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Humanitarian shelter response in urban setting during armed conflict

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Abstract

Today most refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) live in cities not camps, where they seek better living conditions, job opportunities and anonymity. Many moved in search of safety from conflict, persecution or disaster. Rapid and effective urban shelter response is not just essential for survival and alleviating suffering but also contributes to security, safety, health and well-being of refugees, IDPs and affected populations. In addition, it promotes recovery in affected cities that are complex, vulnerable and dynamic. Therefore more knowledge and better understanding of the policy and the practice of shelter support in urban conflict is urgently needed in humanitarian action, especially in the Middle East, where the largest number of people made homeless by conflict are found. This dissertation questions how shelter policy is implemented in urban conflict, focusing on the Middle East. It uses comparative analysis of information gathered in semi-structured interviews concerning two contemporary case studies, Damascus and Gaza, Arab cities facing the consequences of armed conflicts with increasing number of refugees and IDPs. Certain ways are identified for a more effective shelter response leading to safer and more dignified shelter solutions in conflict and post-conflict urban settings in the Middle East and beyond.

Key words

Arab city, Damascus and Gaza, refugees, humanitarian shelter response, transitional settlement, urban conflict
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Abbreviations

BBC British Broadcasting Corporation
CCCM Camp Coordination and Camp Management
CGI Corrugated Galvanised Iron
DK Dorling Kindersley
DRR Disaster Risk Reduction
ECHO European Community Humanitarian Aid Office
EU European Union
EUISS EU Institute for Security Studies
GSC Global Shelter Cluster
HLP Housing, land and property
IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP Internally displaced person
IFRC International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IOM International Organization for Migration
IRP International Recovery Platform
MENA Middle East and North Africa
MOFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOLA Ministry of Local Administration
LGBT Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
MDG Millennium development goals
MSA Ministry of Social Affairs
NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NFI Non-food item
NGO Non-Governmental Organization
NRC Norwegian Refugee Council
OSCE Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SARC Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SCP Shelter Cluster Palestine
SDC Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG Sustainable development goals
SOGI Sexual orientation and gender identity
UN United Nations
UNESCO UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN-Habitat UN Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNRWA UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
US United States
USAID US Agency for International Development
WASH Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WatHab ICRC Water and Habitat Department
Part 1: Introduction

Imagine you and your loved ones without a roof over your heads to protect you from a cold windy winter or from a blazing summer sun, no place to call home, lacking privacy and dignity without access to drinkable water and a decent lavatory. Some people need not imagine all this, having recovered from such hard times. Some fellow human beings, usually called refugees or internally displaced people (IDPs) are experiencing it right now; they certainly never expected to become an "affected population" in media reports.

No-one and no family on this planet, whether in a "fragile state" or in a rich industrialized country, is completely immune from losing their home to fire, "natural disaster" or armed conflict. No preparation can fully stop the impact. The experience of loss and even the recovery process are difficult to the point of being life changing for individuals and families, indeed for the whole community. For those fortunate ones living in developed economies, existing governance structures and private sector insurance contribute to speed up a return to normal. Nonetheless in the case of armed conflicts even in strong states, insurance compensation might not cover affected properties or lives lost to the crisis.

This paper addresses contemporary shelter assistance, protection and support provided by humanitarian actors including United Nations (UN) agencies, other international organizations and bilateral agencies to affected people especially refugees and IDPs in Urban conflict to better understand how shelter policy is implemented in urban settings in the context of armed conflict, focusing on transitional shelter and settlement in Arab cities. It investigates policy and practice of the humanitarian shelter response and identifies related gaps and challenges in Damascus and Gaza. The paper furthers the discussion of emergency shelter in the specific context of civic conflict, to establish the optimum overall shape and content of humanitarian shelter policy and how it would be articulated and applied in relation to conflicted urban areas of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Specifically, the research was guided by the following questions:

1. Does the urban context need a shelter response distinct from the rural one?
2. Can humanitarian actors meet needs for shelter assistance and protection of affected people in cities where conflicts are taking place?
3. Should the different clusters and sectors related to shelter and settlement in humanitarian action in civic conflict be linked together or separated from each other across the phases from emergency to development?
Reason
In understanding shelter as not just buildings and construction, but a continuum between humanitarian and development work whereby people engage to improve their own homes, and create a safe and secure environment, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC 2015) and other members of the Urban Refugee Task Team of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) assist and protect refugees and IDPs in cities as they move along this continuum. This new challenge to humanitarian actors is addressed in this paper as an urgent need to shift approaches from camp to urban settings (Urban Refugees 2015) where "tens of millions of the world’s most vulnerable people live in increasingly unsafe and impoverished conditions because of armed conflicts and violence ...." (Banfield et al. 2016, p.1) Consequently, "it has therefore become increasingly important to understand the dynamics of violence in an urban setting." (Apraxine et al. 2012, p.3)

Of all the regions of the world where the need for urban shelter response is urgent, it is in the MENA region where we find "the largest proportion of people made homeless by conflict". (Ashmore et al. 2008, p.iv) Arab cities including Damascus and Gaza are faced with ever-increasing numbers of refugees and IDPs due to civil wars and civic conflicts, especially since the 1948 and 1967 wars and following the misnamed "Arab Spring" of 2011. Indeed, the "Gaza Strip represents one of the most depressing sights in the region" (Maurer 2012, p.1508) According to the inter-agency Shelter Cluster Palestine (SCP), led by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), "currently in Gaza, more than 100,000 people are displaced by the recent war, with an estimated 47,000 people living with host families and 57,000 people in collective centres." (SCP 2015) Similarly, and not so far away "Syria has long hosted large IDP and refugee populations. Damascus exerts a marked pull on all displaced groups, attracted by its employment opportunities, hopes of better living standards and the anonymity of life in the capital." (Haysom et al. 2011, p.21)

Research objective
To better understand humanitarian shelter policy and practice in the urban setting. The dissertation may contribute to identifying ways forward for better, safer and more dignified shelter in conflict and post-conflict urban settings in and beyond the Middle East.

Hypothesis
Currently no explicit, coherent or comprehensive policy addresses emergency and transitional shelter response in urban settings located in armed conflict zones. Such a policy would be characterised by "Multiple approaches … in complex urban environments, where traditional concepts of “community” … may be harder to apply". (UN-Habitat 2012, p.viii) Our
hypothesis is that under specific circumstances, measures can be provided to create conditions for temporary, safe, dignified, effective and appropriate emergency shelter systems in urban setting even during and after armed conflict.

**Methodology**
To identify gaps and understand challenges in the policy and practice of shelter response in humanitarian action during civic conflicts, a case study was made of the real-life context of two Arab cities during armed civic conflict, Damascus and Gaza. After literature review, qualitative data was gathered by empirical inquiry (open-ended questioning in seven semi-structured interviews with expert practitioners). As maps, images and photographs might have "many purposes: testimony and proof, illustration and description, fund-raising and documentation, information and communication, education and awareness-raising (Gorin 2012, p.1378) not only interview data but also images from Damascus and Gaza were found and analysed. These illustrations add a sense of place to complement information from the interviews¹. A comparative analysis of the findings focused on the categories, needs and location of affected people. An institutional perspective on shelter needs for those living in collective centres and host families was obtained. Analysis highlighted similarities, differences and links between Damascus and Gaza, developing better understanding of how shelter policy is applied given the respective challenges, opportunities and identified potential shelter responses. The discussion draws on interviews, literature and further documents using sub-questions as guidelines. Finally, findings and a conclusion attempt to show understanding of policy and practice of shelter response, identify ways forward for better, safer and more dignified transitional shelter and settlement support in civic conflicts in the region and beyond.

**Limitations of the research**
Publicly available information about what is happening in contemporary conflict zones is in general limited more so than about humanitarian shelter and settlement policy and practice. Few humanitarian institutions have time and resources to conduct and publish in-depth social, economic and political analysis of complex urban situations. The present individual research, despite its inter-disciplinary approach, can only partially reflect holistic, cross-sectoral findings and reach some definitive conclusions.

¹ The questionnaire is Annex 1 while the standardized and comparable database is incorporated in two annexes concerning the respective case study sites (Annex 2 for Damascus, Annex 3 for Gaza).
Part 2: Literature review of humanitarian shelter and settlement in urban conflict

It is important to build a foundation of knowledge about policy and practice of humanitarian shelter response in areas affected by civic conflict by exploring and analysing the literature. Publications of humanitarian, development and human rights actors address shelter and its importance in the emergency, early recovery and development process during and after crisis. However, little specific literature is to be found about emergency shelter beyond two books: “Transitional Settlement” by Corsellis and Vitale (2005) and “The right to Adequate Housing” by UN-Habitat (2009). The components of the literature review which follows reflect the concepts and issues related to humanitarian shelter interventions in urban conflict.

Shelter
Shelter, "anything serving as a shield, protection from danger, bad weather and place of refuge" (DK 1998, p.762) is a general term for a physical structure giving protection from the elements and a secure and safe environment, which “provides a space in which to work and rest, and to care for children and elderly people. It makes available a place to care for animals and to store tools, water, or goods produced” (Corsellis et al. 2005, p.24) In this paper shelter is addressed as the temporary and transitional accommodations in Arab cities that refugee and IDP households use in crisis. According to the Global Shelter Cluster (GSC) "shelter and settlement are more than just a roof and its surroundings" (GSC 2016) and go beyond the safe physical structure giving a comfortable "home"; but provide and support livelihood and health and give a sense of dignity, safety and security, a place for children, a workplace for income generation, protection for belongings. In addition, assets and investments, links to utilities (water, electricity, drainage) and access to roads, transport, markets and social community facilities all make the head of the household and family members part of a neighbourhood and feel worthy and respected. Shelter gives status in the community when defined as "a habitable covered living space providing a secure and healthy living environment with privacy and dignity..." (Corsellis et al. 2005 p.11) as it is "... likely to be one of the most important determinants of general living conditions" (UNHCR 2000, p.144) Additionally, when provided in consequence of emergencies, shelter includes facilities, constructions or services such as health facilities and warehouses or "any structure providing protection from harmful external forces, be they related to temperature, precipitation, wind, wildlife, civil threat, or any other hazard." (IRP 2010, p.1)
Settlement

Settlement is the context where shelter takes place; in other words, humanitarian and development aid related to shelter does not happen in a void nor in isolation. The neighbourhood, settlement or community need to be considered and their contribution strengthened. "Responsible settlements are about creating a safe environment for the population where they not only have access to safe and adequate shelter but also to utilities, critical infrastructure and employment opportunities.... as well as considering other aspects of community life and how they all fit together physically and functionally" (IFRC 2012, p.7) Following GSC terminology, "settlement is a place where people establish a community" (GSC 2016)

Physical community space has several characteristics: housing which is subject to renovation and expansion, water supply and distribution, sanitation through toilets, showers, laundry and drainage, solid waste management by collection, recycling and disposal, food growing, marketing and preparation, gathering spaces such as parks and squares, access and mobility for circulation and linkages within and outside the settlement, energy and communication, and finally opportunities for restoration and resilience by which the potential hazards and the eco-system are taken into account. (GSC 2016)

The transitional settlement choices for displaced people have been categorised into six programme options, three of which are considered as dispersed settlement (host families, urban self-settlement and rural self-settlement) and three as grouped settlement (collective centres, self-settled camps and planned camps). It is possible that people will move from one to another until their displacement is over. (Corsellis et al. 2005 p.8)

Interviewed by the BBC in the run up to the World Humanitarian Summit, the President of the International Rescue Committee, David Miliband clearly indicated that the only viable option is for settlement into the world's major cities. (BBC 2016)

Housing, land and property rights

"The right to adequate housing contains entitlements to: security of tenure, housing, land and property restitution, equal and non-discriminatory access to adequate housing, participation in housing-related decision-making at the national and community levels." (UN-Habitat 2009, p.3)

Housing, land and property rights (HLP) rights are human rights laws, standards and principles addressing conditions in which people reside and their rights as dwellers. HLP rights apply at all times; in peace, conflict, "natural disaster" and development. The primary HLP right is to adequate housing with security of tenure, accompanied by cultural adequacy, affordability, availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure, habitability, accessibility and location. Security of tenure goes beyond proof of ownership; it takes into
account context and understanding and respect of culture in order to acknowledge practices, customary and informal law. HLP can be a determining factor in shelter response as pointed out in a US Agency for International Development (USAID) report on Haiti following the January 2010 earthquake; land availability and land tenure issues hinder construction, transitional shelter, risk reduction and post-disaster programming. (Caron et al. 2014)

**Shelter cluster**
Reference is made to an operational coordination entity, the cluster. "Clusters are groups of humanitarian organisations (international, national, local authorities, civil society) working in partnership in the main sectors of humanitarian action." (Richardson et al. 2013, p.19) They exist to facilitate and strengthen coordination and partnership between actors and stakeholders for better humanitarian response. Yet, while cluster coordination and partnership approaches should be adapted and adjusted to context, it seems that international actors and organisations tend "to exclude national and local actors and frequently fail(s) to link in with existing coordination and response mechanisms". (Collinson et al. 2012, p.20) Participation and involvement in cluster coordination by empowered local actors and members of the affected population would ensure a more responsible humanitarian response.

Shelter coordination is addressed in the "Emergency Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI)" cluster, led by UNHCR and IFRC. Sometimes shelter and NFI combine with Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) as in Yemen. In this case other organisations such as IOM and NRC may co-chair the cluster. For UNHCR, using the shelter and NFI cluster meets urgent needs in a timely and accountable way in support of a long term development shelter process. Its strategy is based on three main elements: emergency response, transitional shelter and support for durable solutions. The previously mentioned GSC, established in 2011 is a global public platform of more than 40 partners with UNHCR leading in conflict contexts and IFRC in "natural disasters". GSC sets out to improve the cluster approach in shelter response and maximise the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) coordination mechanism for faster and better shelter response. (GSC 2016)

While the cluster system shines especially in "natural disasters" in rural areas, sometimes the cluster system is not approved by certain governments and local authorities for political reasons or when its limitations are reached in a complex urban conflict. It may be that shelter and settlement situations involving housing infrastructure and urban planning require more than just good stakeholder coordination. Here, "An organization must be open to entering into partnerships in a participative spirit with local and municipal authorities, other humanitarian, development, and human rights organizations, the private sector, academic
circles, and religious and other associations.” (Harroff-Tavel. 2010, p.340) Despite agreement that "The scale and complexity of urban disasters increases the need for effective partnerships ... Emergency response effort should aim to strengthen governance structures" (Sanderson et al. 2012, p.3) certain stakeholders fear that the cluster system might duplicate existing state coordination mechanisms or even overtake their governance bodies.

**Shelter response**

When homes are lost due to conflict or "natural disaster" people lose more than just a house, they lose the activities that happen inside and around it. Therefore shelter response includes settlement interventions and is multi-cluster in practice, integrating other sectors such as livelihoods, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and disaster risk reduction (DRR). Shelter response is the facilitation of a recovery process. In order to meet an affected population's needs, certain important aspects related to shelter are considered: streets to access individual shelters and roads from the settlement to its surroundings including to other neighbourhoods or villages, access to water and sanitation, washing facilities, fuel for cooking and electricity. "Transitional settlement of displaced populations is based on a holistic interpretation of the need for ‘shelter’. It goes beyond the traditional provision of tents and camps, aiming instead to support all the settlement and shelter options that are open to displaced people.” (Corsellis et al. 2005 p.7) Local authorities and affected populations respond in different ways based on context, need, location, situation, their capacity, knowledge, skills and their category (whether they are IDPs, refugees or not actually displaced). People are usually self-reliant and will try to achieve the best possible shelter solutions with what materials are available to build, repair or rebuild their homes. In this sense, they are the first responders, addressing their own shelter needs. Humanitarian shelter response should first provide materials, tools and technical support to any such self-managed response. "The first responders in any emergency are disaster-affected people and their governments. The key objective of international humanitarian action is to support national efforts in protecting the lives, livelihoods and dignity of people in need." (PHT 2013, p.12) Beyond this, consideration is required of the urban planning process, environmental impact, right of tenure, support to the local construction supply market to meet local demand and last but not least continuing involvement of affected households. Humanitarian interventions should have the affected population uppermost; clearly it is important to understand their needs, culture, local practice, resources and technology in order to support the choices affected people make and help to ensure dignity. "While the basic need for shelter is similar in most emergencies … the kind of
housing needed, what materials and design are used, who constructs the housing and how long it must last will differ significantly in each situation". (UNHCR 2000, p.144)

**Displaced and non-displaced people as recipients of shelter response**

The IFRC website indicates that displaced populations are those who "leave their homes, usually due to a sudden impact, such as an earthquake or a flood, threat or conflict." (IFRC 2016b) They likely to be more vulnerable than non-displaced population as they are in a temporary location for an uncertain period of time after deciding or having been forced to leave due to fear, insecurity and damage or loss of properties. The choice to stay or move depends on interest, capacity, means, needs, emotions and the perception of the situation. Holistic approaches address individual, family, collective and communal points of view, including ability and willingness of affected people to stay or to move after a crisis, as well as factoring in current location and context. Only in this way can one determine what the needs are and the best way to assist that avoids discrimination or leaving anyone behind.

Numerical terms are revealing, already ten years ago: "There were 20 million refugees living worldwide. In addition, 25 million people were displaced within the borders of their own countries" (Corsellis et al. 2005 p.6) but what has not changed is the importance of taking in to account the location of the assisted people, whether inside or outside their own local, national and even regional territory and also if they are in or from rural or urban environments. Status impacts on entitlement, access to aid and support. In a crisis, property owners, existing tenants or others already present with legal or non-legal status are often considered less vulnerable than displaced people. Nonetheless, in shelter response, support to such non-displaced people to help them cope and recover must be taken in to consideration.

Finally, shelter assistance and protection needs should be assessed according to settlement typologies and whether or not people are in fact displaced. Defining factors include: climate, culture, type of settlement where people are, speed of response, cost. A first response can be a cost-effective and flexible one to address a wide range of people, allowing for rapid response even with little assessment. As an operation evolves, needs become clearer and more differentiated, targeted interventions at higher cost can be used. Looking at what affected people are already doing and how they lived before the crisis can usefully inform these subsequent responses.

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2 Further information on cost and time of shelter response (see Annex 6)
Disaster risk reduction in the process of shelter response

Shelter response and recovery contribute to longer-term DRR and to community resiliency. According to the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) "DRR is relevant to most aspects of shelter operations” and inversely “Shelter represents a key asset for any family, and its loss or damage can result in increased vulnerability and exposure”. (ECHO 2016, p.4) At the same time, "the concept of vulnerability helped to clarify the concepts of risk and disaster" (Birkmann 2006, p.12) in the settlement context of shelter activities. To understand context and vulnerability is to be able to design an intervention that is effective, culturally appropriate, creates long lasting impact for the communities while strengthening their engagement, resilience and preparedness. This done, disaster risk is reduced.

From emergency shelter response to development implications

Taking note that "transitional shelter is sometimes misunderstood as a product and not a process" (Ashbridge et al 2012, p.6) interventions should aim to facilitate transitional recovery processes. However, not all go at the same pace, some people pass promptly from self-recovery to durable solutions or permanent housing, while others need assistance at every step towards recovery. In an emergency, the priority is to save lives; some shelter response will take the form of providing tents, tarpaulins, toolkits, and technical assistance. Everywhere in normal times, householders build, upgrade, renovate and extend their houses to improve family health and wellbeing and enhance their community standing. While this process could be interrupted, when crisis has passed it will continue and shelter response should support it in order to build back safer and better. This helps an affected population to find its path towards recovery through their own shelter and settlement projects, ensuring families and community are not made more vulnerable by the assistance provided. A shelter response should support the affected population to cope with its situation rather than increasing its dependence, even at the risk of it taking longer. As indicated earlier, the first responders are those directly affected. Later, when mechanisms are in place, official aid and assistance will go through different phases: emergency, early recovery, reconstruction and recovery, durable solutions, preparedness and risk reduction, more preparedness and risk reduction. In this integrated process, several steps and phases may happen at the same time rather than one after the other in a linear manner. "To speed up the recovery process, support for infrastructure and settlement planning will be required during the response and should be integrated into the shelter programme plan/strategy." (Ashbridge et al. 2012, p.94) Much depends on having the resilience, access, security, capacity and the resources to cope with the situation.
The journey back to normal after a crisis could be long and difficult; challenges along the way may include addressing gaps between poor and rich, in urban and rural contexts, gender inequalities, DRR issues and dramatic weather arising from climate change. It is simply a very complex, long and at times dangerous journey, especially in armed conflicts which "remain the biggest threat to human development" with “almost 60 million people (forced) to abandon their homes -- the highest level recorded since the Second World War." (UN 2015, p.8) Yet, no humanitarian cooperation can be complete without addressing early recovery as a step towards development. Many of the actions required for smooth transition from emergency, through recovery to development are those identified to attain the goals (formerly the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), now the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)) that take communities to prosperity and hopefully beyond. Respecting a defined and agreed development framework such as Agenda 2030 and SDG targets will also help minimise any possible harm to any stakeholder, including the environment, in the process. The norms and operational standards used by humanitarians in their emergency interventions should nonetheless be a reflection of the set targets and goals of development actors, donors and other national and international political entities.

Shelter and settlement strategy: from a vision to reality
Effective shelter and settlement response requires strategic guidance. It is important therefore to look at the strategy of leading agencies such as UNHCR, IFRC and others, as well as at the coordination mechanisms under which they are operational. But first, let us recall that "shelter and settlement strategies contribute to the security, safety, health and well-being of both displaced and non-displaced affected populations and promote recovery and reconstruction where possible." (The Sphere Project 2011, p.249) Most shelter actors address the related needs of the different types of population based on location and according to short, medium and long term considerations, to ensure that resources are maximized for impact. The GSC strategy goal 2013-2017 is "to more effectively meet the sheltering needs of populations affected by humanitarian crises, by strengthening the shelter response of humanitarian actors through leadership, coordination and accountability in the humanitarian shelter sector" (GSC 2012, p.1) Within this strategy is the aim to support responsive and flexible country-level shelter coordination mechanisms, under an effective and well-functioning GSC and increased recognition of the shelter and settlement sector as an essential component of humanitarian response, through enhanced advocacy and communication.

UNHCR has a strategy for shelter response designed to "improve the living conditions of refugees who are seeking protection and assistance in rural and urban settings." (UNHCR,
2014a, p.7) Compare this with IFRC strategy "... tackling the major challenges that confront humanity in the next decade. Informed by the needs and vulnerabilities ..." in humanitarian shelter relevant terms, to "save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disasters and crises, and enable healthy and safe living". (IFRC 2012, p.1) While implementation of UNHCR shelter strategy focuses on the "affected population in both rural and urban, settings (using an) integrated approach ensuring linkages with all relevant sectors and regular monitoring of global market developments" both IFRC and UNHCR have been criticised for poor linkages between strategy, programmes and projects as "transitional settlement response should be planned on the strategic, programme, and project levels." (Corsellis et al. 2005, p.26) These require a variety of assistance means and methods: hardware (physical items for constructing a dwelling, improving a neighbourhood or meeting household needs), software (services to ensure an adequate quality of intervention), and some enablers (types of support that help communities to reach an adequate solution). "There is no single shelter solution, so a menu of options is required." (UNHCR 2014a, p.24) The GSC menu of hardware, software and enablers is found as Annex 4.

Humanitarian actors in principle provide emergency shelter and give support to transitional shelter and settlement. While difficult for them to be involved in permanent housing as this goes beyond their mandate, facilitation and consideration might be shown during relief and early recovery phases to ease the process towards development, recovery and DRR especially for the most vulnerable groups such as the elderly, people with disabilities and orphans. A change in current practice and policy might be attempted among shelter actors working along the continuum of emergency shelter, transitional shelter towards a process to take in to account future permanent housing.

The IFRC strategy and that of UNHCR read like global vision and goals in an urban context or even aspirations to meet challenges in the field, rather than a reflection of a thorough understanding of the urban system. In an attempt to advocate for "Alternatives to Camps" including urban settings, UNHCR made up a definition of a camp as "any purpose-built, planned and managed location or spontaneous settlement where refugees are accommodated and receive assistance and services from government and humanitarian agencies." (UNHCR 2014b, p.12) Policies for the urban setting and strategies for interventions there cannot be complete without reference to the vulnerability of the urban system and drawing on a good understanding of its complexity especially in mega cities.
The level of community participation and engagement in shelter response
Urban shelter interventions are most effective when the community participates, because participatory processes deliver more sustainable solutions and get things done in the immediate phase of reconstruction. Thereafter they build capital over the long term. "Participation in humanitarian action is understood as the engagement of affected populations in … phases of the project cycle: assessment; design; implementation; monitoring; and evaluation. This engagement can take a variety of forms. … Far more than a set of tools, participation is … a state of mind, according to which members of affected populations are at the heart of humanitarian action, as social actors, with insights on their situation, and with competencies, energy and ideas of their own (ALNAP and URD. 2003, p20)

Imperatively "humanitarian actors in urban areas need to determine how community-based and bottom-up initiatives can be better supported" (Guterres 2010. p.8) Participation also reduces dependency on the state or on other organisations over the long term, increasing the chances that decisions will be acted upon. It contributes to new kinds of organisation and partnership, for continuity once humanitarian actors pull-out. "Involving communities is vital for the sustainability and efficiency of the shelter assistance" (UNHCR 2014a, p.23) The US Department of Health and Human Services demonstrated in the health sector that community participation may contribute to collective and individual resilience "where key preparedness activities such as continuity of operations plans for organizations, reunification plans for families, and compiling disaster kits and resources continue to be essential, recommended steps to take. A resilience approach also builds social connectedness … improving everyday health, wellness, and community systems." (US Department of Health and Human Services 2014). Similarly in construction, procurement, logistics, transport and banking, the participation of small and medium enterprises run by members of the local community reinforces social and economic engagement as "… humanitarian agencies develop close relations with domestic firms and entrepreneurs in war-torn countries". (Carbonnier et al. 2015) This is confirmed in the humanitarian context, as "local shelter solutions should be promoted to ensure that traditional building practices and cultural habits are taken into account in shelter design and to facilitate the active participation of refugees and other displaced people in both the planning and construction process." (UNHCR 2014a, p.23)

While strategically necessary to include community engagement from the beginning, and monitor and evaluate impact, it must be in a manner respectful of culture and context. The ways and means of participation, for example from passive information provision to ownership and decision-making will be valued differently from one setting to another.
Notions of inclusiveness of affected men and women, young and old, rich and poor, and what level of engagement is possible for each member of society remain open questions.

**Gender considerations in shelter response**

Gender-related consideration and approaches play an important role in all sectors and the shelter sector is no exception. Fundamental to a successful humanitarian shelter response is the use of the "gender lens" as "understanding the different vulnerabilities, needs and roles of women, girls, boys and men is essential to the success of shelter programs." (ARC 2011, p.4)

Men and women in crisis and peace time have the same human rights. However, they might have different needs, roles and responsibilities. Various opinions about what is considered as appropriate housing and sheltering will be found in a community, some differences may be attributable to gender. These differences should be addressed and considered during all stages and phases of shelter response especially as "basic decisions and knowledge about how a shelter is to be used, kitchen and hygiene needs are more likely to be understood by women given their role as primary caregivers in many cultures and communities." (ARC 2011, p. 1)

Nevertheless, women also play an important role in training and in physical shelter construction and settlement at each stage. Indeed, by taking on roles that were not performed before the crisis, the humanitarian setting can provide an exceptional opportunity for overcoming traditional personal limitations imposed by gender norms. At the collective level, misunderstandings concerning the social limitations imposed on women can also be overcome or at least challenged during shelter response. As demonstrated in the Gender Strategy of IOM, gender-based budgeting tracks differential impact made by the financial and other resources of a project budget from the perspective of how men and women benefit. (IOM 2008)

Displaced people located in collective shelters or in host families might face changes in the cultural role and responsibilities that men, women, boys, girls and the elderly play in the household and community. Adaptation might be difficult as "changes in circumstances and shifts in traditional roles often create social problems and barriers to community development." (Corsellis et al. 2005 p.50) In transitional shelter and settlement a focus on these changes is needed to give equal and appropriate support to individuals, families and communities in order to cope better with the new circumstances. This is especially so with female-headed households. As indicated above, culture and religion of affected people should be understood and considered during the whole process of shelter response. However, equal access to support, services, opportunities and decision making must be respected.
In displacement, women, young children, unaccompanied minors and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons (LGBTs) are likely to become more vulnerable to sexual harassment, assault, abuse, exploitation, and violence. Damaging actions against those "people vulnerable to sexual attack (both women and young children):" (Corsellis et al. 2005 p.52) might even be legally codified, such as in the case of early marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and capital punishment for sex outside of marriage (honour killing). Monitoring these kinds of vulnerability and assessing the risk associated with them in an early stage in the planning and the implementation is essential to enhance safety, security and protection. This requires comparison also between the legal frameworks applied in the host community and that of the community of origin of the displaced. Tangible means for improving security are available to mitigate such risk include lighting in and around collective toilet facilities. These should be undertaken in parallel with non-tangible means like awareness raising and advocacy, which are useful to help correct misunderstandings and generate accurate statistics, given the tendency to under-report cases as "victims" might be subject to stigmatisation, shame and fear of retaliation even by family and community members. While humanitarian and development actors across the international community have developed standards, guidelines and tools to combat discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in the geographical and religious contexts of those currently affected by civic conflict, these matters remain debatable, provocative and even an official taboo, as demonstrated by the recent refusal to support investigation of violence against LGBTs. (UN-Watch, 2016) Faced with unwillingness on the part of governments in place to challenge discriminatory attitudes, a gap in understanding is likely to remain between international actors and local stakeholders on how to address, prevent and respond to GBV and SOGI in emergency and humanitarian settings. In this context, international actors may at least hope for agreements based on the “do no harm” principle.

**Modern mega urban complexity, city vulnerability and the conflict context**

The definitions of what (or where) is "urban" and "rural" differ from one country to another or even within the same country and certainly over time, and though it could be useful if everyone were to agree, even the United Nations Demographic Yearbook 2014 cannot standardize the concepts "due to the fact that every urban development is shaped by the complex interaction of different factors, with cultural, political, economic, spatial and ecological factors determining settlement development." (Baccini et al 2007, p.125) As a result, "UN principles and recommendations state that due to different characteristics of urban and rural areas across the globe, a global definition is not possible." (Dijkstra et al. 2014, p.2)
Despite this, there are widely shared common understandings of how scale, density, diversity, dynamics, service availability and infrastructure determine, for example, that a town is "a densely populated urban area with a name, defined boundaries, and local government, being larger than a village and usually not created a city." (DK 1998, p.879) In contrast, the European Commission distinguishes, defines and categorises three settings based solely on density and size of population: densely-populated area/city (at least 1500 inhabitants per km² and a minimum population of 50000), intermediate area/town (at least 300 inhabitants per km² and a minimum population of 5000) and thinly-populated area/rural (any figures below the above). (Dijkstra et al 2014) In contrast to the Commission’s down to earth figures, UN-Habitat understanding of the city as the Home of Prosperity is on a higher plane. "It is the place where human beings find satisfaction of basic needs and access to essential public goods. The city is also where ambitions, aspirations and other material and immaterial aspects of life are realized, providing contentment and happiness. It is a locus at which prospects of prosperity and individual and collective well-being can be increased."(UN-Habitat 2013, p.10)

Contemporary humanitarian interventions in conflict settings have shown that reliance on essential urban services makes people vulnerable to crisis, while the urban structure and city systems are vulnerable in themselves to any kind of disruption. These lessons learnt have lead ICRC to an operational understanding of urban as "the area within which civilians vulnerable to disruptions in essential services reside and the network of components supporting those services." (ICRC 2015, p.17) While the words urban and city are often used interchangeably, among humanitarian actors it might be advised to use the term "urban" for any place which has city characteristics whatever it might be officially and administratively called. This is in keeping with the international focus on the importance of addressing shelter, housing, settlement and cities as seen in the shift from MDGs to establish SDG 11 to "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable ..." (ICSU and ISSC 2015, p.55) In the development context, it is likely this goal will face operational and political challenges due to conflicts of interest among different stakeholders involved in the modern urban system.

One apparent weakness which has implications for the humanitarian context would be an assumption that the urban system is a universal or uniform one, which is not the case. As mentioned before, there is no global agreement on urban or city definitions. However, as each country and city might have very specific profiles, city or urban development should be addressed on national and local level (with agreed urban policies and strong city-focused institutions). Attaining SDG 11 in full from the social, cultural, economic, environmental,
technological, physical, and political points of view in cities facing conflicts such as Aleppo, Benghazi, Damascus, or Gaza might be too ambitious for 2030. It is nonetheless encouraging that Gaza is the city chosen by UNDP to illustrate SDG 11 on its website: (UNDP 2015)

This paper discusses the concept of shelter in just that specific context, of civic conflict, which refers to a "broad array of conflicts, all of which tend to take place in cities. These include gang warfare, violent crime, terrorism, religious and sectarian riots, and spontaneous riots or violent protest over perceived state failures." (Beall et al. 2011, p.2) affecting "50 million people worldwide." (ICRC 2015, p.7) Humanitarian action in such violent settings has become complex, overwhelmed by numbers of undocumented IDPs, refugees and other dwellers, all of whom may be confronting a lack of physical space in cities without a track-record in protection of land and property rights. "This can result in several forms of tenure co-existing on the same plot in multiple-occupancy and multi-storey dwellings." (IFRC 2014, p.104) meaning that the shelter response must rise to the challenge of increasingly tense, if not violent urban environments where "Responding … m
means complexities in identifying and assessing the needs of the population." (IFRC 2014, p.9) The ICRC management concludes that violence and wars will happen more and more in cities and urban areas and therefore it is urgent for all stakeholders including governments and humanitarian actors to address "civic conflicts" in order to reduce violence and better cope with fragility, mitigate the impacts of wars on affected population. This was forcefully stated by François Bellon, ICRC Head of Delegation to the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as "the location of future ‘battlefields’ may well be more and more in city centres." (Apraxine et al. 2012, p.7) This is exactly where much humanitarian shelter response takes place. ICRC also calls for "a move from traditional assistance paradigms to one that takes account of the longer-term realities and needs in urban areas affected by ongoing armed conflict" (ICRC 2015, p.7)

Thirty years since establishing a department for water and habitat (WatHab) now counting more than 500 engineers in over fifty countries worldwide, ICRC believes that "one major trend is population growth in cities which are increasingly becoming battlegrounds and where civilians are trapped without coping mechanisms like those available to people in rural areas". (ICRC 2013, p.74) ICRC focuses on water and sanitation in the urban context during armed conflict complementing emergency and transitional shelter and settlement, as seen clearly in its publications list, raises the issue of the impossibility of separating shelter from other sectors such as water, sanitation, NFI and CCCM. This can be contrasted with some United Nations (UN) agencies such as UNHCR linking shelter to NFI and CCCM. In the
development context, SDG 11 on housing and cities must be linked to SDGs 6 and 7 related to WASH and energy. It is early days in the SDGs, but what is foreseen as their implementation through partnership (SDG 17) parallels the importance in moving from humanitarian emergency phase to development phase while linking the clusters and sectors, especially in the urban conflict and post-conflict settings.

**Summary of literature review of humanitarian shelter and settlement in urban conflict**

Given limited knowledge on emergency and transitional shelter and settlement, "Transitional settlement" by Corsellis and Vitale (2005) and "The right to adequate housing" by UN-Habitat (2009) push us beyond the idea of a roof and four walls, a safe physical structure giving a comfortable "home" through to the provision of protection, livelihood and health and giving a sense of dignity, while in emergencies shelter provides and safety security extending to facilities, objects and buildings for services such as clinics and storage. Settlement is the context where shelter takes place, as shelter does not happen isolated from the neighbourhood or community. This connection must be considered and strengthened in humanitarian action, whereby a strategy of settlement being the framework of the "area based" or "spatial approach" changes the focus from households and individual shelters to neighbourhoods and the larger community, with consequent linking of related sectors such as WASH, livelihood and DRR. Improving coordination mechanisms among humanitarian and development actors and other stakeholders including the local authorities and the local communities in the urban context is especially relevant in achieving this. Fundamental factors demonstrated by The Sphere Project are: recognition of the multi-sectoral, multi-faceted character of the numerous contexts, improved linkage and networking with local community organisations and authority to ensure application of HLP rights, sustainability of the intervention across social, economic, environmental, cultural and gender concerns and respect for livelihood.

A more adequate shelter response is one incorporating DRR in all stages and phases of intervention through community risk mapping, settlement planning and safer construction techniques. At the same time, relief is linked to development while remaining accountable at all times during the intervention to affected communities and local governance structures. Many refugees and internally displaced people in need of humanitarian aid have originally been part of an urban society. Many are heading towards urban centres, resulting in additional stress on the infrastructure and services of the city and the host urban community. All this contributes to rapid urbanization, usually in a fragile context and at high risk of suffering the consequences of "natural disaster" or of conflict. Humanitarian response in an urban setting hence usually means working within these complexities when identifying and assessing the
needs and the categories of an affected population. IRC concludes that the contemporary refugee crisis requires a shelter solution in keeping with globalisation; relocating refugees where most say they want to go, in major cities of the industrialised world or in cities near the conflict zone rather than in temporary camps on its borders. The shift from MDGs to SDGs and the focus on housing and cities in SDG 11 will encourage further development cooperation in the urban context, addressing shelter and housing needs especially in slums and the post-conflict environment. However, humanitarian action and development work in urban conflict remain complex and challenging for all actors. Further understanding of the urban context and better cooperation and partnerships between stakeholders are needed. An operational checklist of lessons learnt from the literature review is provided as Annex 5.

**Part 3: Case study: Damascus and Gaza**

The case study sites Damascus and Gaza, two Arab cities facing up to the consequences of armed conflicts and conflicts, have some similarity and many differences. This study compares and analyses shelter policy and practices of humanitarian actors in those cities. Cities across the MENA region are faced with ever-increasing numbers of IDPs and refugees due to the rise of the civil wars and civic conflicts especially since early 2011. According to the inter-agency Palestine Shelter Cluster, led by NRC, due to ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel "currently in Gaza, more than 100,000 people are displaced by the recent war, with an estimated 47,000 people living with host families and 57,000 people in collective centres." (SCP 2015) Similarly and not so far away "Syria has long hosted large IDP and refugee populations. Damascus in particular has exerted a marked pull on all displaced groups, attracted by its employment opportunities, hopes of better living standards and the anonymity of life in the capital." (Haysom et al, 2011, p.25) This case study examines some contemporary experiences of humanitarians working in and for Damascus and Gaza from the perspective of shelter response in civic conflict. The annexed databases document their experience and the following paragraphs assess any policies underlining the field experience in an effort to identify gaps and challenges faced by humanitarian action in the MENA region and beyond.

**Damascus**

Damascus is the capital of the Syrian Arab Republic and with a population of 1.7 million (WPR 2016) the second biggest city in the country after Aleppo. It is one of the oldest cities in the Middle East, founded in the 3rd millennium B.C. and one of the oldest continually
inhabited cities in the world. It suffered from poor and inappropriate urban planning and management even before the armed conflict which started in March 2011 and led to significant, continuous and escalating violence and degradation of the humanitarian conditions, services and infrastructure of the city. (UNESCO 2016) In Syria "6.5 million people are internally displaced … due to the conflict" (UNOCHA 2016 p.7) 436,170 of them are in urban Damascus and 1,269,202 in rural Damascus. However, due to security considerations and the political situation, most humanitarian response including shelter-related response for Syria is managed from neighbouring Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The response is focused less on the Syrian territory itself but rather on the needs of families fleeing it and on those of local affected people in these neighbouring countries. "Supporting the countries that neighbour Syria to address the shelter needs of both refugees and local communities is critical." (NRC 2015, p.4) According to UNHCR, in Syria "the number of IDPs presently stands at over 6.5 million". (UNHCR 2015, p.2) Despite an increase to 8 million in the estimated number of IDPs within Syria (ICRC 2016) data and records about them remain limited and unavailable to most humanitarian actors. This makes humanitarian response challenging especially in urban areas such as in Damascus. The continuous changes in the political environment and power shifts have led to tensions and conflict which in turn resulted in sudden and unpredictable displacements of people internally, especially towards urban areas. This situation confounds shelter response in Syria, which is "location-bound; therefore it is difficult to adjust in case of changing conditions in the planned intervention area" (UNHCR 2015, p.1)

According to the Syria Relief Network (an umbrella of Syrian humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and to members of the UNHCR-led Shelter and NFI Sector in Syria, the shelter response in Damascus reached hundreds of thousands of affected people including by the distribution of NFIs, shelter kits and materials. In addition to upgrading public and private collective centres used as shelters, support is given to the management, coordination and maintenance of UNRWA collective shelters. (Syria Relief Network 2015) Much of the shelter response is implemented and executed with help of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC). To structure their response, the IFRC and SARC have their own transitional shelter and settlements strategy and plan. The current situation in Damascus limits SARC’s shelter assistance to the provision of household items, such as mats, mattresses, blankets, tarpaulins, and kitchen sets. (IFRC 2016a, p.5) However, even with these limitations, SARC remains one of the biggest and most important relief implementers in Damascus. Despite these figures, information and data related to humanitarian shelter
response in Damascus are often very limited and vague, with no clear cut distinction between shelter response for Syria and in Syria itself. Similarly, published information and data do not always show which context, urban or rural, is being addressed nor the categories of affected and targeted groups and people.

Despite efforts to explore documents and archival records, a very reduced stock of information on contemporary Damascus could be found. It was decided to conduct three interviews concerning the current situation in Damascus (only two were necessary for Gaza). Further interviewing of shelter focal-points, coordinators and managers from local and international humanitarian actors in Damascus would help better understand the policy and the practice of the current shelter response in Damascus. The persistent existence of Yarmouk and the ambiguity of its administrative status show that shelter response in an urban setting is not easy to categorise. Who are the affected people, who is a refugee, how are the internally displaced distinct from the host community? Clarification is needed as to which location is urban and which one is rural. This also applies in Gaza, the second case study.

**Gaza**

One of the geopolitical pawns of World War, Gaza has seen itself shifted from Ottoman authority to that of the British then from the Egyptians to the Israelis before being "given back" to the Palestinians. Governed by the "Palestinian unity government" since 2014, political transactions continue to affect Gaza and its population. It has faced blockades and armed conflicts including wars and insurrections in 1948, 1967 and most recently in summer 2014 resulting in a large presence of people whose personal status may be described, because of the specificity of the place, either as refugees or IDPs. There has been cumulative negative impact on Gaza and its infrastructure, services and population until most recently as "Israeli military operation ... 2014 in the Gaza Strip has led to massive displacement and destruction of buildings and urban systems" (UN-Habitat 2014, p.5) Gaza City with a population of over 500,000 is the biggest city in the State of Palestine. It is located in the Gaza strip which has an overall population of 1.8 million. Most of the Gaza population is living in five governorates and eight refugee camps that have the characteristics of an urban setting. "Gaza is a highly urbanized region with 74% urban population."(UN-Habitat 2014, p.5)

UNRWA was established in 1949 to carry out direct relief and development work for almost 5 million Palestine refugees across the region, 1.26 million of them located in Gaza. "The Gaza Strip is home to a population of more than 1.76 million people, including 1.26 million Palestine refugees." (UNRWA 2016) Blockades, chronic violence, armed conflicts and attacks in Gaza have led to continuous movement and population displacement in Gaza.
City and across the Strip. Largely looking for safer locations from the conflicts, and adequate shelter, housing or a host family, Gazans on the whole present specific challenges for humanitarian actors. It is especially difficult to identify categories and location of IDPs and other affected people, and to address their respective needs, especially for shelter, not just because shelter support is location-bound, but also due to the limited space in Gaza City and indeed throughout the Strip. This physical restriction is compounded by the lack of access to funding and materials necessary for renovation and reconstruction. The summer 2014 war and ensuing destruction increased the number of IDPs and consequent burden on host families and collective shelter centres. Public schools in Gaza are bearing a heavy burden: "as of 18 October 2014 the number of IDPs residing in 18 UNRWA schools estimated to be 42500. In addition, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA) estimated an additional 47000 IDPs are residing with host families." (UN-Habitat 2014, p.24) The cumulative conflicts and blockades through to summer 2014 caused massive damage to urban infrastructure, services and housing: "14798 structures damaged, damaged shelters were estimated to be 55855 housing units, divided between 8800 destroyed units, 7953 severely damaged, and 39120 partially damaged units." (UN-Habitat 2014, p.25) Clearly though, it is not just physical damage and loss of assets that have resulted. The conflicts and blockades also caused further damage to the livelihoods and coping mechanism of the inhabitants of Gaza, eroding their resilience. Such non-material losses increased their vulnerability and reliance on international humanitarian and development aid mainly provided by UNRWA, ICRC, NRC and other organisations and donors. "Years of conflict and closure have left 80% of the population dependent on international assistance." (UNRWA 2016) Even this international relief faces access restrictions, hence "there is a need for increased pressure and protective presence to protect both communities and deliverers of aid to prevent delays or obstruction of humanitarian assistance to communities in need." (SCP 2016, p.3) The Gaza Shelter Cluster is an operational coordination entity of several partners including the local authority, UN Agencies, international and local NGOs, civil society organizations, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, academia and donors. The cluster is led by NRC and exists to facilitate and strengthen coordination for better and faster shelter response for refugees, IDPs and affected people in Gaza. However, "The Shelter Cluster team does not directly provide shelter materials, such as tents, plastic sheeting, tools etc., but rather it helps ... partners provide assistance in a coordinated way." (SCP 2015)

According to NRC, *de facto* lead agency of the shelter cluster in Gaza, there are three categories of shelter response in Gaza: "Emergency Assistance (NFIs, tents and winterization
programmes), Temporary Solutions (cash for rent, collective centre, caravans and temporary shelters) and Durable Solutions (repairs, reconstruction)” (SCP 2016 p.4) Despite this, housing and sheltering vulnerability remain acute. Institutional reports indicate that “more than 180000 housing units were damaged, 70000 people and 13000 families remain displaced” (SCP 2016 p.4) while the media claim that almost half a million people are living in emergency shelters or with host families. (BBC 2014) Whatever the exact figures, in such a context there is an evident need for all actors and stakeholders to address shelter response in policy and in practice in a coordinated and synergistic manner. Cooperation is needed to overcome current challenges and obstacles that limit sheltering and housing programmes and projects. Policy coherence, pooling of information (and resources) and a certain amount of common commitment are the ingredients for obtaining long term solutions. Meeting the immediate needs of local affected people in a consolidated manner will facilitate the transition from emergency response to support for community resilience and reduce further and possible future risk and vulnerability.

**Analytical comparison between Damascus and Gaza**

Both being located in the Levant, similarities exist between Damascus and Gaza; Islamic (Sunni) and Arab culture are dominant, with minorities such as ethnic Arab Christians, since 1948 both have conflicts and borders with Israel and are considered war zones. Democratic deficits of official government (whether considered dictatorship, inherited or elected) weaken civil society. Emergency shelter response in both places focuses on support to refugees and IDPs in collective centres or host families, distributing NFIs and improving utilities such as water and sanitation. UNRWA is an important humanitarian and development actor in both places, though its mandate is limited to Palestinian refugees. Nonetheless, in an emergency phase it shelters and supports non-Palestinians in its operations, indeed UNRWA is the only actor allowed to set up camps in the whole of Syria. In both contexts, once hostilities are over the shelter response moves from emergency to transitional phase, where shelter solutions vary from repair and reconstruction to cash for rent and other approaches. However in Gaza the population is almost entirely dependent on UNRWA and international assistance. A Gaza shelter contingency plan is agreed by all stakeholders, with public buildings including 50 UNRWA schools being emergency shelter-modified. So far there is no reference to such a plan or strategy in Damascus. In Damascus and Gaza most international actors agree to give

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3 Analytical comparison based on the two databases created from the interviews (see Annexes 2 and 3)
priority to local shelter standards and regulations. Referencing Sphere project standards is problematic in both cities and the region. On the other hand, as approved by its donors and the local authority UNRWA consistently applies its own emergency and transitional shelter standards which are higher than the local and Sphere Project ones. Any perceived lack of coherence increases the gap in quality and the pace of recovery of different affected categories. Hence, it is easily possible for tension to escalate between refugees, IDPs and host communities. While humanitarian actors in Damascus and Gaza are aware of the urban trend in humanitarian action and the complexity of shelter response in armed conflict in urban contexts, currently no urban shelter strategy specifically focused on armed conflict context has emerged. Strategy designed and developed for the rural context after "natural disasters" is used with only slight modification and local adaptation. International actors are beginning to focus on transitional shelter as much as on emergency shelter in order to stimulate early recovery. UNRWA is exploring the possibility of including urban planning programmes alongside emergency and transitional ones and is negotiating in Gaza to facilitate the emergency to development and DRR process. International actors in general as well as those involved in shelter response are currently physically more present in Gaza than in Damascus. Most, including UNRWA, directly implement their shelter programmes and activities. In Damascus most implementation is via SARC with the exception of UNRWA which is allowed to implement shelter activities throughout Syria as long as it operates within its own facilities and premises. The cluster system has not been approved, so here the shelter sector is coordinated by UNHCR, specifically by a coordinator seconded by SDC to UNHCR. In Gaza the Shelter Cluster is hosted by NRC from the administrative and logistics point of view, while programmes and the activities of the cluster as a whole are overseen by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). There is a lack of consistently coordinated, harmonized and appropriate shelter response in Damascus in comparison to Gaza. Due to the blockade by neighbouring states (shown in Annex 3) access to Gaza for humanitarian and development actors is difficult and subject to discussion, negotiation and obtaining official agreement. The access challenge for Damascus is even more complex as access to Syria first and then on to besieged and hard-to-reach populations in need in areas such as the Yarmouk camp is not always guaranteed. This is beside the complexity resulting from formal and administrative procedures which delay urgent response and deployment.

Due to the unclear assessment, monitoring and reporting approaches and mechanisms in place in Damascus and throughout Syria, it is questionable if information and data from there are reliable and credible. On the other hand, confidence levels in assessment,
coordination, response, monitoring, evaluation and reporting in all sectors in Gaza are higher; a database is available for humanitarian and development actors including for shelter actors. Much effort is needed in both cities to improve communication, negotiation and advocacy with all stakeholders including the local authority and other authorities and states involved, with the affected people and the "private sector". This is necessary not just for better, safer and faster access but also to avail of funding. Various emergency and transitional shelter solutions such as collective shelters, lodging with host families, or cash for rent exist in both Gaza and Damascus mainly provided by UNRWA for Palestinian refugees. Here again, any lack of coherence and consistency slows the pace and process of coping, resilience, early recovery in different groups and locations. This seems especially so when considering the current situation of the most vulnerable, such as disabled people living in Yarmouk. This gap seems less wide in Gaza. In both Damascus and Gaza, updated administrative and legal terms would improve communication. Distinction is needed between who is a refugee, an IDP and who is not, what is urban and rural and what is not, what is a camp or a mixed neighbourhood. Clear terminology facilitates needs identification, categorising of groups, pinpointing locations, determining and applying humanitarian and development aid policy while differentiating emergency, transitional and long term shelter support, assistance and protection. This also applies to using terms and names for sectors and clusters; for example in Damascus activities take place under the name of shelter support despite the fact that these activities are more related to WASH, NFI, food and health than shelter itself. The fact that these activities are taking place in collective shelter centres does not necessarily make them shelter activities. In Gaza, sectors, clusters and even phases are better linked or separated as appropriate. Holistic and integrated approaches between sectors, clusters and stakeholders and the tangible and non-tangible components of shelter response contribute to the pertinence of policy and to implementation at individual, household and community levels whether concerning emergency, transition, recovery and development.

Part 4: Analysis and discussion

Guided by the research sub-questions, input generated during interviews with representatives of two agencies globally is presented below to complement the views of the field agents working in the case studied cities (whose views contributed to the comparison above).

1. Does the urban context need a shelter response distinct from the rural one?

Urban settings are complex and vulnerable in both fragile and strong states. The challenging recovery processes in New York following 9/11 and in New Orleans in 2005 post-Katrina
show that no matter how prepared we are, our cities are vulnerable places and systems. Most humanitarian actors are aware of and acknowledge the trend of urbanization in humanitarian action. Yet complex cities might go beyond their mandate, capacity and experience as humanitarians. Nonetheless, only by coordination, collaboration and partnerships between stakeholders including development organisations, governments, affected people, academia and last but not least the "private-business sector" will it be possible to develop effective, applicable, responsible, holistic and sustainable policies, strategies and plans for emergency and recovery phases for all sectors including the shelter and settlement. The urban setting is not just a context but might properly be considered as a sector and domain in itself. The arguments for this shift arise from trends in urbanization, with traditional urban planning and infrastructure planning reaching their limits as mega-cities grow. Further research and investigation will help better understand emergency humanitarian action in the vastly complicated modern city, where the very survival of city dwellers depends on the sustainability of the city itself as a system of energy, mobility, communication and commerce. This parallels the rural complex environmental ecology of crops, livestock, water purity and soil health, all to be preserved if human beings are to survive “natural disaster”.

From literature review and the case studies it seems difficult to develop and apply universal and global urban shelter response policies, strategies and standards. Clearly policies, strategies and standards developed based on the rural context are seldom applicable in the urban context. However, holistic and integrated urban humanitarian action guidelines should be collectively developed by a range of stakeholders including academia and those involved in other clusters and sectors as well as urban planning and development. Such guidelines should draw on international approaches based on the MDGs and the SDGs and reflect national and local experience and realities in shelter and settlement to facilitate the process of recovery and DRR in complex cities.

2. Can humanitarian actors meet needs for shelter, assistance and protection of affected people in cities where conflicts are taking place?

Firstly, it would be helpful were all humanitarian actors to agree on what is considered assistance and what is protection in shelter response, whether in conflict settings or not. This distinction is still not clearly agreed on neither in policy nor in practice. Similarly, categorisation of affected people and their needs, timing and location of shelter response are components essential to determining where, if and how humanitarian action should be engaged. This is all the more important in hostile locations, taking in to account what is occurring in neighbouring cities, on borders, in conflicted countries and even further away in
other continents or regions where life may be considered safer and opportunities better. Humanitarian interventions like NFIs distribution, WASH, CCCM and other shelter-related support are first delivered where it is considered safer, more secure and accessible. Further communication, negotiation and advocacy with policymakers globally and belligerents in the field are needed if access to affected people in cities during hostilities is going to be possible and their shelter needs met. Shelter support in neighbouring cities across the region will certainly be required. Current experience shows that humanitarian expertise needed further afield as displacement of large numbers of people occurs now across continents.

However, the responsibilities of “peace-makers” and “peace-keepers” such as the UN and NATO, African Union, Arab League, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and of the local authorities must be engaged. Development actors and humanitarians cannot and should not operate alone in, nor bring stability to, the conflict affected areas. Facilitating sustainable peace initiatives is essential to enhance and speed up the recovery, reconstruction and returning back to normal.

3. Should the different clusters and sectors related to shelter and settlement in humanitarian action in civic conflict be linked together or separated from each other across the phases from emergency to development?

It is difficult to separate shelter from certain clusters and sectors such as NFIs, WASH, Protection, HLP or even CCCM, education and health in the complex and dynamic urban setting. All services, facilities and utilities are linked in one way or another, just as they are in a non-conflicted modern city. The links and the separation are not givens; they rather should be based on context, need and situation and their relationship will evolve during the recovery process from emergency to development. Hence, strong and rapid assessment, monitoring, evaluation, feed-back and reporting come to the fore as mechanisms for coping with evolving hostilities and conflicts subject to sudden and profound change in the urban context. Most actors including UNHCR and SDC advocate for separating CCCM and shelter on the policy and strategy level. The link and the differences between CCCM and shelter activities remain somewhat unclear in the field whether in the rural context or in cities as seen in Damascus and Gaza. Further clarification, adaptation and evolution are needed among shelter and settlement related clusters on the one hand, and shelter in humanitarian action on the other. This is to reflect the changing situation and profiles on the ground and to focus on early recovery while passing from emergency to development.

Clearly humanitarian and development actors should strengthen their coordination, including with local government and institutions, engaging with the affected people through
local NGOs, academia, business and other sectors. Functional links between sectors in the complex urban system are not universally determined; each city might have its own profile. Based on that profile different sectors and clusters should be linked, separated or adjusted over time, determined and agreed on the local level. However, it needs to be recognised that lack of political will especially on the part of fragile governance structures in conflict settings hinder effective discussions and agreements taking place in the field.

Part 5: Findings

The following considerations focus on general shelter response and settlement policy from the perspectives of UNHCR and SDC globally, while the recommendations of field-based respondents reflect daily challenges, gaps and obstacles. Key lessons for urban response have been learned while carrying out this research, in particular that shelter and settlements are vital for ensuring recovery and development after any "natural" disaster or armed conflict, wherever occurring. The primary obstacle identified is of course the lack of access by humanitarian actors to the affected population including direct access at the location where the conflict is taking place. Other obstacles are included in the following checklist:

- lack of knowledge of the urban system
- poor access to correct and up-to-date information and data
- absence of political will
- uncertainty and irregular funding
- neglect of housing, land, property rights and their related responsibilities
- inattention to protection issues, safety and security
- unavailability of required construction materials.

On the other hand, commitment to improving multidirectional communication, negotiation and advocacy is emerging. Examples are found where affected populations engage with a broad range of humanitarian actors, who in turn interact across different sectors and clusters involved in shelter, settlement, urbanization and conflict. The diversity and number of stakeholders and locations involved in responding to shelter needs in urban conflict potentially challenge traditional policy and approaches; this reflects the complexity, vulnerability and dynamism of modern cities. Hence, appropriate shelter policy in civic conflict contexts balances rights and responsibilities of individual stakeholders with protection of the city itself. In order to provide services and facilities, procure materials and travel between locations the donor agencies, experts and academics, local authorities, non-
state groups and other influential bodies will inevitably interact with each other and with affected people. A significant aspect of this interaction is engagement with the private business sector, deeply rooted in the urban setting even during conflict. It can be said that shelter policy in civic conflict should include cooperation or even partnership of stakeholders across sectors in the spirit of Sustainable Development Goal 17.

Shelter and settlement actors have to improve their grasp of the complexity, vulnerability, networks and infrastructure of the urban system and the ever-increasing and destabilising civic conflict dynamic. Their response in cities in conflict first requires improvement at the global level. The policy and principles which guided shelter response in the rural "natural" disaster context are inadequate in civic conflict. Holistic and integrated policies, strategies and approaches relevant to the respective phases of intervention in civic conflict need to be developed which cut across stakeholders, sectors and clusters. Their implementation will contribute to more responsible and sustainable urban shelter response and smoother transition from emergency to development not only at the household but also at the community level. Emergency and transitional shelter and settlement in humanitarian action clearly must be provided wherever the affected population finds itself. The costs of provision must be calculated not just where the civic conflict is taking place, but in neighbouring cities and countries. Hence, shelter policy is only complete when it encompasses the needs of affected people who have left the immediate place of conflict, even if their numbers are large, their journey long and their geographical dispersion wide. The inadequate shelter provision in southern and eastern Europe for refugees is an implementation failure within an overall defective humanitarian shelter policy. Finally, perception in Europe of a "migration crisis" is in fact simply a failure to recognize that civic conflict in Arab cities, aspects of which have their origins in colonialism, has created a humanitarian disaster.

Part 6: Conclusion

Urban shelter response by humanitarian actors is not just essential for survival and alleviating suffering but also contributes to the security, safety, health and well-being of refugees, IDPs and affected populations and promotes recovery in complex, vulnerable and dynamic cities and their surroundings affected by conflict. While many of those in need of humanitarian aid originally may have been part of an urban society, many others head towards urban settings, resulting in additional stress to the existing complexity, vulnerability and dynamic infrastructure of the city and pressure on the services of a host urban community. Hence humanitarian actors must recognize that in shelter and settlement response no one solution fits
all, as individual, household and community needs and solutions vary. Using the rights-based approach of HLP as a foundation and The Sphere Project as provider of main guidelines, humanitarian actors must continue to support all those in need of shelter in urban conflict areas. They can do so in various tangible and non-tangible ways, starting from distributing NFI s, improving services and utilities in collective shelters to disbursing cash for rent. Institutional technical and capacity building support is used to strengthen humanitarian coordination and DRR with consideration to related sectors or clusters such as CCCM, WASH, early recovery, gender equality, community participation, protection and sustainability. Seeing transitional shelter as a process related to other sectors and clusters rather than a concrete product will reduce time and cost while helping overcome obstacles in managing shelter response right from the start of the intervention.

Damascus and Gaza today demonstrate the fact that in humanitarian action there is no current specific policy and strategy for shelter response in urban conflict. It is rather up to an agency office in the field to choose or develop the shelter strategy appropriate to its mandate, and deliver activities to meet needs using available resources and capacities. Most transitional shelter and settlements guidelines and standards used by humanitarian actors including in the Gaza and Damascus fields were developed based largely on experience and lessons learned in "natural" disasters especially in rural areas. Of the main obstacles that hinder urban shelter response in the context of armed conflict, lack of access to affected population including access at the location where the conflict is taking place, is the major operational one. Lack of knowledge and adequate understanding of the complex and vulnerable urban system and poor access to correct and updated data about it compromise shelter operations. Uncertain funding and unavailability of required materials is a concern and last but not least the absence of political will remains the main challenge that hinders shelter response in urban conflict including for Damascus and Gaza.

The intricacy of the modern urban environment in crisis combined with challenges arising during armed conflict therein could be beyond the political, financial and technical capacities of humanitarian actors, local authorities and affected people. This may explain why only limited understanding of shelter response in humanitarian action in the urban conflict context exists; giving rise to scant specific knowledge is available in the literature. Nonetheless, it is possible to suggest that, along with continued commitment to the promotion of HLP rights and attention to protection issues including their own safety and security, humanitarian actors involved in shelter and settlement should improve their understanding of the complexity, vulnerability, networks and infrastructure of the dynamic urban system in
general and in the ever-increasing and destabilising civic conflict setting. Beyond developing this knowledge of the urban environment in which civic conflict is occurring, multidirectional communication, negotiation and advocacy skills are also required so as to engage with the different sectors, clusters and stakeholders involved in responding to shelter needs in urban conflict. Fundamentally, the humanitarian shelter response in cities in conflict requires improvement at the shelter policy level. The policy and principles which guided shelter response in the rural "natural" disaster context are inadequate in the civic conflict context. It can be concluded that shelter policy is only complete when it encompasses the reality of the modern city and the needs of affected people who have left the immediate place of conflict, even if their numbers are large, their journey long and their geographical dispersion widely beyond their region of origin.
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Annex 1

Questionnaire addressed to representatives ICRC, International Organisation for Migration (IOM), NRC and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), UNHCR and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (names of respondents and their positions are on file). The burden of time effort to read and individually complete the questionnaire announced to the respondents was approximately ten minutes. The time suggested for the interview guided by the questions was between 45 and 90 minutes. It was announced that responses will be treated confidentially. The total number of interviews was seven, two face to face in Switzerland with UNHCR and SDC and five over the phone with the shelter managers and coordinators in Damascus and Gaza.

1. Which groups and locations are identified in your shelter policy, programs and projects? Why? What are the criteria for selection?
2. Do you have references, norms and standards for you shelter policy, programs and projects? Is The Sphere project among them?
3. Do you have a specific shelter strategy for urban settings? Why? What lead to the decision?
4. Do you have specific shelter strategy to apply during civic conflict? Why? What lead to the decision?
5. Do you apply shelter support directly or via other partners (local/international)? Why? What lead to the decision?
6. How is the relationship between stakeholders in transitional shelter and settlements managed? Which stakeholders are you in relationship with: Private-Public sector, donors, "beneficiaries", implementers, local partners and authorities?
7. What are the main challenges facing transitional shelter during civic conflict? Why is that?
8. Are there gaps between shelter policy itself and its application in practice in urban setting during armed conflicts? Why?
9. Does your practice lead you to make any conclusions about how Shelter, CCCM, NFI, WASH and durable habitat policies, programmes and practices should be linked in the future?
10. Do you have any recommendations or comments about providing shelter assistance and protection during a civic conflict?
**Annex 2**

**Damascus Database, Syria and the Yarmouk "Camp"** *

The photo on the right shows people lining up for food aid in Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp. Credit UNRWA, via Associated Press 2014. "For Yarmouk to become a spectacle of suffering far worse than Gaza marked an indelible stain on Bashar al-Assad" (Steele 2016)

* “Camp” This administrative and legal term used in Damascus to describe where the Palestinians are settled creates confusion in applying humanitarian and development aid policy including emergency and transitional shelter support to affected people.

As with the publications on humanitarian action in Damascus, most of the interviewees referred in one way or another to the Yarmouk "camp". It is used here as an example to demonstrate how shelter policy and practice can be lost in terminology and administration. Yarmouk was home to more than 100,000 Palestinian refugees from the 1948 and 1967 wars. It is still referred to as a "camp" despite the fact that after more than 50 years the tents have been replaced by solid housing and as shown in the images above the "camp" has become a part of the urban structure of Damascus even though the local authority considers it officially as part of rural Damascus rather than of the city. The use of the label “rural” could mislead policy and strategy in shelter response. Indeed, the term "refugee camp" might no longer be accurate for "as well as being home to Syria’s largest community of Palestinian refugees, it also housed some 650,000 Syrians." (Steele 2016) Legal and administrative terminologies used and circulated in shelter policy and strategies in urban setting need to be carefully studied and modified according to the understanding of internal stakeholders and external actors before applying them on the ground to reduce the challenges that shelter response face.
**Database and analysis of data from interviews concerning Damascus**

**Groups and locations for shelter response**

The interviews with experts and practitioners from ICRC, UNHCR and IOM working on shelter response in Damascus highlight the fact that the main groups receiving shelter support in Damascus are IDPs located in collective centres and host families. "In Damascus, the main focus is on the vulnerability of IDPs and host communities" (ICRC engineer responsible for water and habitat in Damascus interviewed 10 July 2016). This focus mainly results in providing NFI and WASH support as well as repairing damaged buildings as needed. The shelter response in Damascus by UNRWA is only addressing the Palestinian refugees and "UNRWA is the only humanitarian actor in Damascus and Syria which have activated cash for shelter assistance for Palestinian refugees" (as reported by the IOM shelter coordinator interviewed 13 July 2016).

The city of Damascus is a governorate administratively separate to rural Damascus, known as Rif Dimashq "where most IDPSs and host families are located" (ICRC engineer 10 July 2016). However, while Damascus city remains relatively safe and more accessible for humanitarian actors "… very few and limited shelter responses" are carried out there (IOM Coordinator 13 July 2016). The main shelter needs are those of the IDPs in rural Damascus, which administratively includes the Yarmouk Camp where there are at least 100,000 Palestinian refugees representing 25% of the total number of Palestinian refugees in Syria. The Yarmouk Camp and the rest of Rif Dimashq may well be called "rural" but they are very much part of the urban setting of greater Damascus. (Additional information in Annex 2).

**Shelter standards in Damascus**

Standards, regulations and norms which would usually be provided by the Ministry of Local Administration (MOLA) are in current practice largely replaced by those of The Sphere Project which are used as a reference by international humanitarian actors in Damascus, with some modification and adaptation made to fit and match the local context. "The Sphere Project was developed based on experiences and case studies from camps mainly in Africa and the Far East which might not be applicable in Arab cities such as Damascus." (ICRC engineer 10 July 2016). UNRWA, which is the only agency allowed to build emergency shelter and camps in Damascus and Syria, has its own standards developed as a result of 60 years of humanitarian and development support to Palestinian refugees following the 1948 war. These are based on international sheltering and construction standards and are used for all its facilities at all times. They are considered "higher standards than The Sphere Project"
and local ones" (UNRWA Shelter Coordinator, Damascus, interviewed 13 July 2016). This difference in standards between The Sphere Project, local government, customary and international standards as applied by UNRWA in the very same city could diminish coherence in the shelter response in Damascus. Normative inconsistencies could have a negative impact in the short and long term, particularly for coordinating the shelter response process.

**Shelter strategy in Damascus**

Apparently, humanitarian actors in Damascus do not work to a specific shelter strategy for urban settings: "We use pure emergency strategy similar to the ones applied in rural areas and adapt them to the local and urban context" (IOM Coordinator 13 July 2016). They are however aware of the challenges and risk given urban complexity during armed conflicts. Trends in evolving strategy were also discussed by (ICRC engineer on 10 July 2016). It might be difficult for humanitarian actors to get involved in long term sheltering, housing and urban planning. Nevertheless, “we start to take very important steps in participating in transitional shelter and settlement programmes as part of our early recovery contribution” explained the IOM Coordinator on 13 July 2016. In comparison, while UNRWA compounds are located in Damascus in an obviously urban setting, its shelter strategies and activities do not go beyond Palestinian refugees and the facilities it provides to them.

In a crisis, especially armed conflicts in urban settings, institutional actors do not get involved in deciding where IDPs and refugees are to be located and sheltered; it is the affected people's decision as the first responders. "We do not have a say nor are involved in where people go after a conflict happens" (IOM Coordinator, 13 July 2016). In Damascus city most IDPs and refugees are located in collective centres mainly public schools, unfinished buildings, UNRWA facilities or with host families. "Humanitarian actors usually have a reactive approach towards supporting the shelter solutions that IDPs and affected people choose" (ICRC engineer 13 July 2016)

**Shelter implementation in Damascus**

Most international humanitarian actors have the tendency to be flexible in terms of doing direct implementation of their shelter-related projects. They may work via trusted partners having better access, capacity and local knowledge. In Damascus, international humanitarian actors in principle assess, implement, monitor and evaluate directly with and alongside affected people. However, in reality most shelter-related projects and activities are carried out by local partners, mainly SARC (if not exclusively by SARC in the case of ICRC
"Only UNRWA is allowed to implement shelter activities in Damascus and Syria without SARC" (UNRWA Coordinator 13 July 2016) and only as long as it operates within UNRWA premises based on agreements between UNRWA and the Syrian government made following the 1948 and 1967 wars with Israel. Implementation of shelter support in Damascus which goes beyond NFIs and non-tangible support are always implemented by local contractors especially when it comes to repair to damaged physical structure.

**Shelter response coordination in Damascus**

In Damascus the cluster system has not been approved by the government, hence it is rather the sector system that has been activated for humanitarian coordination in Syria. The shelter sector is coordinated by UNHCR, specifically by a coordinator seconded by SDC to UNHCR. "The local authority is unable to change their long term and development planning, policy and approaches to emergency" (ICRC engineer 10 July 2016). As mentioned by others, humanitarians in Damascus work with SARC and MOLA, except UNRWA which works with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the MSA.

**Shelter challenges in Damascus**

One of the main humanitarian challenges in Damascus arises from the very little and late response especially by the UN in shelter-related support, explained the ICRC engineer: “a lot of IDPs are heading toward Damascus as it is a relatively safe place. However, very few manage to reach and enter the city itself, most of them settle in rural Damascus”. The government claims that people from the opposition and non-state armed groups are among those IDPs and it is very difficult to tell them apart. Nonetheless, this increase in the number of IDPs in rural Damascus puts a big impact and stress on city infrastructure and services as well as for the shelter response.

There are very few shelter centres in Damascus city itself as most of IDPs, refugees and host families are located in the outskirts in rural Damascus. "There are no challenges and need for shelter inside Damascus city. More shelter need and challenges are in rural Damascus. Indeed, we are not even sure if we can say that there is armed conflict in the city of Damascus" (IOM Coordinator interviewed 13 July 2016).

**Gaps between shelter policy and practice in Damascus**

International humanitarian actors in Damascus agree that there is a gap between shelter policy and practice in Damascus, except UNRWA which believes that their "shelter policy is
applicable in Syria and Damascus". The UNRWA Coordinator further argued that the challenge is in the gap between the understanding of shelter assistance and protection (protection to the refugees, IDPs and staff inside the shelters from inside and outside elements) rather than between the policy and the practice of shelter response itself. "In Damascus there is no clear agreed policy on shelter among humanitarian actors as the solution varies from five stars accommodation to really unacceptable conditions of living in some locations."

"Flexibility is one of the most important elements in humanitarian action. Policy and practice in shelter response are not an exception" (ICRC engineer 10 July 2016)

Shelter and other sectors and clusters
The ICRC water and habitat engineer in Damascus believes that closer links are needed between shelter and WASH sectors and clusters whereas more separation is needed from the CCCM approach. Further investment in communication and coordination between all clusters, sectors and stakeholders especially the local authorities is needed. The IOM Coordinator adds that shelter should be also linked to protection as much as shelter is linked to WASH and NFI s. "In Damascus and Syria people might rather seek protection, safety and security before even the roof." (UNRWA Coordinator interviewed 13 July 2016).

Interviewees’ recommendation about shelter response in Damascus
"After five years of crisis, additional funding is needed to provide cash for rent in Damascus as more and more families go for this solution and the rent is going up" (UNRWA Coordinator, 13 July 2016). The ICRC engineer explains that access to services such as water and sanitation is the key to shelter response in urban setting, and “international actors should avoid making affected people completely reliant on international relief, but rather try to support and strengthen the local coping mechanism and resilience”.

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4 These were made by interviewees reflecting on the points raised in the research instrument.
In the more than 60 years that have passed since the 1948 and then 1967 wars, tents in the Gaza refugee "camps" have been replaced by solid housing. As shown in the image below, the "camp" has become a part of the urban structure of Gaza even though the local authority and the humanitarian and development actors still use the term. The no-longer accurate label might misdirect policy and strategy in shelter response, clearly seen in the city at Al-Shati beach, Jabalia and at Rafah camps in the south of the strip. Already "in the year after Rafah camp was created, thousands of refugees moved from the camp to a nearby housing project at Tel El-Sultan, making the camp almost indistinguishable from the adjacent city." (UNRWA http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/camp/rafah-camp. Accessed 13 July 2016)

Al-Shati refugee camp, Gaza City
Photograph: Majdi Fathi

Based on the UNRWA website, it appears that eight main refugees "camps": Jabalia, Ash Shati, An-Nuseirat, Al-Bureij, Al-Maghazi, Deir al-Bala, Khan Yunis and Rafah (listed from north to south) face more or less the same challenges and problems as the rest of Gaza: high population density, housing shortage and overcrowding, poverty, unemployment, inadequate access to clean water, inconsistent electricity supply. Low availability of materials for construction or repair work, due to the blockade on Gaza, tends to perpetuate such problems. In these camps are 1,258,559 registered Palestinian refugees, 245 schools with 232,504 pupils, two vocational and technical training centres, 22 primary health centres, six community rehabilitation centres and seven women’s programme centres. (http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip. Accessed 18 June 2016)
Database and analysis of data from interviews concerning Gaza

Groups and locations for shelter response

Emergency shelter response in Gaza includes distributing NFIs and is mainly provided through and in collective shelters especially those of UNRWA and housed in public schools. As soon as the hostilities are over, people might be able return to their homes to repair them or seek other shelter solutions. This is the moment when the transitional shelter response phase starts and IDPs and refugees can leave the emergency shelters. Therefore it is very important in shelter response to distinguish between emergency shelter and transitional shelter. The latter has a close link to early recovery and recovery while emergency is more related to the relief phase. The population group, location and approaches might change as the change of phase shifts from humanitarian to development aid: all this was explained by the National Shelter Cluster Coordinator in Gaza, interviewed on 14 July 2016.

UNRWA is the biggest humanitarian and development agency present in Gaza. 70% of Gazans directly are aided under UNRWA’s relief and development mandate; the other 30% receive support from other agencies such as ICRC, NRC, UNDP and various NGOs. UNRWA works with Palestinian refugee families living throughout Gaza who are in need of shelter support, priority is given to the most vulnerable households in need of protection. UNRWA emergency shelter policy and programmes started after the second Intifada in 2000. “The shelter support has social and engineering dimensions covered by our social worker and engineers” explained the UNRWA Shelter Coordinator in Gaza, interviewed on 19 July 2016. Other agencies such as ICRC and NRC give shelter support to whoever needs it, while focusing on IDPs and host families in urban areas, according to the Cluster Coordinator 14 July 2016.

Shelter standards in Gaza

Since 2000 UNRWA has its own emergency shelter standards approved by donors and the local authority, as updated and reviewed in 2014 with UNDP and other partners. "The Sphere Project does not match our social and engineering shelter standards. Ours are much higher." stated the UNRWA Coordinator 19 July 2016. Meanwhile other humanitarian actors in Gaza such as ICRC and NRC follow local standards and use The Sphere Project ones as a reference for their shelter support. This difference in norms and standards and potential lack of coherence in aid provision between stakeholders in Gaza could compromise the pace of the recovery process. In so far as these differences impact the refugees, IDPs and host communities, it is possible for tension easily to escalate between categories of affected people.
Shelter strategy in Gaza

Humanitarian actors in Gaza agreed on one shelter strategy as part of the contingency plan, whereby all affected people taking refuge and sheltering in UNRWA or public schools will be provided with immediate assistance and relief. This was detailed by the UNRWA Coordinator, interviewed 19 July 2016, as "50 UNRWA schools out of 250 in Gaza have been shelter modified in case of emergency." On the other hand, "there is only a general shelter strategy which is based on the rural context. However, cash assistance might be the best way for shelter support in urban setting." (Cluster Coordinator interviewed 14 July 2016). While UNRWA is officially only working in providing services including shelter support to the refugee camps, “we are hoping to include urban planning activities in our programmes, as our camps become more and more urban and merging to the rest of the cities and towns in Gaza” explained the UNRWA Coordinator in Gaza, 19 July 2016.

Shelter implementation in Gaza

UNRWA has 15,000 staff members and maintains 11 distribution centres in Gaza. With such human and logistical capacity, UNWRA is able to carry out direct implementation of all its projects and activities related to shelter. "UNRWA is doing everything for the refugees due to the weak governance of the fragile state in Gaza." (UNRWA Coordinator in Gaza interviewed 19 July 2016). Like UNRWA, agencies such as UNDP and NRC do direct implementation, while international NGOs work either directly or via local NGOs. This is especially so concerning assessment tasks and in building community relationships, due to the lack of capacity and local knowledge. However, as explained by the Cluster Coordinator in Gaza, interviewed 14 July 2016, the Shelter Cluster in Gaza is hosted by NRC from the administrative and logistics point of view, while the programmes and the activities of the cluster as a whole are overseen by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).

Shelter response coordination in Gaza

While undoubtedly adding value the population of Gaza, the phenomenal size of external institutional assistance efforts to provide shelter and associated goods and services created a sociological imbalance, leaving local authorities “in the shade”. Nonetheless, as the Shelter Cluster Coordinator in Gaza explained, the cluster in Gaza has a close relationship with the Ministry of Public Work and Housing and MSA. While the latter ministry is involved more in the emergency phase, collective shelters and NFIs distribution, public works and housing
officials are involved in transitional shelters, repairs and the reconstruction phase. This phase is generally known as "early recovery" in international parlance, though the local authority in Gaza prefers to refer to it as a transitional phase rather than early recovery. Each agency has its own direct relationship with donors and the private business sector, the latter consisting mainly of local contractors who play an important role in repairs and reconstruction especially in procuring building materials.

**Shelter challenges in Gaza**

Collecting data about the affected people and identifying intended beneficiaries remain complex for humanitarian actors intending to make a shelter response. The phenomenon of multiple displacements is most challenging in Gaza, where the same individuals and families will be obliged to move several times. Especially in the urban setting, cash for shelter assistance seems to be the most effective shelter support. However, in Gaza it cannot be the only solution due to the lack of available accommodation for rent and the high cost and the lack of sustainable funding for such activities. UNRWA’s Coordinator in Gaza adds that the safety and protection of UNRWA staff, assets and facilities are an additional preoccupation alongside meeting the sizeable needs of refugees, IDPs and the rest of the population.

**Gaps between shelter policy and practice in Gaza**

As is clearly seen in the lack of funding and prioritization, donors might differ in their priorities from implementers. An example given by the Cluster Coordinator: "when policy and strategy put shelter together with water, sanitation and hygiene, in fact and in practice they are separate" this is a clear gap between what has been decided on at policy level and what is applicable on the ground. UNRWA sees no gap between shelter policy and practice, but rather sees are obstacles due to the blockade imposed on Gaza and its inhabitants by neighbouring states and authorities. There is a vision in Gaza for a holistic shelter response for technical assistance encompassing legal matters, engineering excellence and community engagement. Yet this cannot apply on the ground mainly because of funding shortfalls and the absence of a clear understanding on the part of certain actors concerning the need for policy to back up their activities on the ground. (Cluster Coordinator in Gaza interviewed 14 July 2016).

**Shelter and other sectors and clusters**

Linkages between clusters and sectors related to shelter should take place on both the policy and the implementation levels and "should happen on the practice level and also on the donor
level." (Cluster Coordinator in Gaza interviewed 14 July 2016). The relevant “pieces of the puzzle” include CCCM, NFIs, WASH and Housing and settlements. The Cluster Coordinator also explains "in shelter response it is necessary to look at the settlement and the community level rather than just on the household level” suggesting that all of this depends on the will of donors to fund several sectors, for example NFIs, shelter and WASH at the same time in the same project. The UNRWA Shelter Coordinator adds that even other sectors and cluster which might seem unrelated to shelter, such as protection and education, need to be linked to shelter cluster. In Gaza this is pertinent as the schools and other education related facilities serve as emergency shelters. Here the challenge is to maintain the schooling function of the premises which are providing shelter. This shows the need for a more holistic vision in Gaza for how the shelter response embraces technical assistance: through legal, engineering and community engagement. Almost inevitably, the health sector too is similarly associated with a holistic shelter response in order to reduce the risk of infection and injury occurring when large numbers of people share a common space (particularly concerning poor hygiene, waste disposal in collective shelters, and also increased violence including sexual violence).

**Interviewees’ recommendation about shelter response in Gaza**

For Gaza, both the UNRWA Shelter Coordinator and the Shelter Cluster Coordinator recommend improvement in assessment, monitoring, evaluation and feed-back mechanisms in shelter response in the urban setting. Both insist that improved coordination and communication between actors in Gaza will facilitate the response for all stakeholders and in all phases from emergency to development and of course in DRR. It is noted that in addition NRC consider that from a policy perspective, assistance and protection are closely related: "providing shelter is the means of assistance, and protection is the outcome of the shelter response."

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5 These were made by interviewees reflecting on the points raised in the research instrument.
Global Shelter Cluster Menu of shelter solutions and methods

- **Hardware**: materials and tools (timer, corrugated galvanized iron (CGI) sheets, hammers and nails and others tools and supplies), emergency shelter solutions (tents, shelter kits, plastic sheeting, shelter related NFIs and others), other shelter solutions (temporary shelters, core houses, progressive shelters and others), community facilities (roads, community buildings, DRR works and others).

- **Software**: training on safe construction and DRR (construction theatre, flyers and handouts, model houses and others), advocacy on shelter-related matters (avoiding forced relocation, promoting safe building practices), technical expertise (site selection and site planning, building design, site supervision, training local builders).

- **Enablers**: cash based interventions (conditional cash grants, vouchers, rental support and others), cadastral support, retrieval of ownership documentation, promotion of hosting by local families, rental and similar arrangement, insurance, facilitation of access to land and building that can be used as collective centres, legal advice on HLP-related matters.

(www.sheltercluster.org Accessed 13 February 2015)
Operational checklist arising from the research:
A guide to understanding and facilitating shelter and settlement response

- Have a good undertaking of the context
- Effective shelter and settlement response are context driven, no one solution fits all as individual, household and community needs will vary
- Save lives, reduce suffering, reduce the social and economic impacts of disasters
- Prioritize use of local materials and labour
- Past experiences of most shelter and settlement actors and the tools they use are based on a rural context, therefore there is a need for a more proficient urban response
- Quick fix solutions such as tents, camps and pre-fabricated buildings while initially beneficial are not the most effective long term solution for the affected population
- Shelter solutions should be simple, easy to use, cost effective, flexible, quick to deliver
- Tents and camps could delay recovery and can become an inadequate long-term settlement
- Most humanitarian actors do not get involved beyond their mandate in permanent housing, settlement and community solutions, yet tenure issues remain a challenging part of shelter response as shelter is always linked to a piece of land
- Shelter response should always be linked to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and look at other issues related to water, sanitation and hygiene (or health) (WASH), livelihoods and basic infrastructure
- Relief and recovery in shelter is a dynamic process and humanitarian actors need to catch up with self-recovery efforts to support and improve the process
- Settlement and community do not provide sustainable shelter unless they are linked to DRR
Concerning the cost and time of shelter response

Shelter response will differ according to settlement typologies and whether or not people are in fact displaced. Its defining factors include: climate, culture, type of settlement where people are and speed of response. These all have an impact on cost and on the timeframe for the response. As an operation evolves and needs become clearer and more differentiated, the precise nature of interventions and likely cost can be determined. Balancing need, cost and timing is an important part of the project cycle of humanitarian and development interventions. Detailed analysis of this management function is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, certain remarks can be made based on relevant literature, as follows:

1. From the cost point of view, humanitarian shelter response should occur as soon as possible, as "Failure to establish the process quickly can add another costly phase to the response." (Ashbridge et al. 2012, p.6)

2. While emergency and transitional shelter "is often one of the largest items of nonrecurring expenditure" (UNHCR 2000, p.144) it must also be considered one of the most time consuming items and processes. Building or rebuilding homes in crisis or post-crisis involves sorting out tenure and land property rights, which despite being an important and essential part of shelter response process, could take a decade or more. "Shelter assistance in urban areas is often expensive and highly politicised" (Suvatne et al. 2010, p.14) Taking in to account the experience and practice of the Shelter Centre "It usually takes two to fifteen years to resolve land rights in order to reconstruct homes damaged by conflict or disaster".

3. However, "Transitional shelter is not a costly approach if implemented correctly." (Ashbridge et al. 2012, p.6) In order to minimise the challenge in terms of cost and time spent in the shelter response, humanitarian actors need to better manage properties and assets in humanitarian and development assistance, from tenure and land property rights through to residential utilities and materials. "Asset management, asset recovery, and cost recovery are not so well developed in aid organisations" (Corsellis et al. 2005, p.62)