

## **Five ways to safeguard protection in development-oriented approaches to solutions to internal displacement**

Over the past four years, there has been growing momentum to adopt a more development-oriented approach to solutions to internal displacement. This was a strong theme in the [recommendations](#) of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, was reiterated again in the UN Secretary-General's [Action Agenda on Internal Displacement](#), and is now the driving force behind the work of the [UN Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement](#).

The logic is clear: at a time when alarm bells are ringing about humanitarian funding shortfalls, shifting towards more development-led approaches has clear benefits. Development actors can facilitate the long-term, systemic changes that are needed to reintegrate displaced persons back into communities and to ensure they can benefit from national systems and support structures. It also places the emphasis back where it rightfully belongs: on the governments who bear the primary duty to provide for the rights and needs of their displaced citizens and residents.

But at the same time, we cannot ignore that in many of the contexts where humanitarian actors operate, the government has been party to the conflict or implicated in driving displacement. Embarking on development approaches that treat the government as the primary partner (or, in the case of development banks, as the client) therefore needs to be approached carefully. Otherwise, there is a potential that parts of the displaced population could be further marginalised or exposed to threats under the auspices of “resolving” displacement – in other words, that they could face new protection risks.

This doesn't mean that government-led, development-oriented solutions shouldn't be pursued – to the contrary, they remain necessary. But it does mean that we need to introduce strong safeguards into the systems we use to ensure that there is attention to protection and that concerns are proactively addressed with authorities. The Office of the Special Adviser has already initiated some of this, for example by working with UNHCR to test a protection risk analysis tool that could be used to assess the viability of shifting towards a development-oriented approach. But additional measures are necessary – not only by the Office of the Special Adviser, but by the full range of actors working in this ecosystem.

Below are five additional steps that could be put in place to safeguard protection in development-oriented approaches to solutions.

- 1. Build a protection analysis into solutions strategies and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.** While some country operations have given attention to protection in their solutions strategies and as part of the Common Country Analysis process, this remains far from systematic and often happens only at the start of the process. Building a requirement for a robust protection analysis into the templates, tools, and guidance used for articulating these documents, and asking operations to revisit the analysis at regular intervals, would provide greater predictability in ensuring that UN and NGO solutions efforts are aware of, and can appropriately respond to, potential protection risks. Importantly, this analysis (and the strategies to which they contribute) should be based on meaningful consultations with displaced and local communities to understand their views on the risk environment and the barriers they face to achieving lasting solutions. Actors working at country level can already support and advocate for

this type of protection analysis to be built into solutions strategies from the start, without waiting for this to be built into global protocols.

2. **Integrate a protection dimension into development finance partnerships.** As financing for solutions shifts more into the development landscape, International Financial Institutions and bilateral development finance actors will need to reinforce their protection safeguard mechanisms – for example, by strengthening their social and environmental inclusion analysis tools to consider additional, displacement-specific risks. They will also need to equip their country focal points with the skills to be able to have conversations with government counterparts about how to ensure that all internally displaced persons will be able to benefit from development investments in a safe and meaningful way. Some development finance actors have already dedicated commendable attention to these issues, while others are only newly entering this space. These actors, together with humanitarian donors, may benefit from exchanging at both country and global level to share learnings on how to address protection issues sensitively and systematically with government counterparts. Operational humanitarian actors can also help by offering their analysis of population groups that might be at risk of marginalisation or exclusion.
3. **Establish a protection focal point in solutions coordination mechanisms.** The Secretary General’s Action Agenda on Internal Displacement tasked UN Resident Coordinators with ensuring that “relevant and inclusive coordination mechanisms are in place” for solutions. While the exact composition of these groups varies from context to context, they should all be asked to include at least one outspoken protection advocate who will ensure that protection issues are tabled for discussion and considered within strategic planning processes. We cannot assume that the inclusion of protection-mandated actors within these forums is sufficient, as even these actors may be juggling competing priorities and relationships with the government. Rather, there needs to be an actor with the designated role within the coordination group to ensure protection issues are heard. NGOs and human rights actors may be particularly well positioned in this regard and can already proactively volunteer themselves to fill this function. Peacebuilding actors who can help ensure a conflict-sensitive approach may also offer a helpful complementary perspective.
4. **Provide support and monitoring on protection-sensitive approaches to data for solutions.** Building on a commitment in the Secretary General’s Action Agenda, a standing working group on Data for Solutions to Internal Displacement has now been established that is responsible for global coordination and collaboration amongst humanitarian, development and peace actors working to advance data for solutions. As part of these efforts, the working group should offer advice to country operations on methods to enable sharing of relevant information with authorities while maintaining strong protocols for data protection. The working group should monitor any incidents that arise to ensure risks are mitigated in the future. Data actors on the ground can also already start tracking issues to escalate to the global group.
5. **Build these (and other) measures for ensuring protection in solutions into the forthcoming UN “systemwide approach to internal displacement.”** The UN High Level Committee on Program is expected to formalise a UN systemwide approach to internal displacement in 2024, building on the Secretary General’s Action Agenda and the 12 institutional plans on solutions to internal displacement that are intended to be finalised this year (some of which are already available – see [UNHCR’s](#) and [UNDP’s](#), for example). To ensure adequate attention to protection going forward, the final product from that process should include a dedicated section outlining the measures that

will be put in place to ensure protection in development-oriented approaches to solutions. This will be vital to ensuring that no one is left behind in the solutions process and that solutions efforts do not inadvertently create new protection risks.

When development-oriented approaches to solutions are implemented in a protection sensitive manner, they can not only avoid doing harm, but can do considerable good. Development actors often have far more influence over governments than humanitarian actors, and where their engagement can be channelled towards obtaining better safety, security, and well-being for all segments of a displaced population, the gains can be significant. It is therefore all the more vital that we embrace the potential of a development-oriented approach, while putting in place strong safeguards and mechanisms to ensure protection is maintained and supported. The five steps above could help us to do that.