following conditions are vital for the successful use of HPVs:

- the political will to improve living conditions for the displaced: in a number of post-conflict situations, the poor living conditions of the displaced are used as a political card in negotiations on the settlement of the conflict.
- an available supply of housing units: this ensures that IDPs’ living conditions can be improved quickly instead of waiting for new construction to be completed.
- private ownership of property: HPV programmes work based on the choice and flexibility offered by a functioning property market. Private ownership of housing is necessary for IDPs to have a secure improvement in living conditions through this approach.
- operating and trustworthy banking institutions: in order for the programme procedures to work efficiently, beneficiaries and vendors must have at least a minimal amount of faith in and access to the local banking system.

Observations from Georgia
The HPV programme in Georgia surveyed participants to study the impact of the programme on their well-being after the end of the second year of the programme. Some of the key findings were:

Housing Purchase Vouchers did not make IDPs more economically vulnerable. Families that successfully purchased housing did not face worsening socio-economic conditions by participating in the programme. In addition, they said that they did not lose their status as IDPs or their access to state benefits by moving into purchased accommodation.

While there were a number of factors that prevented IDPs from successfully redeeming their vouchers, such as family composition, type of housing desired and type and location of employment, income (and by extension the amount of the subsidy) was the most significant difference between successful and unsuccessful families. With income being the largest factor in determining success in the programme, the vulnerability of those who were unsuccessful was a concern.

The programme did not disrupt IDP social networks. Over 70% of IDPs who resettled using HPVs stayed within their community, many within sight of their former collective centres.

IDPs saw HPVs as an opportunity to invest in their future. Throughout the course of the programme in Georgia there was an increase in housing prices in the market overall, putting pressure on the fixed-price subsidies of the HPVs. Slightly fewer than half of the families in the programme reported adding their own resources to the subsidy and nearly two-thirds said that they invested additional money to renovate their housing after purchase, in stark contrast with the 18% of IDPs who said they had invested (smaller amounts of) money in renovating or maintaining their temporary residences in the collective centre over the course of twelve to fourteen years.

With the conflict in August 2008 again highlighting the plight of IDPs in Georgia, the use of Housing Purchase Vouchers, while not an ideal solution for every displaced family, provides a politically appealing solution to IDPs’ housing needs at an efficient cost.

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1. Funded by the US State Department Bureau of Population Refugees and Migration, and implemented by the Urban Institute.
2. HPVs of course do not need to be fixed price. However, for simplicity of administration during the pilot phase, the value of the Georgian vouchers was not adjusted.

Confidence-building measures in Western Sahara
Edward Benson

Despite the fact that a long-term solution to the extended displacement of Sahrawi refugees still seems far off, there is at least now an opportunity for some Sahrawi families to be briefly reunited.

As Spain was preparing to relinquish control and withdraw from Western Sahara, Morocco asserted its claim of sovereignty over the territory of the former Spanish colony. In response, the Polisario – a Sahrawi group that had been fighting the Spanish for the right to self-determination – turned its focus on the Moroccans and war ensued. As a result, thousands of Sahrawis fled in 1975 into the desert, where they still remain, scattered across five refugee camps located in a territory which the Algerian government has allowed the Polisario to control in the southwestern part of the country, close to the Algerian town of Tindouf.

The political sensitivities involved in the Western Sahara question have so far prevented UNHCR from conducting a proper registration exercise. The host government, Algeria, estimates the number of refugees in the five camps near Tindouf at 158,000 persons.

In 1991, a ceasefire brokered by the UN saw the establishment of MINURSO – a peacekeeping mission tasked with monitoring the ceasefire and organising a referendum on the future of the territory. The ceasefire has remained and, though modest in numbers, MINURSO is now the longest serving UN peacekeeping mission in Africa, a longevity that is a reflection of the lack of progress in finding a political solution.
Confidence-building measures

It is against this background that UNHCR has implemented a Confidence Building Measures (CBM) programme, to address the humanitarian needs of the refugees and to “contribute to establishing a certain level of confidence among the parties concerned in the conflict in Western Sahara.” UNHCR initially proposed four CBM activities: visits between refugees in the camps near Tindouf and their family members in the Territory of Western Sahara; a telephone service in the camps, allowing refugees to call their relatives in Western Sahara at no cost; seminars to bring together separated Sahrawis to discuss topics of common interests of non-political character; and a mail service between Western Sahara and the refugee camps. As of now, UNHCR has only been able to implement the telephone service and family visits. UNHCR began operating the telephone service in 2004 and there are currently four telephone centres for the refugees to use. The family visits allow family members who have been separated, the majority for at least a generation, to reconnect in person. Each week, family members living either in the camps near Tindouf or the Territory are transported between the two locations by UN plane and vehicles hundreds of miles across the Sahara Desert to visit their families. Should visiting family members wish to remain rather than return, they are free to do so; UNHCR follow the outcomes of such decisions, particularly if it involves the separation of minors from their parents. However, while over 8,000 Sahrawis, from both the Territory and the refugee camps, have participated in family visits since the start of the programme in 2004, to date only a very tiny minority has opted to remain rather than return.

The popularity of the visits with Sahrawi families is evident. In UNHCR’s most recent registration exercise at the end of 2008, over 27,000 individuals recorded their intent to visit their families in Western Sahara and the refugee camps in the months and years ahead. Many will have to wait years before their wish will materialise since demand far exceeds operational capacity.

Humanitarian impact

It is hard to overstate what these five-day visits mean to those lucky enough to benefit. For the first time in over thirty years, people have the chance to spend time with their mother, father, son, daughter, husband, wife, brother or sister. Naturally, the celebrations each time family members arrive to re-unite with their families either in Western Sahara or the refugee camps are something to behold. Hundreds may surround the cars as the beneficiaries pull up outside their host’s residence, jostling with one another to be the first one to make physical contact with a member of their family whom they may have not seen for a generation or, for the younger ones, for the first time.

As ecstatic as the emotions can be at the start of the visit, the opposite is true when the five days have passed and the family members have to leave. Particularly for those returning to the isolated and land-locked desert refugee camps of southern Algeria, where temperatures are in excess of fifty degrees in the summer, sandstorms are regular, and they are dependent on humanitarian aid, the reality of what they are returning to is brutal. One elderly woman as she was boarding the plane back to the refugee camps explained that in her water bottle she had seawater and pebbles from her visit to the Atlantic Ocean. Though she remembered as a child growing up next to the sea, having been in the refugee camps for over thirty years and seemingly with no solution to this situation in sight, she was unsure if she would ever see the sea again.

Negotiations and confidence

The CBM programme has not been easy for UNHCR to negotiate and deliver between the parties. The 65-point Plan of Action (POA) required several months of negotiation to gain the agreement of the Governments of Morocco and Algeria and the Polisario.

On building confidence, the issue is complex. Visits can allow beneficiaries to understand better what life is like for their relatives on the other side, including the role of the respective parties and UNHCR. This – depending upon their five-day experience – can contribute to general confidence.

Progress in confidence between the parties involved in the Western Sahara conflict is far harder to gauge. In a conflict of this duration, with entrenched levels of distrust and frustration, humanitarian actors should be realistic in terms of what might or might not be achievable, particularly in the short to medium term. However, if the programme is delivered transparently with all parties feeling they are being treated equitably, confidence can be built between the humanitarian actor and each of the conflicting parties, a significant and not easy step to make when tensions and suspicions run so high.

Partial progress

Since the original POA was agreed some years ago, experience has been gained and some operational momentum achieved. UNHCR has
access to the Sahrawi people in the refugee camps and in the Territory that no other international actor enjoys. CBM remains the only humanitarian activity that spans the camps and the Territory.

Despite little progress at the political negotiating table, in 2008 there was agreement among the parties to explore the establishment of family visits by land in addition to the existing programme by air. If realised, there might be a chance for families to visit for longer than the five days and in far greater numbers. The symbolic act of travelling overland, passing the heavily-mined 2,000km sand wall, know as the Bern, which separates Western Sahara from Polisario-held areas, could be symbolically important: a trip that they or their ancestors did some thirty years ago and an activity that would be replicated if there were ever to be large-scale returns of refugees in the event of a political solution. Long-term solutions aside, uniting families that have been long separated and with no obvious end to displacement in sight should, from a humanitarian perspective, be reason enough to sustain this important initiative for one of the world’s most protracted and forgotten refugee situations.

**Refugees and mobility**

Giulia Scalettaris

The way that mobility is dealt with in respect of protracted refugee situations shows a gap between social practices and international policies.

Asylum and migration are currently considered as separate policy areas. Refugees are seen as lacking agency, mostly not doing but being done to; they are forcibly displaced and in need of protection. Migrants are seen as voluntarily migrating and (repatriation), or in the neighbouring countries (local integration), or in a third country (resettlement).

However, mobility and transnational networks often constitute effective livelihood strategies. For instance, mobility patterns of Afghans and Somalis, both considered among the largest and protracted refugee populations, intensified following outbreaks of conflict. Both populations have extensive diasporas and have developed extended transnational networks with multidirectional and/or cyclical mobility patterns. From this viewpoint, mobility could be considered as a solution by itself.

Secondary movements are one of the key issues discussed in policy documents on protracted refugee situations (PRS). The notion refers to refugees moving independently from their first host country to a third country. PRS are seen as particular susceptible to secondary movements, which are prompted by the lack of durable solutions. In addition, secondary movements are seen as strictly of concern to the refugee regime – a matter of asylum rather than of migration policy areas.

The notion of secondary movements acknowledges that as a matter of fact refugees do move outside the three solutions framework. It envisages a degree of agency, as movement is not aimed exclusively at searching for protection in a ‘country of destination’. While refugees’ trajectories are still seen as linear and as having a direction (secondary movements are often referred to as ‘onward movements’), at the same time secondary movements are considered as an exceptional phenomenon, prompted by the protracted hopelessness peculiar to PRS.

**Secondary movements as a problem**

In UNHCR policy papers, secondary movements are presented as a problem to be addressed and as a phenomenon to be reduced and prevented. The main reason is that they are usually irregular. Irregular movements undermine “the right of States to control who can enter and remain in their territory” and entail disorderly and unpredictable flows, both considered undesirable for states.

In Southern countries refugees have often no opportunities for legal mobility and this lack of legal opportunities diverts the flows to irregular channels, meaning that in many cases secondary movements are irregular almost by definition, as a result of existing policies. Therefore, in practice, preventing irregular secondary movements means preventing any movement.