

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HOUSING, LAND, AND PROPERTY: A PATH TO PEACE AND DURABLE SOLUTIONS IN CAR

Without land tenure security, there can be no durable returns, no social cohesion, no genuine peace, and no advancement of sustainable solutions in the Central African Republic.

Thirteen years after the onset of the crisis, the Central African Republic (CAR) remains extremely fragile. Insecurity, poverty, and weak institutions perpetuate a strong dependency on aid. In this context, equitable access to Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) is essential for peace and social cohesion. This note analyzes land-related challenges, highlights vulnerabilities, and proposes recommendations to strengthen inclusive and secure land rights.

BACKGROUND

Thirteen years into the crisis, CAR remains among the world's most fragile contexts. An estimated 2.4 million people require humanitarian assistance, including 442,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 740,000 refugees. Despite the presence of the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), MINUSCA, and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs, large parts of the country remain under the control of armed groups. This continued insecurity perpetuates instability and entrenches dependence on humanitarian aid. While the 2024–2028 National Development Plan (PND) and the CAR-SSP seek to bridge emergency response, recovery, and social cohesion, persistent barriers to accessing (HLP) rights continue to undermine sustainable solutions.

To date, the Kampala Convention, which protects the rights of IDPs, including secure access to housing, land, and property, has not been domesticated in CAR. At the same time, the National Strategy for Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons and Returnees (2024–2028) underscores that social cohesion depends on the restitution of land, housing, and property that have been illegally or arbitrarily occupied (Section V.5.5). The strategy commits the government to support local mechanisms to identify contested property, resolve disputes, and ensure effective remedies.

BARRIERS TO RETURN: HOUSING, LAND, AND PROPERTY DYNAMICS

NRC surveys conducted in Nana-Gribizi, Nana-Mambéré, Mambéré-Kadéï, and Kémo in November 2025, based on interviews with 1,013 displacement-affected individuals, reveal stark differences in displaced people's intentions to return across the country.

Half of respondents (50.2%) report that they do not plan to return to their areas of origin, underscoring the persistence of security, structural, and land-related obstacles to durable resettlement. Property- and land-related constraints are particularly significant. While 12.7% of residences are occupied with consent, 39% are occupied without authorization, directly limiting prospects for return. In addition, between 3% and 9% of houses are inaccessible due to damage, and 24.6% remain unoccupied.

Despite these constraints, 29.2% of respondents express a desire to return immediately, and a further 20.6% consider return over the longer term. For those contemplating return, housing remains a key enabling factor: 52.6% cite the recovery of their house or land as their primary motivation, while 29.4% point to a combination of housing, security, and access to services. A smaller share (18%) prioritizes security and access to services over land ownership. These dynamics are further complicated by land disputes, which account for nearly 30% of reported community conflicts. Most disputes (74.3%) relate to plot boundaries, highlighting the fragility of formal land management mechanisms. Secondary occupations represent 24.9% of land-related disputes, while illegal constructions account for approximately 4.7%.

Faced with these tensions, affected populations adopt a range of coping strategies. Only 3% seek support from the wider community, and 12% turn to customary authorities. Responses to eviction pressure also vary: 36.3% report refusing to vacate their homes despite pressure, while 50.1% comply with evacuation requests. More than 80% of respondents report having experienced neither direct threats nor forced displacement, suggesting a degree of local tolerance, but also pointing to the absence of clear, structured, and predictable frameworks governing return, restitution, and tenure security.

The role of the State remains central in shaping land-related outcomes. According to the study, 77.3% of community land seizures are linked to commercial or infrastructure projects. Compensation practices remain limited, with 83.2% of affected individuals reporting no compensation, 2.6% citing unfulfilled promises, and only 14.2% considering the compensation received to be satisfactory. In terms of dispute resolution, 61.8% of land disputes are brought before local administrative authorities, while 38.2% are handled by customary authorities, often perceived as more accessible. Overall, 84.7% of households acknowledge the central role played by traditional mechanisms in resolving land disputes

INTEGRATING HLP ACROSS HUMANITARIAN SECTORS AND DURABLE SOLUTIONS HLP

In the context of the humanitarian reset in CAR, it is even more important to work towards systematically integrating housing, land, and property (HLP) considerations across humanitarian sectors, but also to ensure stronger coordination with longer-term issues and durable solutions.

In 2026, the HLP Area of Responsibility (AoR) will remain a sub-working group of the Protection Cluster, while progressively transitioning to the new Shelter, Land and Site Coordination Cluster, with full integration planned for 2027. This transition highlights the need for HLP issues to be increasingly reflected within current shelter and CCCM responses, given their close links to land tenure, occupancy rights, and access to land. More broadly, as HLP challenges are closely interconnected with protection, food security and livelihoods, and are relevant to intersectoral

problem analysis and humanitarian response planning, their consistent consideration across all clusters is essential to capturing displacement dynamics and response gaps linked to land and property issues. This approach aims to embed HLP considerations more effectively within the broader humanitarian response, while ensuring adequate resources for their integration.

In parallel, coordination between HLP actors and the Durable Solutions Working Group remains a critical element of solutions-oriented programming. Feedback from key informants points to persistent challenges in this area, notably the absence of a shared analytical framework and harmonized tools to guide the integration of HLP considerations into area-based approaches, return and reintegration processes, and other durable solutions interventions. Such collaboration would enable the HLP Working Group to provide specialized expertise that can reinforce the Durable Solutions Working Group's assessments and interventions related to HLP issues, ultimately enhancing the coherence and effectiveness of the overall response. Enhanced coordination would promote the alignment of technical expertise, strategic planning, and operational activities, thereby optimizing resource use, harmonizing practices, and contributing to sustainable and inclusive solutions for displaced populations.

FUNDING GAPS AND HUMANITARIAN SHORTFALLS

The HLP sector remains severely underfunded: of the USD 32 million required in 2025, only USD 5.8 million (18%) has been mobilized. The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) has been funded at 42%. This financing gap significantly constrains efforts to:

- Support housing reconstruction and enable durable returns for IDPs.
- Prevent land disputes and strengthen community cohesion.
- Secure property and tenure documentation, which is critical for economic recovery.

The consequences are obvious, including non-durable returns, the exclusion of women and youth from recovery processes, increased pressure on host communities, and rising local tensions.

CONCLUSION

Equitable access to housing, land, and property is central to peace, social cohesion, and durable returns in the Central African Republic. Addressing the marginalization of women and IDPs, fragile land governance, and chronic underfunding is essential. Strengthening legal security, inclusive access to land and housing, and local mechanisms will be critical to transforming resilience into lasting stability and sustainable recovery.

NRC RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of CAR:

- Domesticate and effectively implement the Kampala Convention, while operationalizing the National Durable Solutions Strategy for Displaced Persons and Returnees in CAR (2024-2025) to strengthen the legal protection of IDPs, safeguard women's rights, facilitate property restitution, and promote social inclusion.
- Strengthen the land registry and clarify land tenure systems to prevent illegal sales, arbitrary seizures, and boundary disputes, particularly in border areas and IDP-dense zones.
- Build the capacities of local authorities in impartial mediation and inclusive land dispute resolution, integrating both customary and administrative mechanisms.
- Promote equitable access to land and property for women and youth with targeted protection measures, particularly against abusive or discriminatory practices by local leaders.
- Invest in access to essential services (including housing, water, and social infrastructures) for IDPs and returnees, to support durable, voluntary, and safe return.

To donors:

- Increase and sustain financing for HLP interventions and systematically integrate it HLP into humanitarian planning to reduce chronic aid dependency and support sustainable reconstruction.
- Mobilize development funding for improved access to essential services in areas of return, with a focus on long-term recovery and social cohesion.
- Support the Implementation of pilot projects, targeting women and IDPs to secure land tenure and property restitution, reinforcing access to property as a lever for durable returns.

To operational humanitarian organisations:

- Continue advocacy for the domestication and application of the Kampala Convention, drawing on evidence of IDPs' and women's exclusion from land and property rights.
- Systematically incorporate gender, protection, and social cohesion into all HLP-related interventions, addressing specific needs of women and IDPs.
- Support local land governance and management structures, including the dissemination of good practices, particularly in securing land titles and preventing disputes linked to illegal sales or arbitrary seizures.
- Strengthen hybrid community-based dispute resolution mechanisms that combine administrative and customary approaches, particularly in areas where informal mechanisms currently resolve most land disputes.
- In the context of the humanitarian reset and the forthcoming integration of the HLP Working Group, contribute to the development of a formalized framework with harmonized tools and procedures to ensure the systematic integration of HLP