



**DRC** DANISH  
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COUNCIL



# BEYOND DISPLACEMENT

Overcoming barriers to solutions  
and building resilience in the  
Somali Region of Ethiopia

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**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

DRC has been supporting vulnerable communities in Ethiopia since 2009. Through our four strategic pillars - Durable Solutions for IDPs in protracted displacement, Climate and Conflict Displacement, Refugees' Rights and Resilience, and Mixed Migration - DRC is supporting refugees, IDPs, returnees and host communities in Protection, Economic Recovery, WASH, and Humanitarian Disarmament and Peacebuilding. DRC works along the emergency to recovery continuum and has developed a unique expertise on climate and conflict-related Anticipatory Action.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency works to ensure that everybody has the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge, having fled violence, persecution or war at home. Since 1950, UNHCR has faced multiple crises on multiple continents, and provided vital protection and assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced and stateless people, many of whom have nobody left to turn to. UNHCR helps to save lives and build better futures for millions forced from home.

This research was carried out with UNHCR funding. The data collection was carried out by Agora Consulting and UNHCR, with analysis carried out by DRC and Agora Consulting between December 2024 and January 2025.

Cover photo: An IDP woman receiving cash assistance in Dhurwale relocation site. Photo credit: DRC.



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## INTRODUCTION

The Somali Region of Ethiopia is one of the most affected areas in the country in terms of displacement, hosting over one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have been uprooted due to conflict, environmental shocks, and resource scarcity. IDPs face persistent challenges, including inadequate housing, limited access to basic services, food insecurity, and constrained livelihood opportunities. While the region has made notable progress in fostering durable solutions, the scale of the needs far outweighs the available resources and capacities.

The Somali Regional Government has been a leader in durable solutions, adopting its first Durable Solutions Strategy in 2017, later updated in 2022. This strategy aligns with international frameworks on Durable Solutions for IDPs, emphasising voluntary and dignified solutions tailored to IDP preferences. A national Durable Solutions Strategy was also launched in 2024, setting a broader framework for Ethiopia's approach to displacement solutions. Despite these efforts, the implementation of durable solutions remains hindered by funding gaps, logistical challenges, and limited effective coordination between humanitarian, development, and government actors. While

some coordination mechanisms exist—such as the Durable Solutions Working Group—there remains a need to bring together an even broader group of actors across the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus, including different line ministries and the various initiatives led under the resilience or nexus umbrellas.

The assessment was conducted between December 2024 and January 2025 to evaluate the progress, challenges and opportunities to durable solutions in the Somali Region, focusing on the eight durable solution criteria (long-term safety, security and freedom of movement; adequate standard of living; access to livelihoods; restoration of housing, land and property or provision of compensation; access to documentation; family reunification; participation in public affairs; and access to effective remedies and justice), enriched by additional cross-cutting considerations (gender, age and diversity). The assessment employed a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews across four zones: Shabelle, Fafan, Sitti, and Afder. This is a summary of the key findings.

## FINDINGS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

This assessment highlights the varied progress and challenges across different relocation and IDP hosting sites in achieving durable solutions in the Somali Region. While some sites show promising developments, such as Bayahow and Jedane, others like Dhurwale and Dhirindhir face significant gaps that hinder the realisation of sustainable solutions.

### VARYING LEVELS OF INTEGRATION

The preferred durable solutions pathways among IDPs vary significantly across the surveyed zones, reflecting their experiences and the challenges specific to each area. Most respondents expressed a preference for local integration in their current place or residence,

emphasising the importance of fostering the development of sustainable and inclusive communities in their current locations. However, in certain zones such as Dhurwale and Tuliguled, a significant proportion of IDPs indicated a preference for returning to their places of origin (NB: in this context this may refer to possibly returning to their initial displacement site). This preference highlights the difficulties faced by IDPs in the areas where they currently stay. In general, only a small group of IDPs across all zones expressed interest in relocating to new areas. Again, Dhurwale stands out, reflecting the frustration felt by IDPs.

Across all zones, common barriers include lim-



Local authorities and DRC working to provide local IDs to IDPs in Dhurwale. Photo credit: UNHCR

ited livelihood opportunities, gaps in housing and land access, and challenges in accessing documentation and essential services. Zones facing the most severe subsistence gaps in essential services—particularly Dhirindhir and Dhurwale—**require urgent interventions** to address food insecurity, access to water, healthcare, and shelter. Malnutrition in Dhirindhir is a serious concern, and IDPs in both locations report extreme reliance on host communities for survival. Access to health services is severely limited, with no adequate healthcare structures in place. In Dhurwale, the locations's remoteness limits their ability to access livelihood programmes or benefit from market opportunities. Furthermore, in both sites, housing conditions remain critical, with many IDPs living in makeshift shelters, leaving them vulnerable to harsh weather conditions and protection risks. IDPs feel isolated and unsupported. Dhurwale is also an area where IDPs report feeling the least safe, and Dhurwale also presents signs of possible future conflict, if persistent challenges are not addressed. Guradamole and Dhirindhir have the lowest rates of documentation among IDPs,

creating significant barriers to accessing basic services, participating in public affairs, and moving freely. IDPs staying in Dhirindhir face significant barriers, including financial constraints and limited access to resources. Local officials noted the lack of prioritisation for durable solutions, highlighting the absence of investment and partner engagement. IDPs expressed an overwhelming preference for local integration as their place of origin has become inhospitable due to drought. Support to IDPs and host communities is urgently needed.

Sites such as Goljano and Tuliguled can be characterised as **transitioning**, where integration is progressing but access to land, livelihoods, and water remains limited. In these locations, targeted interventions are required to achieve sustainable outcomes. The lack of land tenure security remains a major barrier to sustainable livelihoods. In Tuliguled and Dhurwale, where access to farming opportunities is severely constrained, IDPs expressed frustration over lack of land for cultivation and pasture. Legal barriers are also prominent in some sites. Strengthening access to legal identity



documents and land tenure security must be prioritised in these locations. Contextualised land administration support, expanding agricultural activities and employment pathways in these areas is critical.

Additionally, across these transitioning sites, infrastructure gaps—particularly in WASH, education, and healthcare—remain a persistent issue. Water access is a severe constraint in Goljano, where IDPs have struggled with recurrent shortages. In Tuliguled (as well as Dhurwale), limited school infrastructure means children are unable to access education, affecting long-term prospects for displaced families. Investments in WASH, health services, and education facilities will be essential to ensure these areas can sustain durable solutions over time.

Areas such as Bayahow and Jedane largely present the **foundations for durable solutions**, and have seen progress in documentation and public participation. While critical gaps in housing, land access and livelihoods must be addressed before durable solutions can be fully realised, communities generally

feel ‘at home’ and hopeful about their future. The integration efforts in both locations have been bolstered by collaborative initiatives between the government and humanitarian partners.

In Jedane, an overwhelming majority of IDPs lack permanent housing solutions, limiting their ability to integrate sustainably. While documentation efforts in this zone have been stronger compared to others, without secure housing and land tenure, many IDPs remain in precarious conditions. In Bayahow, IDPs have been granted kebele IDs and access to basic services, but land documentation remains absent, and sustainable livelihood options remain underdeveloped. Investments in housing solutions, tenure security, and diversified income opportunities will be key to ensuring long-term stability in these locations. Bayahow provides an encouraging example of a relocation effort aligned with community preferences and supported by planning and investments ahead of the move. In Bayahow, durable solutions are beginning to take shape. IDPs in this zone have benefited from improved access to documentation, with support from humanitarian actors like DRC and



Housing constructed for relocated IDPs in Bayahow relocation site. Photo credit: UNHCR

UNHCR facilitating the issuance of kebele IDs and basic services. These efforts have fostered integration, with IDPs reportedly enjoying rights like those of the host community. However, the relocation to Bayahow is extremely recent, and ensuring lasting results requires sustained investments in livelihoods and resilience-building initiatives.

## **ACCESS TO LAND**

It is worth noting that while only few IDPs reported direct security risks or feeling unsafe, lack of access to land was reported as a concern making IDPs and those who had relocated feel unsafe. This highlights the need to move beyond the assumption that relocation within clan territories inherently guarantees land access or livelihood opportunities. A more systematic approach is needed to understand how land is allocated, and ensure that contextualised land use strategies are effectively planned and implemented in ways that prevent future disputes and promote long-term integration. Given the critical role of land in achieving self-reliance, it is crucial to ensure that land allocation for IDPs goes beyond residential plots to include access to farmland, pasture and viable economic opportunities. This may not necessarily call for a formal approach based on title deeds. In fact, experience from similar contexts, such as some areas in Somalia, indicates that investment in formal titling may not result in best outcomes in contexts marked by legal pluralism. Focus on conflict-sensitive, community-based land management initiatives that support access to land for all communities, informed by a robust conflict analysis, may be needed.

## **DRIVE TOWARDS URBANISATION**

At the same time, it is crucial to understand the profile of the displacement-affected population and their aspirations. Transitioning from a pastoral livelihood to working the land is not just a pursuit of income, but also a matter of identity shift for many. If this is well understood and accounted for in comprehensive programming approaches, regenerative agricultural opportunities for both IDPs and the host communities can be an important

tool to reduce tensions and support long-term sustainability of people's lives in the Region. Furthermore, support for alternative sources of income and livelihoods should complement land access efforts, particularly in cases where agricultural opportunities remain limited or when IDPs themselves, especially young people, express interest in non-agricultural opportunities.

## **REAL-TIME EVIDENCE TO MONITOR PROGRESS**

The lack of a monitoring system to track the progress made has enabled significant gaps to persist in some locations. While some areas, such as Bayahow and to some extent Jedane, demonstrate promising advancements in integration, documentation, and public participation, other zones—most notably Dhurwale and Dhirindhir—face significant and persistent challenges that hinder sustainable recovery. Recognising these disparities is critical in designing context-specific interventions and in determining how resources and efforts should be sequenced for maximum impact. The qualitative interviews showed that while a lot of focus was put on the relocation process itself, follow-up to support sustainable integration is not sufficient. To avoid the pitfalls of multiple other contexts, it is crucial to ensure that durable solutions are understood as a long-term process, not simply reduced to the physical movement of people from one location to another.

## **INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS**

The Somali Region Durable Solutions Strategy 2022-2025 makes commitments to participatory approaches, as well as gender equality and social inclusion as its guiding principles. However, implementation on the ground often struggles to meet this objective. While operational actors seem to be aware of the need to more comprehensively address the specific needs of women and girls, limited budget, capacity and cultural norms challenge progress in this area. Based on the findings of this study, across the areas, the lack of gender-sensitive planning and focus on initiatives meaningfully addressing the needs and priorities of women

and girls poses a severe risk to the success of solutions initiatives. Shockingly, only 15% of interviewed IDPs felt that solutions interventions or programmes that focus on the needs of women and girls exist in their area. Out of this group, only 44% felt that the available programmes had improved their situation. The findings also revealed that women rate key issues affecting their lives significantly differently from what their male counterparts view as important for women. Women are more likely to emphasise access to land, livelihoods and participation. This calls for increased direct participation of women and girls in design and implementation of solutions initiatives.

Similarly, the concerns of youth and children are not sufficiently reflected in the current durable solutions processes. Without prospects for education and employment in the locations where IDPs have relocated to, the young population remains frustrated, marginalized and without prospects for the future. The specific challenges and solutions priorities for IDP children in the Somali region have been well documented by the recent study by Save the Children,<sup>1</sup> highlighting the importance of considering education and recreational opportunities as part of child-sensitive durable solutions in the Ethiopian context. If urgent investments in gender, age and diversity are not made, durable solutions processes risk leaving women, girls and boys behind, while losing out on the gains that their engagement could bring to advancing progress towards solutions.

The research findings also highlighted several findings relating to clan affiliation, requiring deeper exploration. On one hand, clan affiliation is a significant enabling factor, supporting social cohesion, governance and resource allocation. On the other hand, more comprehensive analysis is needed on the political economy of how humanitarian and development programmes influence inter-clan relationships, social structures, and power dynamics. One particularly relevant dimension of this research would be an in-depth study of the land tenure system, focusing on how

negotiations for land access in displacement and relocation contexts affect both traditional governance mechanisms and broader clan relations. Understanding these dynamics is crucial to ensuring that interventions support long-term stability rather than inadvertently reinforcing existing inequalities or tensions. In addition, this study was not able to map the implications of clan dynamics and the way solutions processes rely on them on those in weaker positions (e.g. minority clans).

## CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Unlike the planned relocations from Qololji for conflict IDPs, the IDPs displaced by climate-related reasons have largely moved spontaneously, without pre-arrival planning or resource investments. For instance, IDPs in Dhirindhir have started to settle without prior agreements or systematic investment. Social cohesion and host community support to IDPs in Dhirindhir remains strong, and the host community has provided significant support to IDPs who have lost their livelihoods, property, and even family members. However, challenges exist, and support to sustainable local integration is needed. Based on the findings from this study, supporting local integration may be relatively less resource-intensive, as gains towards integration have already taken place.

Beyond being a driver of displacement, climate change and environmental conditions affect the success of durable solutions for all IDPs, as well as the host communities around them. Harsh weather conditions, including extreme heat, droughts, and floods can undermine IDP settlement stability if climate resilience is not factored into planning. While climate change is recognised as a major driver of displacement, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on how it is factored into the design and financing of durable solutions. There is a need to critically examine the extent to which climate resilience measures are incorporated into donor strategies and project implementation, particularly in relation to climate-smart livelihoods, adaptive infrastructure, and sustainable water man-

<sup>1</sup> Save the Children, 2024. Children in Displacement – What we can learn from internally displaced children about durable solutions? A participatory research study. June 2024.



agement. Given the increasing frequency and severity of droughts and floods in the Somali Region, ensuring that durable solutions are climate-resilient is a prerequisite for their long-term success. Without systematic investments in anticipatory action in areas at risk of climate change induced disasters, both IDPs and the current host community will face future risks of forced displacement. In addition, proactive investments in long-term resilience building (such as livelihoods diversification, improved farming practices and investments in water infrastructure) need to underpin local development planning to ensure that communities are equipped for the climate conditions that they reside in. This will also entail forward-looking sustainable urban planning, as young people express priorities for a different lifestyle than their elders. Given the close linkages between access to land and the pastoralist lifestyle and people's identities, these processes – at times entailing a sense of loss and inter-generational conflict – need to be supported through robust community-based

disaster risk reduction methods, with a strong emphasis on age, gender and diversity.

## **COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS**

The coordination mechanism for durable solutions in the Somali Region is advanced, but engagement from additional actors – especially line ministries beyond the Disaster Risk Management Bureau – is needed to ensure long-term success. Technically, IDPs who have undergone relocation, should no longer be considered IDPs, and be able to access services on a par with others. The fact that this is not happening highlights pending challenges in limited resource allocations to the local authorities (especially kebele and zonal) to account for the increased demand for services. While IDPs are expected to start contributing to the local economy and community life, an upfront investment from the authorities is required to enable this.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations are made to improve success of durable solutions initiatives in the Somali Region of Ethiopia:

### **THE REGIONAL DURABLE**

#### **SOLUTIONS WORKING GROUP SHOULD:**

- Invest in area-based, harmonised interventions, which take into account the priorities and needs of IDPs, host communities, and - where they are present - refugees.
- Establish a collaborative and community-led monitoring mechanism to ensure that progress towards durable solutions outcomes is tracked and barriers identified in a timely manner. This monitoring should ensure inclusive approaches that involve all segments of the IDP communities, including women, youth and children, whose priorities otherwise risk being neglected.
- With support from organisations with relevant expertise, develop practical minimum standards on participation for all durable solutions assessments, planning, implementation and monitoring for women, youth, children and other groups, and ensure that all actors involved in durable solutions processes are informed about them.
- Strengthen community-based protection mechanisms and support the establishment of conflict resolution mechanisms, including through increasing the capacities of all community segments to analyse, mitigate and transform conflict in their communities.
- Invest in initiatives that foster meaningful participation of IDPs of different diversities in decision-making at community level as well as with local authorities.
- Develop an action plan for supporting solutions for IDPs who were displaced due to climate change-related factors. Especially in communities where IDPs are willing to locally integrate, building on the progress already made spontaneously towards this by both IDPs and host communities can

significantly reduce the required cost and result in significant gains.

- Invest in analysis of factors affecting access to land, as well as launching initiatives to support access to land for productive use for all, including IDPs, those from minority clans, and women. This could include:
  - Ensuring that an HLP due diligence is a minimum requirement built into all projects that require access to land.
  - Working with clan elders and other decision makers on collaborative dispute resolution and ability to negotiate access to land for people in less advantaged positions, including minority clans, women, and internally displaced people.
  - Pilot innovative land-use arrangements such as block farming or cluster farming, and shared cropping agreements. Cooperatives have successfully been used in other contexts to ensure access to land for those segments of the community who typically would be left disenfranchised.
  - Work with government authorities to clarify the status of informal land documents (“ownership cards”) issued to IDPs and engage in advocacy efforts to ensure the recognition of less formal arrangements (e.g. supporting the documentation of and adherence to verbal agreements).
  - Work with organizations such as UN-HABITAT, who have expertise in strengthening the capacity of land administration and urban governance institutions in legally pluralistic and largely customary settings.
- Make significant investments in a comprehensive climate-smart livelihoods strategy in the Somali region, which considers both the needs of those currently displaced, as well as those at-risk of future climate change related shocks that may lead to short-term or more permanent loss of livelihoods and other preconditions for sustainable life. This should take into account:
  - Establishing climate vulnerability and

risk analysis as a minimum standard to inform all community-level durable solutions plans.

- Supporting climate change adaptation for communities at risk and wishing to maintain their old ways working.
- Supporting communities and individuals (especially young people) who wish to transform their ways of living and access new kinds of opportunities, possibly in urban contexts.
- Supporting peaceful co-existence and facilitating inter-generational, inter-communal and gender-transformative dialogues to remove barriers.
- Investing in climate-sensitive infrastructure, including heat resistant and high-quality housing that is able to withstand the harsh and changing weather conditions in the communities.

#### **REGIONAL AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES SHOULD:**

- Ensure engagement from a broader group of actors in planning, resourcing and implementation of durable solutions, including different government bureaus and local administration at zonal, woreda and kebele levels.
- With leadership from the DRMB, which already has strong technical expertise and knowledge on durable solutions, invest in mainstreaming this technical capacity across all layers of local governance.
- Lead the development of a comprehensive action plan for communities at risk of or displaced by reasons related to climate change and capitalise on progress already made towards durable solutions.
- Ensure the prioritisation of the needs and priorities of displaced populations in local development plans and in particular urban planning and ensure funding allocations to ensure expansion of relevant basic services in communities where IDPs are seeking solutions.



- Expand legal aid and awareness programmes as well as environment-building advocacy to support initiatives that advance access to formal recognition of IDPs' right to access services and reside in their current locations of residence. This can include:
    - Expanding access to mobile courts and other methods of obtaining legal aid in remote settings with a minimal cost.
    - Awareness raising on the importance and process of obtaining documents.
    - Waiving fees for vulnerable individuals who may face financial barriers to accessing documentation.
  - Coordinate efforts to address gaps in healthcare, education, water supply and food support in areas where IDPs are integrating or have been relocated to, with priority given to underserved settlements such as Dhurwale, Dhirindhir and Tuliguled.
- DONORS SHOULD:**
- Ensure that funding mechanisms enable effective and long-term investments in progress towards durable solutions based on the needs and priorities of affected communities. This requires flexibility to adapt allocations based on evolving situations as communities and local administrations advance on the solutions journey. Investments are needed in activities that strengthen local governance, sustainable service delivery, and climate-aware economic opportunities.
  - Ensure that funding for livelihoods opportunities integrates aspects of inclusive, peaceful coexistence, participation, protection considerations such as access to documentation and land, as well as enable gender-transformation and positive change for youth and children in accordance with their priorities.
  - Continue to provide bridging support based on humanitarian needs in communities that still struggle with basic subsistence, with the understanding that sustainable integration is a process that requires an investment from both development and humanitarian actors.
  - Increase funding for anticipatory action with a no-regrets principle and long-term development funding to support initiatives that prepare communities to withstand possible future shocks.



IDP woman presenting her newly issued local ID in Goljano. Photo credit: UNHCR.



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