection and findings were common across many assessed districts.

Table 1: Overview of FGD sessions

Governorate	District	Sub-district	Number of participants in each session	
			Host	IDPs
Aleppo	Jebel Saman	Daret Azza	6	5
	Az'az	Az'az	5	5
	Az'az	Suran	7	6
	Jarablus	Jarablus	7	6
Dar'a	Al-Sanamayn	Al-Sanamayn	8	8
	Dar'a	Dar'a	7	7
	Izra'	Izra'	7	5
Hama	As-Suqaylabiyah	Madiq Castle	6	6
	Suran	Suran	6	5
Homs	Ar-Rastan	Talbiseh	5	5
	Ar-Rastan	Ar-Rastan	7	7
	Taldu	Taldu	7	6
Idleb	Teftnaz	Teftnaz	5	5
	Harim	Dana	6	6
	Maarat al-Numaan	Sinjar	6	6
	Jisr al-Shughur	Jisr al-Shughur	6	5
	Ariha	Ariha	6	6
Quneitra	Quneitra	Khan Arnabah	7	6
Total			112	104
			216	

FINDINGS

Shelter

The first section and third section of the FGD discussion analysed shelter issues faced by different population groups (with a special focus on IDPs, female-headed households and other vulnerable groups), as well as coping strategies adopted to address these challenges. Notably, probes included:

1. Are there groups of people who find it particularly difficult to obtain shelter?
2. How do IDPs obtain information about available shelter and assistance?
3. What coping strategies, if any, are used to deal with a lack of available space in the community?
4. What shelter access issues returnees face? Do female-headed households are particularly worse-off when accessing shelter?
5. What are the challenges that currently prevent people from addressing shelter issues? Is it more difficult for certain people to address shelter adequacy / damage issues?
6. What coping strategies, if any, are used to deal with shelter adequacy / damage issues?

Shelter availability and access

- Participants reported severe issues in accessing shelter across all assessed areas, including a lack of shelter availability (particularly in Jarablus and Suran districts, in Aleppo and Hama governorates respectively) and affordability (as reported for instance during the sessions conducted in Al-Sanamayn district, Dar'a governorate).
- In most of the sessions, participants identified insufficient income as the main factor affecting the ability to secure adequate shelter, as rental prices are considered unaffordable. The HH survey outlined how shelter adequacy and income are inter-related. The average income of households reporting one or more shelter adequacy issue was \$136, compared to \$163 for those without adequacy issues.
- Finding shelter is reported to be less challenging for host communities, who generally own their house. As highlighted by the HH survey, households with IDPs are much more likely to live in more vulnerable shelter types.
- Shelter appears to be less available in urban areas (as reported in FGDs held in Aleppo governorate), since most IDPs tend to move to urban areas, where there are more income-generating activities and services available, thereby creating greater demand for shelter. According to the HH survey findings, 52% of the population assessed in Aleppo's urban areas were IDPs, compared to 34% in rural areas.

Securing shelter among the newly displaced

- IDPs tend to go to communities where they are more able to rely on a network of family and friends, mostly in the same governorate, to secure emergency shelter, while a limited proportion of IDPs are reported to have taken into account shelter availability when deciding on where to move (as reported during the session held in Al Madiq Castle, Hama governorate).
- Personal connections represent the primary source to gather information on shelter availability, as well as to secure emergency shelter in the initial phases of displacement. According to HH findings, word of mouth remains the main source of information, and FGD participants reported that host communities are often proactive in providing information and support to IDPs, particularly to those who are not familiar with the area and lack personal connections.
- Where a network is not available, IDPs also refer to local councils, which, upon registration of the household, may provide accommodation in collective centres (including mosques and schools) for a temporary period. The time spent in temporary collective centres varies considerably, from a few days to several months, based primarily on: a) shelter availability in the area; b) number of households waiting for accommodation; c) eligibility criteria set up by local councils. Participants could not consistently provide details regarding criteria regulating shelter assignment, and in some sessions (such as in Jebel Samaan and Izra, Aleppo and Dara governorates

respectively) they reported a perceived lack of transparency on the side of local councils, stressing that connections are often key to obtain assistance.

- Female-headed households are considered generally worse-off in securing shelter, especially if they cannot rely on a network of family and friends. Female heads of household were in fact described as being less effective in negotiating access to shelter with the local authorities, due to their perceived lower bargaining power. Similarly, women find it more difficult to afford rental prices, due to limited opportunities to engage in income-generating activities. This results into female-headed households being more likely to face shelter adequacy issues, as pointed out by the HH survey in several governorates including Aleppo, Dar'a, Homs and Idlib.
- Host communities also face challenges in securing emergency shelters in the event of severe damage to their houses, as reported in the sessions held in Tefnaz (Idlib governorate) and Az'az (Aleppo governorate).

Anticipated long-term challenges

- Participants from all areas assessed reported that returnees frequently find shelter damaged, destroyed, looted, or occupied, confirming the findings of the HH survey. This indicates that a large proportion of IDPs will face challenges in accessing adequate shelter should they wish to return to their area of origin
- Although findings from FGDs should only be considered indicative, participants did not report major disputes occurred in their communities upon return. This may also be due to the fact that many participants explained how informal mediation by community representatives (elderly, religious and tribal leaders) are quite effective in minimizing tensions within the community as explained in several FGD discussions held in Hama and Aleppo governorates. However, disputes are expected in the longer term due to an absence of documentation for those currently residing in shelters, as detailed in the following section.

Shelter damage, adequacy and repairs

- Shelter damage was considered a critical issue in all the FGD sessions. As pointed out by the HH survey, the proportions of households reporting to have some level of damage were extremely high in all governorates assessed from 87% in Homs to 20% in Quneitra.
- According to the HH survey, the proportion of IDPs reporting shelter adequacy issues was higher than the proportion of the non-IDP population in all governorate assessed. FGD participants confirmed those findings reiterating that IDP communities are more likely to deal with substandard housing, as they arrive to communities that are often already overcrowded. Reportedly, they are forced to show a high level of adaptation in living in inadequate or even dangerous structures.
- The HH survey outlined that only between 40% and 57% of the households, depending on the governorate, were able to make repairs to their shelters. The FGD participants explained that the possibility to upgrade and repair shelter is limited by the lack of financial resources to pay for construction materials or service providers. Even when financial resources are available though, the perceived temporary nature of displacement and the risk of eviction discourage investments. This was more commonly reported than a general lack of available shelter materials.
- Another frequently reported factor discouraging shelter upgrades is the frequency of shelling. Participants in Aleppo and Homs, for instance, expressed a deep frustration because they had to flee after having invested substantial efforts and resources in improving the conditions of their homes.
- Consequently, vulnerable groups, and IDPs in particular, frequently tend to make temporary self-repairs using emergency materials such as plastic tarpaulin and blankets to insulate from cold and mud and clay to repair structural damages.
- As a last resort, when lacking capacity or resources to conduct necessary repairs to ensure shelters are inhabitable, people move into unfinished buildings, collective shelters or shared housing. Living conditions in these shelter types are considered extremely inadequate and some participants from all sessions reported having experienced tensions related to daily life with co-inhabitants. Overcrowding and unsuitability for women to live with people that are not part of their household, are unanimously reported as push factors to move to different shelters.

Documentation and Housing, Land and Property (HLP) issues

The second part of FGDs addressed the following areas:

1. What formal documentation people typically have to prove tenancy?
2. What process is required to obtain documentation (for land or property ownership) and what agency/authority is in charge of this?
3. What issues, if any, usually arise from a lack of documentation or tenure status and how are disputes settled?

Availability and access to shelter documentation and land registries

- The most commonly reported HLP issue outlined by the HH survey in Aleppo, Dar'a, Hama, Idleb and Quneitra was lack / loss of HLP documentation. The FGDs discussions showed that this is often caused by the fact that people leave their communities in a rush, during times of displacement, as well as the destruction or severe damage of shelters during which documentation get lost.
- The HH survey indicated that between 40% and 90% of respondents (depending on the governorate) had HLP documentation, the FGD discussion suggests that this mostly applies to properties purchased prior to the conflict, as those were registered at governmental agencies. This government-issued documentation was unanimously described as a solid legal guarantee to avoid potential disputes or dispossession.
- However, obtaining documentation for properties purchased after the onset of the conflict, or new copies of documentation that had been lost/destroyed was described as very challenging and expensive. FGD participants reported that land registries function in very few locations and are mostly inactive across the assessed areas. Moreover, access to governmental facilities is hindered by the volatile security situation, as well as by the fact that they are inaccessible to people living in remote areas.
- In order to obtain documentation from governmental agencies, two main strategies were highlighted during the sessions: using the service of brokers or relying on friends/relatives living in areas nearby land registries who can collect documents on their behalf. The proportion of people using brokers is reportedly small, as they tend to charge unaffordable fees. In contrast, relying on personal connections is free of charge but requires the right personal network. As highlighted by the HH survey, registration of properties purchased during the conflict is characterized by different levels of formality. FGD participants reported that a wide variety of HLP procedures emerged to replace those provided by land registries in areas where they do not function anymore. The most common type of documentation available in these areas is a buyer-seller contract, which acquires formal recognition upon validation by *Sharia* courts. There was no consensus among the participants concerning the legality of this system. Participants had indeed quite different opinions about the validity of such contracts, ranging from "no legal value", to "a fully legal document". The main concern expressed by participants is the validity that such documentation may have in areas where *Sharia* law is not in place.
- It is worth noting how most participants reported that transactions of any kind have dramatically dropped over the last years because of the protracted conflict. This is due to several reasons, including the fact that displaced people are unwilling to sell their properties as they plan to return once the conflict is over, a lack of willing buyers, as well as the challenges faced in completing legal transactions from afar.

Main causes and systems to settle disputes.

- FGD participants reported shelter-related disputes across all the assessed areas but in Idleb, Jisr al-Shughur, Harem and Muhradah districts, without major differences in terms of both severity and typologies of disputes reported. The HH survey confirmed this phenomenon, estimating that between 5% and 21% of the population in the areas assessed faced HLP issues.
- The most frequently reported disputes are inheritance-related, which, as highlighted in several sessions (such as in Suran, Azaz and Jarablus in Aleppo governorate, and Taldu in Homs governorate), are due to both lack of documentation and inactivity of land registries. Such disputes are exacerbated by the fact that competing claimants have no documentation to resort to in attempting to solve their issue. When possible, people access land registries to gather relevant documentation; in most cases, however, disputes need to be solved through *Sharia* court decisions or local mediation, the latter of which is more common in rural areas.

- Disagreements with landlords were also reported to be common, in particular about rental agreement, payment of utilities and other similar issues, as notably raised in FGD sessions held in Jebel Samaan, Azaz and As-Suqaylabiyah districts. IDPs reported that substandard housing might be a matter of dispute, with disagreements between landlords and tenants over who needs to pay for the necessary repairs. Other frequently mentioned causes for HLP disputes relates to disagreements about boundaries of agricultural land, as well as properties being unlawfully occupied.
- The number of participants reporting tensions between IDPs and host communities due to HLP issues was limited. Participants reported that, even though there is no structured system for settling such disputes, controversies are frequently resolved on an informal basis. Generally, this kind of mediation entails a mix of customary and informal negotiations with *mukthars*, local councils and religious leaders that facilitate the process.
- Finally, some participants expressed concerns about disputes, which may arise upon return of shelter owners currently settled in a different community. The HH survey found that between one and two third of IDPs do not have legal documentation for property owned in their community of origin. The FGD participants perceived this phenomenon as a potential trigger for social conflict, given the high rate of unlawful occupation and squatting. However, IDPs expressed a high level of awareness on the temporary character of their current accommodation, expressing the willingness to return to the area of origin once security allows.

NFIs availability

The last sections of FGDs assessed access to essential services such as electricity and fuel, the availability of shelter and NFI assistance and whether these meet the needs of the target populations. The section included the following probes:

1. What factors affect availability of electricity across the area and what are the main reliable alternatives?
2. What factors affect availability of fuel across the area and what are the main reliable alternatives?
3. Do people use items intended for alternative purposes due to a lack of appropriate items (e.g. burning plastic for fuel, using body soap to do laundry, etc)?

Access and availability of electricity

- In the majority of areas, the main network is reportedly not functioning, either due to the conflict or because the authorities controlling the network prevent the service to reach areas that are not under their control, as reported in Dar'a and Quneitra governorates. The HH survey showed that the majority of households in all governorates with the exception of Hama and Homs reported having fewer than four hours access per day.
- The available alternatives to the main network, such as fuel-powered generators and solar panels, are reported to be expensive. As cheaper, poor quality propelling fuel may cause damage to the generator engine, people are forced to spend high amounts on good quality fuel (with a consequent drop in consumption of fuel overall). On the other hand, solar panels require considerable initial investments. As a result, only a small proportion of people within communities are estimated to have enough electricity from these sources.
- Participants adopted a wide variety of coping strategies, including using battery-powered devices and candles to reduce electricity consumption. The most common, cost-effective substitute is the use of car batteries which, when connected to an inverter, generate power to meet household needs for a few hours.
- Some differences in power availability were reported between rural and urban areas, as raised during the FGD discussion in Jebel Saman, Teftnaz and Quneitra districts. Electricity was in fact generally more available in larger urban areas than smaller villages even before the conflict due to better infrastructure, and this hold true in the last six years. However, in some rural areas, alternative systems such as solar panels had already been adopted before the conflict, when financial resources were more widely available. According to participants, this allowed people living in those areas to better cope with conflict-related shortages.

Access and availability of NFIs

- According to the HH survey, between 78-84% of households declared not have heating fuel in their house in Homs, Idleb, Hama and Aleppo. Cooking fuel was also commonly lacking in many governorates, especially in

Homs and Aleppo. FGD participants reported that this shortage is due to the high price level of fuel across the entire country. For this reason, people rely on multiple types of fuel, depending on price levels and local availability. Diesel and kerosene are often the preferred options for both heating and cooking, although gas is often chosen due to its limited cost.

- State diesel, which is reported to be the highest quality fuel, is produced and distributed only in a few specific sub-districts, and is not available in many areas. As reported in Hama, Dar'a and Quneitra sessions, fuel must therefore be procured on the black market, even though the price is considered generally unaffordable.
- In worst-case scenarios, which is common in areas hardly hit by the conflict (as reported for instance in Al-Sanamayn, Harim, Ar Rastan and Taldu), people tend to use any kind of inflammable materials, including plastic materials and textiles, which can pose serious concerns for health. In all rural areas, the preferred option is wood, but people often tend to use organic materials such as oil bagasse and manure, as these waste materials are available free-of-charge.
- Similarly, participants reported using the same NFI item for multiple purposes in most areas assessed. Notably, in all districts assessed in Aleppo and Homs, participants referred of using soap for any kind of cleaning purpose, including doing laundry and washing dishes to compensate the lack of specific cleaning products.

Shelter and NFIs assistance

The last section assessed the availability of Shelter and NFIs assistance. The main probing questions in the section included:

1. What is the typical type/form of Shelter/NFI support available, and who is the provider?
2. What is the most needed type/form of NFI support available, and who is the provider?
3. Is there any group unable to reach out for assistance?
4. What are the preferred modalities for NFI assistance?

Assistance received

- Participants unanimously reported the inadequacy of Shelter/NFI assistance, although FGDs may encourage overreporting of frustrations and inadequacy of aid. Nevertheless, the liveliness of the discussion when this topic was raised indicates that this is a priority issue across all areas assessed.
- NFI assistance was reported to be generally more available than shelter aid, in line with household findings. However, this rarely met household needs according to the participants, who pointed out a lack of needs assessments prior to distributions across almost all the assessed areas. In this respect, participants explained that assistance consisted in the distribution of a basic package of items (mostly cooking and eating utensils and hygiene kits which households already possess), instead of fuel, which is most needed across all areas.
- Across all areas, shelter assistance is seen as the most urgent support required. In all the sections conducted, participants stated that either no assistance was provided, or that what was provided (usually plastic sheeting, mattresses, blankets and tents) was not sufficient and unfairly distributed due to the perceived biases in selection of beneficiaries – perceived to be biased toward IDPs, for non-IDPs and vice-a-versa, or on the basis of personal contacts.

Preferred modality and sources of assistance

- Overall, participants suggested that cash assistance or a mix cash/in-kind approach is better suited to respond to the needs of their communities. Only in a few locations, such as Khan Arnabah (Quneitra) and Jisr al-Shughur (Idleb), participants expressed a clear preference for external actors making repairs or the provision of durable materials. This reflects the findings of the HH survey that outlines that a majority of respondents prefer cash rather than in-kind interventions.
- Overall participants could not reach consensus about who provided assistance, reflective of a large proportion of KI and household survey respondents indicating they were uncertain of the sources of aid. This is often due to low visibility of international actors, who tend to operate through local organizations, as well as the tendency for local authorities, such as local councils, to take the lead on distributions and beneficiary selection – thereby reducing community awareness of the source of support.

Barriers to receiving assistance

- Participants reported a lack of transparency in the application and/or definition of the eligibility criteria for distributions. In Al-Sanamayn, Dar'a and Jarablus sub-districts, eligibility criteria was not believed to be transparent, and participants pointed out that households able to mobilize connections are more likely to receive assistance.
- Perceptions on assistance were polarized according to the different population groups. Host communities see the IDP population in a better position to receive assistance, since eligibility criteria play in their favour as pointed out in the discussion that took place in Izra. On the other hand, IDPs believe that host communities are more able to make use of personal connections within local councils to receive aid even though they are perceived to be less in need by the IDP population, as raised during FGDs held in Quneitra and Jebel Samaan.
- The high mobility of IDPs is another factor that was considered to affect the fairness of aid distributions: IDPs moving across communities must register with the relevant local councils in order to receive assistance. However, as number of local councils reportedly do not update their list, newly arrived IDPs often face challenges in accessing aid, as reported by participants in Dara, Ariha, Azaz and As-Suqaylabiyah.
- Access to assistance also depends on how close to the distribution points are the areas where households live. For instance, in Jarablus, Daret A'zza (Aleppo) and Harim (Idleb), people living in rural communities reported to have received no assistance, as they are too far from where distributions take place. As a result, access to aid is deemed to be limited for people with reduced mobility or women, who are not able to move over long distances due to cultural or security concerns.
- Security also compromises access to aid. In Dar'a and Quneitra, both host communities and IDP participants explained how security concerns prevented aid reaching out to beneficiaries, notably because of intense shelling and roadblocks.

Conclusion

As a whole, while confirming the findings of the household survey, FGD discussions highlighted additional themes associated with the perceived influence of personal connections in securing shelter as well as receiving assistance, the conflict related disincentives for conducting shelter repairs, the current understanding of legal documentation, as well as the general lack of shelter assistance in contrast to NFI assistance, the former of which is perceived to be most in need, and the latter of which was perceived to poorly match household needs.

Shelter

- Access to shelter remains a concern across all the area assessed, especially in urban communities, due to the lack of shelter available, as well as its unaffordability. While access to shelter is an issue that predominantly affects IDPs and female-headed household, host communities also reported facing challenges in securing shelters, especially in case of emergencies, when they face damage or destruction to their property.
- As mobilizing one's personal network is perceived as the most effective way to secure emergency shelter, IDPs prefer moving to the closest, safest areas where they can rely on personal connections such as family and friends. However, tensions between host communities and IDPs were seldom reported. On the contrary, often host communities reportedly provide information and support to IDPs, particularly when they do not have personal contacts in the area of displacement.
- Shelter adequacy was considered a critical issue in all the FGD sessions, especially for the IDP population that is often forced to live in substandard housing to save resources to deal with more urgent, life-saving issues.
- The possibility to upgrade and repair shelter is limited due to a lack of financial resources. When resources are available, the perceived temporary situation of displacement, the risk of eviction, as well as the frequency of shelling discourage investments.
- Living in unfinished buildings, collective shelters or shared housing was reported to be a last resort solution as conditions in these shelter types are considered extremely inadequate due to overcrowding, tensions with co-inhabitants and lack of privacy.

Housing, Land and Property

- Although it was commonly reported to have government-issued documentation for properties purchased before the conflict, it is very challenging to obtain new documentation. Land registries are either not functioning, or inaccessible due to distance or security risks on the routes to reach these areas.
- Currently, the most common type of documentation available is a buyer-seller contract validated by a Sharia court. Still, participants expressed highly different opinions about the validity of such documents, ranging from “no legal value”, to “a fully legal document”.
- Shelter-related disputes are predominantly related to inheritance, rent agreements and boundaries of agricultural land. This is exacerbated by the fact that disputing parties often do not have documentation to resort to in order to solve their issues that are therefore settled by Sharia courts or local mediation where these courts do not exist.
- Transactions on the real estate market have drastically diminished during the conflict, because of lack of supply and demand, as well as the challenges in completing legal transactions - often remotely, when one of the parties involved is displaced.
- Some participants expressed concerns about disputes, which may arise upon return of shelter owners currently displaced in a different community, even though IDPs expressed a high level of awareness of the temporary character of their displacement accommodation.

NFIs

- Access to electricity was reported to be limited to a few hours a day at best. As alternatives sources, such as fuel-powered generators and solar panels, are expensive, people adopt coping strategies, such as using battery-powered devices and candles, to reduce electricity consumption.
- As access to fuel is compromised by its high cost, households tend to diversify their consumption using multiple types of fuel, depending on price levels and local availability. As an extreme coping strategy, participants reported the use of any kind of inflammable materials.

Assistance

- Across all areas, shelter assistance was seen as the most urgent support required. In all FGD sections participants stated that assistance was either not provided or insufficient.
- NFI assistance was reported to be generally more available than shelter aid. However, assistance reportedly rarely meets household needs, as it mostly consists in distribution of items that are already available.
- Additional factors often hamper access to assistance, including the distance between the beneficiaries and the distribution points, as well as security. As a result, people living in rural areas, women and people with reduced mobility are less likely to receive support.
- Perceptions on how fairly assistance is provided depend on the different population groups. Host communities believe that the IDPs benefit of eligibility criteria that play in their favour, while IDPs consider that host communities can mobilize their personal network to receive aid.

Annex 1: Communities covered

