




Eviction Response During and After Covid-19

A Webinar Report





Evictions have emerged as the most common housing, land and property risk globally associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in spite of the fact that access to adequate housing is essential to reduce the spread of the virus. This arises due to a combination of factors, the main one being the suspension and loss of livelihoods on a massive scale resulting from public health prescriptions resulting in an inability to pay rent. Opportunistic actors (governments, armed groups, and landlords) may also use this crisis to evict people from houses, camps and informal settlements. Lastly, evictions are also a major risk for public health workers and others who risk exposure as a result of their professions, people who have been infected by the disease, and other marginalized populations due to stigma and fear. Even in non-pandemic times, evictions are humanitarian crises – with lasting effects on the health, well-being, education, and livelihoods of not only those who have been evicted, but communities as a whole.

Not all governments have enacted measures to secure housing tenure for tenants and occupants of camps and informal settlements in response to this crisis. Among those jurisdictions who have put in measures, most have moved to enact moratoriums on eviction and utilities shut-offs, and a minority have put in measures to reduce rents or offer rental subsidies to the most vulnerable households. However even these measures will expire in the coming weeks and months even when economies have not fully “reopened” and livelihoods revived, leaving renters with several months worth of unpaid rent. Being able to respond to this emerging crisis will require practitioners, donors, activists and policy makers to deploy all of the tools and best practices they have at their disposal in order to address the massive, unprecedented need. As such, this webinar convenes some leading thinkers on eviction, and ask them to draw on their experiences to help orient our collective thinking on how to respond to this crisis during COVID-19 and in the months and years after when its effects will continue to linger.

Moderator: Ibere Lopes – Roving, International Organization of Migration

Presenters:

Joseph Jackson, Norwegian Refugee Council Somalia (panelist)

Theresa Williamson, Catalytic Communities (panelist)

Robert Lewis-Lettington, UN Habitat (panelist)

Nathalia Watanabe, Norwegian Refugee Council Jordan (panelist)

The recording of this webinar is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9RSfar0OuY>



Key Takeaways

- A lack of secure housing, shelter and tenure will only exacerbate the COVID-19 crisis. Intervening to protect the most vulnerable is a public duty.
- Moratorium or other forms of public temporary suspension on evictions remains one of the most practical and cost-effective approaches to reducing the impact of eviction during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- We need to enhance collaboration and support to local municipalities to integrate eviction prevention as a strategic objective in national plans.
- In places where vulnerable tenants have no measures put into place to secure their tenure, possible scenarios include violence from members of host communities, discrimination based on unfounded suspicion, and the risk of evicted populations being left homeless.

Webinar Summary

1) SOME JURISDICTIONS ARE CONSIDERING OR HAVE IMPLEMENTED MEASURES TO MITIGATE THE RISK OF EVICTIONS, WITH THE MOST COMMON APPROACH APPEARING TO BE THE SUSPENSION OF ALL FORMAL EVICTION PROCEEDINGS FOR THE DURATION OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS APPROACH? HOW DO WE ALSO PROTECT LANDLORDS WHO RELY ON RENT FOR THEIR OWN SUBSISTENCE?

- Some of the advantages to this approach include reduction in incidents. Based on analysis data for April in Somalia, a significant reduction in the number of eviction incidents was observed in regions where the moratoriums were issued. On the other hand, a spike was recorded in non-moratorium locations across the country.
- Some of the restrictions include enforceability and the lack of operational capacity and the legal infrastructure to enforce the moratorium and to punish those who violate. Furthermore, the economic impact it has on property owners is another restriction.
- Protecting landlords who rely on rent for their own subsistence means a tax waiver on properties for the period of the crisis should be implemented, and potentially implemented for additional months.
- It is important to note that Internally Displaced Persons should be prioritized as the most vulnerable sub stratum of the population and the ones disproportionately affected by evictions.

2) WHAT IS THE SITUATION FOR VULNERABLE TENANTS AND OCCUPANTS IN JURISDICTIONS WHERE NO MEASURES HAVE BEEN PUT INTO PLACE (OR GOVERNMENTS DO NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT /ENFORCE THEIR MORATORIA) TO SECURE THEIR TENURE?

- Possible scenarios include violence from members of host communities, discrimination based on unfounded suspicion, and the risk of evicted populations being unable to secure alternative space, and being left homeless.
- These situations are questions of humanitarian assistance. We need to protect life and human dignity to the extent that we can. We also need to support governments in these situations to see that some form of intervention to protect the most vulnerable is not only a public duty but also a benefit to their entire societies. A lack of tenure security for the most vulnerable can only exacerbate the COVID crisis and its related impacts.

3) WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL TOOLS AND APPROACHES THAT PRACTITIONERS CAN ADVOCATE FOR OR DEPLOY ON THE GROUND TO KEEP PEOPLE HOUSED? WHAT ARE SOME OF THE LIMITATIONS, RISKS, AND CHALLENGES AROUND THESE APPROACHES?

- There are genuine challenges and contexts and dynamics tend to vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. However, moratorium or other forms of public temporary suspension on evictions is one of them.
- We need to enhance and expand collaboration and support to local municipalities to integrate eviction prevention as a strategic objective in national plans. Possible initiatives could include establishment of eviction units and identifying and putting in place dedicated focal points to lead eviction prevention efforts.
- In the short term, we have seen many governments adopting creative solutions including the identification of land for self-building, the re-purposing of buildings and the provision of emergency shelter for isolation or re-housing.

4) ANTICIPATING THAT INEQUALITY IN TERMS OF LIVELIHOODS AND HOUSING IS BEING EXACERBATED BY THE COVID-19 CRISIS, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IN TERMS OF THE EVOLUTION OF LAW, POLICY AND PRACTICE ON THIS ISSUE BOTH IN THE IMMEDIATE TERM AND THE LONG TERM?

- In the long term, there needs to be a more inclusive approach to access to land and shelter in many countries. That should also be linked to stronger approaches to public finance, particularly at the local level.
- While we have to accept that the right to an adequate standard of living will remain a right that can only be progressively realised, we must also accept that housing is central to the achievement of many other social, economic and public health objectives. As such it has to be prioritized.
- COVID-19 has generated a global and shared awareness, fighting the same problem doesn't matter where or who. This is an opportunity for integration among the different sectors, programs and institutions will be essential to overcome the negative impacts of the COVID-19.

Notable Quotes from the Panelists



“MORATORIUM OR OTHER FORMS OF PUBLIC TEMPORARY SUSPENSION ON EVICTIONS REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST PRACTICAL AND COST-EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO REDUCING THE IMPACT OF EVICTION DURING THE ONGOING COVID-19 PANDEMIC.”

- JOSEPH JACKSON, NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL SOMALIA



“COVID-19 HAS GENERATED A GLOBAL AND SHARED AWARENESS, THAT WE ARE FIGHTING THE SAME PROBLEM. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHERE OR WHO. THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INTEGRATION AMONG DIFFERENT SECTORS, PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS. THIS WILL BE ESSENTIAL TO OVERCOME THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19.”

- NATHALIA WATANABE, NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL



“WHAT WE EXPECT TO SEE IN THE END IS THAT THE PANDEMIC HAS KILLED MANY, MANY PEOPLE IN FAVELAS, WITH RIO'S FAVELA PERHAPS BEING THE WORLDWIDE EPICENTER OF DEATHS. AND THEN AFTER THE PANDEMIC WE'RE EXPECTING A WAVE OF ATTEMPTS AT EVICTIONS USING SANITATION ARGUMENTS AS JUSTIFICATION.”

- THERESA WILLIAMSON, CATALYTIC COMMUNITIES



“FORCED EVICTIONS MUST BE AVOIDED UNLESS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY AND, WHERE FOUND NECESSARY AND PROPORTIONATE, THEY MUST BE SUBJECT TO ALL OF THE REQUIREMENTS AND PROTECTIONS SET OUT IN INTERNATIONAL LAW AND GUIDELINES.”

- ROBERT-LEWIS LETTINGTON, UN HABITAT



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