



IOM KEY PRINCIPLES FOR INTERNAL HUMANITARIAN EVACUATIONS/ RELOCATIONS OF CIVILIAN POPULATIONS IN ARMED CONFLICT

For the purpose of this guidance, internal humanitarian evacuations or relocations are understood as large-scale movements of civilians, who face an immediate threat to life in a conflict setting, to locations within the same country where they can be more effectively protected¹. This activity is usually the prerogative of States and other parties to the conflict who are responsible for the protection of all persons in their territory and jurisdiction, however humanitarian agencies might be called to support when the above are unable or unwilling to perform this activity. For the purpose of this document, civilians might include nationals, non-nationals, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons and/or other affected communities by the conflict.

The below set of key principles are drawn from existing guidance² produced by IOM and partners. They provide the general framework to help guide IOM staff in the decision making process leading to the implementation of the internal humanitarian evacuations. For the specific operational guidance, please refer to existing available tools³.

Key principles:

- **Internal humanitarian evacuations as a measure of last resort**

Internal humanitarian evacuations should be considered as a measure of last resort, when no other ways of protecting the civilian populations could be ensured in situ. They carry legal, political and logistical implications which should be carefully weighed. As above indicated, States and Armed Non-State Actors-ANSAs (if in control of the areas where the endangered civilians reside) are responsible for the protection of the civilians. Humanitarian actors should try to avoid becoming involved in internal humanitarian evacuations unless it is necessary for the protection of affected persons against very serious and imminent threats to their lives, their physical integrity or health.

¹ Definition readapted from GPC Handbook for the Protection of IDPs, Chapter 9- Many refer to them as relocations. Throughout the text the two terms will be used interchangeably. The most quoted and recent examples of internal humanitarian evacuations or relocations are: the relocation operation in CAR in 2014 and the one in Homs, Syria in 2013.

² IOM- IN/238 Inclusion of protection considerations when planning and implementing international humanitarian evacuations of migrants 2016, IOM Emergency Manual 2016, The MEND Guide- Comprehensive Guide to Plan Mass Evacuations in Natural Disasters- Pilot Document 2014, UNHCR Draft Guidance for Humanitarian Evacuations 2016, ICRC and InterAction, Trapped in Conflict 2014, OCHA internal guidance, NRC internal guidance, GPC Handbook for the protection of internally displaced persons 2010, GPC Thematic Roundtable “ Humanitarian Evacuations in Armed Conflict”, 2014.

³ Such as the IOM Emergency Manual and the MEND Guide.

- **Inter-agency evidence based decision making**

IOM cannot decide unilaterally whether to evacuate or relocate an endangered civilian population. The request to relocate an endangered civilian population might come from the State, IOM, another humanitarian partner and/or one or more members of the civilian population. Regardless where the request is coming from, the decision to engage in relocating a civilian population should be the result of a consultative and evidence-based decision making process. More specifically, the decision should be taken within a UN country team and/or Humanitarian Country Team meeting or series of meetings and should have the final go ahead of the Resident Coordinator or Humanitarian Coordinator (or the SRSG if in an integrated mission set-up). The decision to relocate is taken on the basis of the careful analysis of factual and verified information regarding the threats to the civilians, the relevant applicable legal frameworks, the safety and security of the staff involved in the operations and any other unintended harmful effects for the civilians to be relocated, for other civilian populations and ultimately the actors involved. When humanitarian evacuations are determined to be a life-saving measure but are being blocked by the national or local authorities for largely political or other reasons, humanitarian organizations need to reach a consensus on how to proceed in respect of humanitarian principles, including through agreement on minimum standards⁴. The Department of Operations and Emergencies at IOM Headquarters needs to be consulted throughout the decision making process.

- **Voluntary character of the operation**

The civilian population should be duly informed on the need for and conditions of the humanitarian evacuation or relocation operations, including the possible risks involved. Populations must be guaranteed the freedom of choice in making their informed decisions to relocate; this must be free of coercion, intimidation or threat. No relocation should be implemented against the will of those who are to be relocated.

- **Choice of the relocation sites**

The area where the civilian population will be relocated to should be carefully chosen in consultation with the host government and the ANSAs (if active/in control of that area), who are ultimately responsible for the protection of the civilians. The relocation in the new site is usually considered temporary unless otherwise decided. Some of the considerations to be taken into account are: security, proximity to family or community members of the civilians to be relocated, access to food, water, shelter, economic activities, electricity, education, communal safe spaces, freedom and facility of movement etc. Continuous communication and consultation with the civilians to be relocated will also determine which other factors should be taken into account in the choice of the relocation sites. Community engagement (both of the population being relocated and the host population) will also ensure reducing the risk of creating tension between communities.

- **Negotiations with the warring parties and safe passage**

Internal humanitarian evacuations cannot happen without the consultation and consent of the warring parties. This will practically involve the State where the civilian population is relocated from and to, as well as the ANSAs when the territory where the relocation is taking place is under their control. They both have to ensure safe and unhindered passage to the humanitarians conducting the operation and the civilian population to be relocated. When the consent of the warring parties cannot be ensured, the safety and security of the populations is at risk. As a primary mediator, the existing CIMIC coordination mechanisms of the

⁴ This consensus should be duly documented and be the justification for the course of action taken. Text readapted from UNHCR- Humanitarian evacuations in violence and armed conflict- draft guidance June 2016

Humanitarian Country Team should be considered. In addition, the offices of the ICRC/Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement members could support the reaching of consensus.

- **Civilian character of the operation**

Internal humanitarian evacuations conducted by humanitarians should maintain a civilian character and involve the movement of unarmed members of the populations (no weapons allowed in any of the transportation assets). The use of armed escorts should be avoided to the extent possible and in case this is considered to be necessary, it should abide by the IASC non-binding principles on the use of armed escorts for humanitarian convoys.

- **Preserving family unity**

Family unity should be preserved throughout the relocation process. This means: moving families together, informing on the risk of accidental separation during the internal humanitarian evacuations and sensitizing to preserve the family unity, establishing meeting-points for accidentally separated children and families at the end of the relocation etc. If, for operational purposes, separation of families is strictly necessary, children have to be moved with their care-givers.

- **Caring for the sick and wounded**

Under international humanitarian law⁵, the obligation to take all possible measures to “collect and care” for the sick and the wounded applies for civilian and combatant alike. Therefore, they should benefit from the relocation. The offices of the ICRC/Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement might be required to ensure negotiations with the conflicting parties as well as the assistance and protection of the sick and wounded.

- **Responsibility for the protection of the relocated civilians**

Once the operation has taken place, the responsibility for the protection of the relocated civilians lies with the State and the ANSAs, if the relocation site is under their control. The civilian populations who have been relocated should have the right to return to their place of origin or previous residence if the conditions allow. The safety (physical, material and legal) and security of persons and their possessions should be ensured throughout the operation and at the relocation site, with a particularly attention paid to populations at risk.

⁵ Geneva Convention 1949, Common Article III (2)