



Rethinking Resettlement and Return in Nigeria's North East

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What's new? In Nigeria's Borno state, authorities have embarked on an aggressive program of relocating civilians uprooted by more than a decade of conflict between the state and jihadist insurgencies. They have closed most camps where displaced people lived in the state capital, often causing them to move to unsafe areas.

Why does it matter? The hasty process is endangering displaced people's lives – putting them closer to the fighting and cutting them off from support. By exposing civilians to hardship, the government risks giving jihadist groups an opportunity to forge ties with relocated communities and draw benefits from their economic activities.

What should be done? The government should suspend its camp closure policy in Borno, while taking measures to better protect those who have been relocated from harm, including by permitting NGOs to provide them with services and by allowing them to move to places they find more suitable.

I. Overview

The government agenda for the resettlement and return of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Nigeria's Borno state is fraught with risk. A portion of those displaced by fighting involving jihadist militants have already resettled, but some 2.5 million remain uprooted from their homes, with 1.8 million of them in Borno. Over the past two years, the Borno state governor, Babagana Zulum, has tried to turn the page on the conflict by accelerating IDP relocation efforts. With federal support, he has been closing IDP camps and bringing home refugees who fled to neighbouring states to escape conflict. But he is moving too quickly. Jihadist groups operate near the sites to which some IDPs are being moved, often involuntarily. Lacking security, public services and cash, these people may feel impelled to engage economically with the insurgents. For the sake of both those at immediate peril and state security, authorities should suspend camp closures and focus on getting IDPs the support they need.

Borno state has been the epicentre of fighting between Nigeria and jihadist insurgents for thirteen years, and during that period has seen the most war-related displacement in the country's north east. As recently as July 2022, Borno's capital, Maiduguri, was home to more than 500,000 IDPs. The primary conflict has pitted federal and state security forces against the group widely known as Boko Haram, which in 2016 split into two rival factions. The Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP),

which has drawn support and counsel from the Islamic State's (ISIS) core, is the larger and more powerful of the two, but the smaller faction, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), also menaces civilians.

Nigerian and Borno state officials claim that they have the militants on the back foot, but reality is more complicated. It is true that the military's air campaign has curtailed ISWAP's room for manoeuvre – forcing it to abandon large-scale attacks that require it to mass forces, which can be bombed from above. But ISWAP remains a potent threat. In 2022, it claimed more attacks than in any previous year, and it controls significant territory on the shores and islands of Lake Chad, and in the Sambisa and adjoining forests. By providing rough justice, and therefore a modicum of order, in the territories it controls, encouraging trade and largely abjuring the brutality for which Boko Haram became notorious, it has positioned itself to win grudging cooperation from some of the residents.

Still, Borno state officials are understandably more than ready to move on from the long-running conflict and the humanitarian crisis it has spawned. Zulum, who was elected in 2019 and is rumoured to have his eye on national office, is particularly eager to put the state's troubles behind it. He has promoted a narrative that Borno must progress quickly toward "stabilisation" in order to generate the economic development that will help the region prosper. He believes that "stabilisation" requires an aggressive effort to return IDPs to their homes, or resettle them, so that they can reintegrate into society. Zulum's administration has closed all but one of Maiduguri's IDP camps and announced that those in Borno's secondary towns will start shutting down in January 2023. Some IDPs who lived in the now-closed camps have resettled in Maiduguri town, but some have been required – either by the state or by circumstances – to move to places close to ISWAP-held territory.

The challenges facing IDPs in these relocation sites can be enormous. In November 2022, for example, ISWAP overran Mallam Fatori village, near the border with the Niger Republic, forcing the garrison to flee, killing civilians and driving some 6,000 IDPs across the border. Relocated IDPs often lack access to land and livelihoods, particularly if the jihadists' proximity and the military's curfews prevent them from venturing into the bush. Zulum has also constrained NGOs from providing support to newly relocated IDPs, arguing that aid fosters unhealthy dependency. The state offers relocation program participants a one-off payment, but it has not always disbursed the money in full, and IDPs who relocate from outside the formal camp system generally do not benefit. Meanwhile, the places where IDPs are resettled tend to lack rudimentary health care, education and other state services. Although relocated IDPs can travel for medical and other reasons, they are often blocked from pulling up stakes and moving.

Borno state's IDP relocation agenda has moved too far, too fast. State and federal authorities should revisit the return and resettlement program both because it is coercive and puts IDPs in danger, in contravention of international norms, and because of the harm that it threatens to do to state security. ISWAP is already trying to use the vulnerability of relocated IDPs to its advantage – developing trading relationships and dangling the prospect of fishing and farming in areas it controls in an effort to broaden its tax base. Donors, civil society groups and other partners who work with the Nigerian government and Borno state authorities should urge the following steps to mitigate such risks:

- ❑ The Zulum administration should suspend camp closures until these can be conducted consistent with the state's own Safe Return Strategy – ie, until there are credible plans to return or resettle their inhabitants in a manner that is safe, dignified, informed and voluntary, in compliance with international norms.
- ❑ Borno state should rescind restrictions on NGO support to relocated IDPs, turning its efforts to ensuring that vulnerable IDPs receive the assistance from these organisations that they require. Forums for coordinating such assistance efforts need to meet more frequently, and focus on removing obstacles to aid delivery, rather than acting as platforms for the government to brief outside actors.
- ❑ The state should increase its own assistance to IDPs who relocate, offering them a full year of support so that they can get better established in their new homes before they have to fend fully for themselves. To protect IDP livelihoods, the military should ensure that its officers do not use the resettlement areas' scarce land and other resources for personal benefit; to the extent possible, access to fishing and farming sites should be preserved for IDPs.
- ❑ Federal and state authorities should also send more support and services to larger resettlement sites in towns away from the war zone so that these places can receive IDPs who are required to leave insecure locales. They should lift restrictions that might prohibit these and other IDP movements.
- ❑ State authorities should create channels for IDPs and humanitarian NGOs to report the problems that relocated individuals are facing so that these can be adequately addressed.

These steps may not move Borno state past the displacement challenges it faces as quickly as authorities would like. But neither will its current program. Redirecting its efforts in this way will allow the government to deal with the difficult situation it faces more humanely and effectively, and without the additional risks – to both human and state security – created by its present course.

II. Insurgency and Displacement in Borno State

Over thirteen years, the jihadist insurgency in Nigeria's north east has driven four and a half million people from their homes. A first wave of displacement started in 2013, when Boko Haram – which calls itself JAS – began ransacking towns and villages, particularly in Borno state.¹ Some residents fled to neighbouring countries, including Chad, Cameroon and Niger, and others moved elsewhere in Nigeria, but most stayed in Borno, heading to larger, better protected towns.² A second wave took place in 2015, when the Nigerian military went on the offensive and relocated civil-

¹ Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad". It was the first official appellation of Boko Haram (generally translated from Hausa as "Western education is forbidden"), which is a derisive term coined by critics.

² "IDP and Returnee Atlas as of July 2022", International Organization for Migration. Returns have been easier in Adamawa and Yobe states, where the insurgency has abated significantly since 2014.

ians it found in Boko Haram-controlled areas to urban centres.³ Maiduguri, the state capital, received the most people, more than 500,000 of Borno's 1.8 million displaced.⁴ Many others dispersed to other towns and informal settlements, but a significant number – 230,000, according to the highest estimate – spent years in camps set up by the state with assistance from federal authorities, donor governments, UN agencies and international NGOs.⁵

Borno's security situation is a topic of controversy. In official statements, Nigerian civilian and military officials say the army has steadily worn the militants down, but the full story is somewhat different. Boko Haram has split into two main rivalrous factions – ISWAP and another one that has reclaimed the JAS name. The jihadists have lost control of all the large towns they held in 2014. Nor can ISWAP, under pressure from airstrikes, launch the large-scale attacks that were common in the period 2018-2019.

Still, off the record, Nigerian officials as well as international diplomats and military experts familiar with the situation are cautious, and for good reason.⁶ It is premature to say security has returned to Borno state. Though weakened by military operations and by their own violent rivalry, ISWAP and JAS remain a threat in significant parts of Borno and in adjacent areas of other Nigerian states like Yobe and Adamawa, as well as in neighbouring regions of Cameroon, Chad and the Niger Republic.

The main threat at present comes from ISWAP, which after years of friction with JAS has become the ascendant faction. With the ISIS core's apparent blessing, it stormed JAS's stronghold in the Sambisa forest in May 2021 and cornered its leader Abubakar Shekau, who killed himself by detonating a suicide vest. As Crisis Group has previously recounted, following Shekau's death, ISWAP moved quickly into new parts of Borno, opened negotiations with Shekau's surviving commanders, and folded many of the JAS fighting groups operating in Sambisa into its ranks. By mid-June 2021, ISWAP appeared to have gained control of the forest, adding the area to its initial strongholds (the adjacent Alagarno forest and the islands and shores of the southern part of Lake Chad). As an ISIS spokesman praised ISWAP for its "victory", it began carrying out attacks on the Nigerian and Cameroonian militaries from territory previously under JAS control; however, JAS remnants have continued to challenge ISWAP.⁷

While ISWAP is under pressure from both the state and JAS, it remains a potent force, adapting its operations and working to assert control over communities in and around the territories where it operates. Although the Nigerian air force is able to target massed combatants, reducing the group's capacity to launch large-scale attacks, ISWAP has redirected its energies with some success. It ambushes soldiers with roadblocks and improvised explosive devices – and indeed claimed more attacks in

³ Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°120, *Boko Haram on the Back Foot?*, 4 May 2016.

⁴ "IDP and Returnee Atlas as of July 2022", *op. cit.*

⁵ Crisis Group correspondence, humanitarian worker, 7 November 2022.

⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Abuja, February and July 2022.

⁷ The material in this paragraph is drawn from Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°180, *After Shekau: Confronting Jihadists in Nigeria's North East*, 29 March 2022.

2022 than in the previous years.⁸ It also launched its first operations outside the north east in 2022.⁹

Meanwhile, while the group is hardly welcome among the population, it has won a degree of acceptance through its governance. Encouraged by ISIS, ISWAP bettered its relations with local Muslims by replacing Shekau's looting practices with a more stable tax system and by administering rough justice through its own courts.¹⁰ It is less abusive than JAS toward civilians (as long as they are Muslim and unconnected to the state). Still, ISWAP has a record of brutal conduct and can be especially ruthless with those who refuse to pay taxes or otherwise resist its control.

Nor has JAS completely receded as a threat. Although it is enervated in military terms, it continues its predation on civilians, notably in the local government areas of Konduga, Mafa, Bama and Dikwa. In those areas, residents who venture outside government-controlled towns risk being robbed or attacked.¹¹ Insecurity is still significant in much of central and northern Borno, so much so that the number of IDPs increased in 2022, even as authorities pressed ahead with an aggressive policy to return and resettle the state's many displaced persons.¹²

III. Moving Too Fast

A. *Zulum's Agenda*

Despite the insecurity in Borno state, the federal and state governments have long insisted that they can safely return or resettle the displaced population, thanks – they claim – to the progress of counter-insurgency campaigns. Starting in 2015, the authorities resettled tens of thousands of IDPs in Adamawa and Yobe states, where fighting was less sustained than in Borno.¹³ The Borno state government made similar attempts in 2018, sending people back to towns like Baga and Kukawa. In that case, however, ISWAP fighters overran the sites, uprooting the residents once more.¹⁴ In a tacit admission that these efforts had been ill-considered, Borno authorities subsequently collaborated with the UN and humanitarian NGOs to develop the Borno State Return Strategy, based on the principle that returns should be safe, dignified, informed and voluntary, in compliance with international norms.¹⁵ But while intended

⁸ ISWAP claimed fifteen attacks in 2016, 370 in 2021 and 494 in 2022. Crisis Group correspondence, Tomasz Rolbiecki, open-source analyst, 29 December 2022.

⁹ ISWAP claimed its first attack outside the north east in Taraba state in January 2022. More attacks followed there as well as in Kogi state. In July, ISWAP carried out a spectacular attack on a prison in the suburbs of the federal capital, Abuja, springing dozens of detainees.

¹⁰ On ISWAP's governance, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°273, *Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province*, 16 May 2019.

¹¹ "Boko Haram slaughters three Borno farmers", *The Guardian*, 5 August 2022; "Boko Haram kill 17 herders in northeastern Nigerian state of Borno", AFP, 26 December 2022.

¹² On the number of IDPs in Borno State, see Appendix B.

¹³ "Nigeria says 'go home', but is it safe from Boko Haram?", IRIN, 17 November 2015.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, IDP from Kukawa, Maiduguri, 2 February 2022. Crisis Group telephone interview, IDP from Baga, 24 January 2022.

¹⁵ "Borno State Return Strategy", Federal Republic of Nigeria and UN, September 2018.

to avoid forced or imprudent returns, the safeguards in this document have since often been honoured in the breach.

Part of the reason is that Borno state Governor Zulum has emphasised accelerating return and resettlement since his election in 2019. Zulum sees IDP relocation as essential to his broader stabilisation agenda, aimed at bringing Borno out of the security and humanitarian emergency it has endured for more than a decade during the jihadist insurgency. He believes economic development is the way to long-term stability.¹⁶ Zulum's vision for Borno's development aligns with federal and multilateral efforts to help place the Lake Chad region on a path toward greater security and prosperity.¹⁷ Within the region, Borno is the locale that has been most affected by the conflict, and it has also received the most support, including from President Muhammadu Buhari and federal institutions as well as a number of international partners.¹⁸

Against this backdrop, Zulum has made clear that he regards the presence of IDP camps and humanitarian relief organisations to be an impediment to the state's recovery. He has argued that the camps do not allow for "dignified economic and social development", suggesting that they are a morass of "immorality", with prostitution and drug abuse reportedly rife.¹⁹ Civil society sources say the governor has expressed concern in informal conversations that IDPs strain Maiduguri's infrastructure, for instance by taking shelter in schools and training centres.²⁰ They also report that Zulum has accused NGOs of fostering aid dependency, providing substandard services and (by leasing properties for staff and operations) driving up Maiduguri rents.²¹ According to a security expert who attended a meeting where Zulum discussed the issue, the governor considers that "the root cause of [the Boko Haram] crisis is lack of education, lack of opportunities for the youth, lack of development". Seeing military operations and emergency assistance as insufficient, he wants to address these root causes – and turn the page.²²

Efforts to accelerate the return and resettlement of IDPs fit with Zulum's vision as a way to both kickstart the economy and challenge the insurgents. On the economic front, Zulum has publicly insisted that the IDPs – mainly farmers, fishermen, herders and traders by previous occupation – were becoming idle and dependent on humanitarian assistance, and that they needed (and wanted) to go back to their lands to become productive again.²³ As for challenging the insurgents, Zulum has said he views

¹⁶ This vision finds expression in a general yet ambitious document. "2020-2030 Strategy: Transformation of Borno State", Borno State, undated.

¹⁷ See "Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region", African Union Commission and Lake Chad Basin Commission, August 2018.

¹⁸ Among the most prominent partners are the UN Development Programme, which manages a Regional Stabilization Facility supported by Germany, Sweden, the UK, the Netherlands and the European Union, as well as the World Bank.

¹⁹ "Prostitution, drugs, thuggery thriving in IDP camps: Zulum", *People's Gazette*, 1 January 2022.

²⁰ Crisis Group interviews, civil society activists and international humanitarian agency officials, Abuja and Maiduguri, January and February 2022.

²¹ Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian workers and civil society activists, Maiduguri and Abuja, February and July 2022. A minister for reconstruction, rehabilitation and resettlement under the previous Borno state governor, Zulum has a history of interaction with international NGOs.

²² Crisis Group correspondence, security expert, 7 November 2022.

²³ "Why I closed IDP camps in Maiduguri – Zulum", BizWatchNigeria, 2 January 2022.

relocating the IDPs as a way to reclaim territory lost to the jihadists and advance the state's security objectives. In 2020, he argued: "One of the tactics of Boko Haram is to ensure there are no human activities in these areas. The presence of human beings in their areas is a threat to Boko Haram".²⁴

Zulum, who has criticised the military's performance against the insurgents, and given financial and material support to pro-government militias and paramilitary forces, also appears to see relocation as a way to boost the security response.²⁵ A local security expert said Zulum and his team have argued that resettled people will have to "fight for their houses, for their land, for their lives".²⁶ They also appear to hope that moving these vulnerable civilians to or near the front line of the counter-insurgency will both motivate the military to fight more effectively and spur militias to mobilise to their aid. Several observers report that the governor intends to increase Borno state's support for militias and paramilitaries as part of that strategy.²⁷

Zulum's agenda has critics, both inside and outside Nigeria, who insist (not without reason) that the state is neither secure enough for major development investment nor in a position to pursue IDP relocation on the scale envisaged – at least not without terrible human cost. International humanitarian organisations have warned Borno state authorities that many sites newly opened for resettlement are unsafe, and certain international partners who generally support Zulum's relocation plans voice disquiet about the new sites.²⁸ Borno authorities have tended to disregard these warnings, even those from the Nigerian military. A humanitarian expert notes that, in a coordination meeting, an officer opposed resettling IDPs in a certain area, considering it too risky; Zulum himself overrode the objection.²⁹

Critics see the push for return and resettlement as a way for authorities to promote a narrative of progress, even as other indicators point in the opposite direction, with the number of displaced people increasing and food insecurity growing.³⁰ Some argue that Zulum – who is running for re-election as governor in March and is known to have national political ambitions as well – is acting partly out of political considerations.³¹ The camps' closure, no matter how it occurs and where the IDPs

²⁴ "Boko Haram: Borno moves to return IDPs to 'liberated' communities", *Premium Times*, 6 October 2020.

²⁵ "I criticise troops to help them improve, says Zulum", *The Cable*, 29 August 2020; "Forces behind Zulum's outburst on Nigerian military", *Blueprint*, 23 December 2020.

²⁶ Crisis Group correspondence, security expert, 7 November 2022. Zulum said as much after witnessing the Nigerian military's poor performance during a visit to Baga in July 2020. "Channels TV: Zulum's convoy under attack, Borno governor blames military", video, YouTube, 30 July 2020.

²⁷ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and civil society activists, Maiduguri and Abuja, February and July 2022.

²⁸ "Government-induced Movements of IDPs in Borno State: Terminology", Protection Sector North East Nigeria, February 2021. Crisis Group telephone interview, international development official, 14 December 2022. Tellingly, the UN Development Programme is working only in places like Banki, Damboa and Monguno, which are far away from ISWAP's core territory in northern Borno. It is avoiding the more exposed sites Zulum has opened of late.

²⁹ Crisis Group telephone interview, former UN official, 12 October 2022.

³⁰ See Appendix B. Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and civil society activists, Maiduguri and Abuja, February and July 2022.

³¹ Zulum was mentioned as a potential vice-presidential candidate on the ruling-party ticket in the 2023 election, though someone else was eventually selected.

go, would be seen as a sign of success by much of the electorate in Borno and Nigeria as a whole and therefore work to Zulum's benefit.³² Critics also suggest that the governor is seeking to redirect money away from internationally managed humanitarian assistance toward Borno state-led infrastructure and other projects.³³

Whatever the considerations behind, and criticisms of, Zulum's agenda, it is well under way. Since 2021, authorities have shut down all the formal IDP camps in and around Maiduguri except one – Muna Badawi, which hosts about 50,000 people.³⁴ The closures to date have required the relocation of about 150,000 IDPs.³⁵ With the city's last camp due to close imminently, the number of IDPs residing in Maiduguri fell over the course of 2022, even as it rose slightly in the north east as a whole.³⁶

In August 2022, Zulum announced in a speech given on the occasion of World Humanitarian Day that formal camps in Borno's secondary towns like Bama and Monguno would also start shutting down in January 2023.³⁷ At the time of writing, that has not happened, and authorities appear to be taking no steps in this direction, but Zulum's intentions remain clear. Meanwhile, at least 50,000 refugees have returned to Borno from Chad, Cameroon and Niger since Zulum's 2019 election, sometimes with assistance from Borno authorities and sometimes spontaneously.³⁸ As discussed below, the problem is that, too often, there is nowhere suitable for them to go.

B. *A Process Beset with Problems*

Interviews with relocated IDPs conducted in the course of 2022 give a sense of the problems that many faced during return or resettlement.³⁹

The IDPs who left the Maiduguri camps report departing under a range of circumstances. In some cases, they were pushed in that direction by shifts in government policy. Starting in 2021, the government began drastically cutting back assistance in the official IDP camps in Maiduguri – a move that both IDPs and humanitarian workers thought was intended to make resettlement more attractive.⁴⁰ Some IDPs

³² "2023: Zulum, 11 others jostle for Borno governorship seat", *Daily Post*, 13 October 2022.

³³ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and civil society activists, Maiduguri and Abuja, February and July 2022.

³⁴ See Appendix C. It appears that the Borno state government is trying to reclassify Muna Badawi as an informal camp, though some assistance is still allowed there. According to a humanitarian worker, it could be trying to reach its objective of closing the last formal camps without actually resettling the IDPs living there. Crisis Group correspondence, 7 November 2022.

³⁵ Crisis Group phone interview, humanitarian worker, 30 October 2022.

³⁶ See Appendices B and C.

³⁷ Crisis Group telephone interview, humanitarian worker, 30 October 2022.

³⁸ Figure derived by Crisis Group from UN High Commissioner for Refugees data. It is not known where in Borno these returning refugees have resettled: informal settlements in Maiduguri, IDP camps in secondary towns, or their places of origin. International humanitarian law makes a distinction between internally displaced people (who have moved within the borders of their country of origin) and refugees (who have crossed international borders to take refuge).

³⁹ Crisis Group interviewed 35 recently resettled people (25 men and ten women) between January and July 2022, either in Maiduguri or by telephone. These people come from a variety of villages in northern Borno, notably Baga, Wulgo, Marte, Soye, Kukawa, Cross Kauwa, Ajiri and Mallam Fatori. See Appendix A for a map of Borno state.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, February and July 2022.

also had a general feeling that the authorities were putting their weight behind return and felt it might be dangerous to disobey. As one IDP put it: “How can we decide on our own?”⁴¹ Most, when they learned the camps they lived in would be closing, were given an explicit choice: go back to their hometown or their local government area headquarters, or fend for themselves in Maiduguri.⁴² “They said, ‘[You can go] if you wish. We are not forcing you’”, an IDP explained.⁴³

Many indeed chose to try to stay in Maiduguri, but for others, staying was not an option, as they had no access to land or economic opportunities in the city. As one IDP put it, “I don’t have a house in Maiduguri, and I can’t pay rent. So, we decided to go back and work on our farm”.⁴⁴ Those who made similar choices tend to offer explanations along the same lines: at least in their hometowns or nearby areas, they would be on familiar ground, however dangerous it might still be. They hoped that heading home might allow them to make their way, perhaps claiming some land, and maybe also gaining access to assistance, which they were losing in Maiduguri. (Some IDPs say they were just told to go back to their local government area without being given another option.⁴⁵)

For IDPs leaving formal camps, the authorities offered financial inducements, whether they chose to resettle in Maiduguri or at sites elsewhere in Borno. (Those who were not living in formal camps have received no support.) The government usually promised eligible IDPs a one-off cash payment: 100,000 naira (\$230) for an adult man or a widow.⁴⁶ This amount was significant compared to the 17,000 naira (\$40) monthly allowance plus occasional food assistance that many IDP heads of household used to get in the camps. It was all the more enticing as the camp allowance was being suspended. According to resettled IDPs, however, the government has a mixed record of making good on its offer, with the actual payment varying – sometimes, a great deal – from one person to the next. A number of Crisis Group interviewees received the full sum, but others got a first instalment of 20,000 naira (\$45) upon leaving and never received the rest. Still others got nothing at all.

Other assistance to relocated IDPs has also varied. Sometimes, the government provided transport to the relocation site for free, sometimes for a fee. Other times, it offered nothing. Some IDPs received food, while others did not.

As for where IDPs have been allowed to relocate, the state’s continuing insecurity means that options are limited. While Governor Zulum has been justly criticised for being too lax about security concerns in some cases, safety is a factor in decision-making about where people can be relocated. Thus, authorities have guided displaced persons only to a small number of towns that are under military control. While some IDPs have been able to return to their towns of origin, and sometimes their own homes and agricultural lands, many have instead experienced what is, in effect, secondary displacement. In cases where prospective returnees are originally from smaller localities that lack a military presence, the government has generally sent them to

⁴¹ Crisis Group telephone interview, IDP from Bama, 25 January 2022.

⁴² Crisis Group interviews, Maiduguri and by telephone, January-February and July 2022.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, IDP from Kukawa, Maiduguri, 2 February 2022.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group telephone interview, IDP from Cross Kauwa, 1 January 2022.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group telephone interviews, IDP from Marte, 25 January 2022, 18 July 2022.

⁴⁶ Married women were also to get 50,000 naira (\$115) separately from their husbands. Crisis Group interviews, IDPs from Mallam Fatori, Maiduguri, 21 July 2022.

the closest garrison town, which is frequently the local government area seat. In other cases, the state government has forced those hailing from areas it deems unsafe to relocate temporarily to informal settlements in the Maiduguri suburbs, such as one on vacant land in the Shuwari neighbourhood or others farther afield in better-defended towns like Monguno.⁴⁷

A number of IDPs have found themselves living in these makeshift communities for months. They have built temporary housing, sometimes using materials taken from the camps where they used to live, though their accommodations in the camps were better. They are cut off from the support they used to receive from relief organisations when they were in the camps, generally in the form of cash allowances, which is not being distributed at the new locales. Public services – water, sanitation and health care – are minimal or non-existent. The IDPs in these situations are more vulnerable to malnutrition, epidemic disease and other problems than they were in the camps. IDPs from Shuwari say cholera hit hard among the resettled families, with one asserting that at least 50 children died of the malady in October 2021.⁴⁸

IV. Relocated amid Insecurity

The relocation of IDPs to insecure areas creates a range of problems that the military and civilian authorities struggle to address – even in areas where they have a significant presence – and fosters dynamics that may benefit jihadist militants.

A. Two Case Studies

Useful case studies of what happens when IDPs are relocated to especially insecure locations can be found in Mallam Fatori and Kukawa, both communities in northern Borno that were resettled on Zulum's watch between 2020 and 2022. As these examples demonstrate, it can be difficult if not impossible to come up with a formula for keeping residents safe and prosperous enough in the most dangerous corners of the region. Neither the insertion of a heavy military or paramilitary presence, nor a lighter-touch approach that relies on patrols by remotely stationed troops, has produced satisfactory results. Government support for relocated persons ranges from weak to woefully deficient. ISWAP hovers outside these towns ready either to attack or to insinuate itself, sometimes leading state forces to stage pre-emptive incursions.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, humanitarian worker, Abuja, 22 January. For example, 1,000 families who were supposed to be headed for the town of Gudumbali, which is still a battleground, were dropped off along the way. They were subsequently told to resettle in Monguno.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group telephone interviews, IDPs from Shuwari, 24 and 25 January 2022. Amnesty International has documented the cholera outbreak in Shuwari, noting that “at least twenty older persons and 21 children died”. Amnesty also quotes a resettled IDP saying: “They built twelve temporary toilet structures for us, but we are more than a thousand people. When the rain came, water flushed the toilets away”. “Plans to Close IDP Camps in Maiduguri Could Endanger Lives”, Amnesty International, 15 December 2021.

1. Mallam Fatori

The first of these communities, Mallam Fatori, sits near the border with Niger. State and federal authorities created a special resettlement camp there, near the site of a deserted town, with its own garrison to protect it from the many ISWAP fighters nearby. Most of the population that relocated to Mallam Fatori starting in 2020 had originated from the town or surrounding villages. They became refugees in Niger or IDPs in Maiduguri when conflict flared up. They were guided back to the new encampment as part of Zulum's return and resettlement agenda.

To secure Mallam Fatori, the authorities confined residents to a camp surrounded by a trench some distance from the old town, and co-located a garrison of soldiers and local men belonging to the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) (a militia supported by the military and Borno state authorities) to watch over the settlement.⁴⁹ There were reports of tensions between the CJTF, which believed it could do more good if it redeployed outside the camp, and the military, which felt it more prudent to keep the garrison stationed squarely on site.⁵⁰ But although the military prevailed, the garrison was never strong enough to deter ISWAP attacks. A security source counted 24 such incidents in 2020, 34 in 2021 and 44 between January and November 2022. The count stopped in November, when flooding disrupted the town's defences, allowing ISWAP to overrun the settlement and force its residents to scatter.⁵¹

Even before the November flooding, Mallam Fatori's residents faced terrible conditions. Borno state authorities provided temporary shelter and limited water and sanitation, but these facilities were insufficient. As of April 2022, there were reportedly only twenty latrines for 4,000 people.⁵² Other state services were very weak, with neither teachers nor nurses. There was no market and no access to agricultural land. Fighting was so close that, most of the time, no one was allowed outside the trench. The only way out was across the Komadugu river to the Nigerien city of Bosso; a convoy went there once a week under military protection. Against this backdrop, most people who returned to Mallam Fatori languished, exhausting whatever financial support they had received for relocating. One of the few income-generating activities was sewing the elaborate caps often worn in northern Nigeria, but business hardly flourished. Most producers had to wait for traders to come buy the headgear at discount prices.⁵³

Mallam Fatori's future is now unclear. Governor Zulum's designs for the site obviously suffered a major blow in November. In seizing the town, ISWAP destroyed the garrison's base and killed at least twenty security personnel and ten civilians.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ On the CJTF, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°244, *Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram*, 23 February 2017.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interviews, IDPs from Mallam Fatori, Maiduguri, 21 July 2022.

⁵¹ Crisis Group correspondence, security expert, 29 November 2022. See also "Advocacy Note: Returns of Nigerian Refugees from Niger to Mallam Fatori, Abadam Local Government Area (LGA), Borno State, North-East Nigeria", Protection Sector Network, 29 April 2022.

⁵² "Advocacy Note", op. cit., p. 2.

⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, IDPs from Mallam Fatori, Maiduguri, 21 July 2022.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group correspondence, security expert, 29 November 2022. See also "Suspected jihadis kill troops, civilians in Nigeria", AFP, 20 November 2022.

More than 6,000 civilians crossed the border into Niger.⁵⁵ Yet Zulum has not abandoned hope that the settlement can be restored. He has ordered 300 CJTF personnel to help the military regain control of the locality and paid a visit to the refugees in Niger, telling them they will soon be able to return to Mallam Fatori.⁵⁶

2. Kukawa

A second case study can be found in Kukawa, a town close to Lake Chad, which has a very different security posture. Unlike Mallam Fatori, there is no permanent military or CJTF presence at Kukawa, as ISWAP drove the army out when the military tried to establish a base in 2020. The army fell back to an existing base in Cross Kauwa, 12km away, and left the resettled civilians alone in Kukawa, now a largely self-governing community. They make their presence felt only through infrequent patrols.

Overall, conditions in Kukawa are better than they were in Mallam Fatori before November 2022, though they are still difficult. As concerns government support, returnees Crisis Group interviewed say they did not receive the full amount the Borno state government promised to resettled IDPs. Most got only 20,000 naira (\$45). Some, however, are registered for humanitarian assistance in the form of monthly cash payments in Monguno, a larger town under army control 30km away as the crow flies, where formal IDP camps still exist.⁵⁷ There are no state services in Kukawa, and civilians must go to Cross Kauwa or Monguno for medical care and to procure seeds and other necessities. There is plenty of access to land, however, since there are no security forces in the vicinity to restrict mobility for safety reasons. Kukawa residents can go deep into the bush and have developed sufficient food sources to meet their needs.

Nonetheless, Kukawa is caught up in the war. ISWAP fighters visit, although they maintain a light footprint: they do not try to govern the town or demand taxes. Sometimes, they do not bring their guns. They come to Kukawa to buy manufactured products and foodstuffs – supplies are better there than in jihadist-controlled areas – and to sell dried fish. But their purchases create risks for the residents. The army knows about the commerce with ISWAP fighters and, on at least two occasions, has burnt down shops and destroyed merchandise, insisting that all trade be carried out in Cross Kauwa, under army supervision. A Kukawa resident protests: “We can’t refuse to sell to them. There is no presence of government there, so what can we do?”⁵⁸ Notwithstanding the army’s interventions, trade has resumed, though more discreetly. The authorities seem to view Kukawa’s inhabitants with suspicion, and Crisis Group heard a report of drivers from town getting jailed when they travel.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ “Lake Chad Basin Humanitarian Snapshot”, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 8 December 2022.

⁵⁶ “Nigeria’s Borno state mobilises militia after 8 soldiers killed by militants”, Reuters, 23 November 2022; “Floods: Zulum in Niger Republic, visits Borno refugees displaced from Malam-Fatori”, *The Guardian*, 6 December 2022.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, IDP from Kukawa, Maiduguri, 2 February 2022

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

B. *Other Sites, Other Challenges*

Well-defended sites as well as those that ISWAP does not consider as strategic as Mallam Fatori and Kukawa also have their challenges, even though they have often fared somewhat better. Towns in the former category are Baga, Cross Kauwa, Doron Baga and Marte, where both the military and CJTF are often quite strong, and ISWAP stages periodic raids but does not pose (for now) as big a threat as in Mallam Fatori.

It generally helps that the state is more visible in these places than in Kukawa, even though it does not fully meet residents' needs. Particularly in local government area seats, Borno state authorities have restored public buildings and some private housing, brought back certain public services and sent civil servants back to their jobs. In Baga, for instance, the local government area chairman, district head and district police officer have returned.⁶⁰ But there are still too few schoolteachers and medical personnel. Many such professionals are afraid to work in these places, worrying that ISWAP will target them as agents of the state.

There are other challenges as well, and while these vary from place to place, certain common themes emerge. First, the economic picture in these places is mixed. Not all those who are relocated have housing. Food is in short supply, and while Borno authorities sometimes provide emergency food assistance, it is infrequent and not all IDPs receive it. Herders sell cattle, as well as meat and milk, and, in villages close to Lake Chad, fishermen sell their catch, but fishing is constrained by military curfews and lack of equipment. Some people try to make a living from sewing caps, but for those who do not know the trade or lack the capital to purchase cloth, the main option is to work as farmhands or collect firewood, like they used to do in Maiduguri. As for the firewood, an IDP notes, "everybody" does that in the resettled areas, and unlike in Maiduguri, there are very few buyers.⁶¹ Also, it is a risky endeavour, as it demands going deep into the bush. There, especially near the hideouts of JAS, IDPs can be robbed or kidnapped for ransom.⁶²

Secondly, access to agricultural land is an issue, as many fields lie in areas deemed unsafe by the military, which sets limits to how far away civilians can go to farm. The IDPs who have been lucky enough to return safely to their hometowns can sometimes cultivate at least a portion of their land (though much of it is often too dangerous and thus beyond their reach). Others have to look for unused land, and sometimes have to pay rent to the owners. Many simply have to work as farmhands, earning from 500 to 800 nairas (\$1.15 to \$1.80) a day. Residents at two sites report that soldiers and CJTF militiamen have asked herders, fishermen and vendors for money before letting them ply their trades. At one of the sites, the commanding officer intervened, telling the locals not to pay anything, but at the other, the "tax" was routine.⁶³

Thirdly, residents' relations with the CJTF and the military personnel who protect the relocation sites can be tricky. Many say relations are good. Indeed, many have family members in the CJTF, and value the protection the militiamen and the soldiers

⁶⁰ Baga is part of the Kukawa local government area, but as Kukawa is inaccessible, the seat has moved to Baga.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, IDP from Baga, 18 July 2022.

⁶² Crisis Group interview, IDP from Soye, Maiduguri, 17 July 2022.

⁶³ Crisis Group interviews, IDP from Baga, Maiduguri, 1 February 2022; IDP from Cross Kauwa, Maiduguri, 1 February 2022.

provide. But some mention sources of friction that go beyond the unofficial taxation. Restrictions on mobility often create tensions. Those who go out for the day to farm or fish are given a token and told to be back by nightfall. One IDP spoke of how a friend was arrested and summarily executed because he failed to produce the token upon returning.⁶⁴ IDPs seeking to leave the relocation sites altogether – perhaps because of the challenge of eking out a living safely or because of the lack of educational options for their children – also face major obstacles. While some manage to get out, local authorities and the CJTF can make exit difficult: while they let IDPs go to Monguno and Maiduguri for business, or for a visit or medical treatment, they forbid travellers from taking their families or belongings along.⁶⁵

Fourthly, while Crisis Group has heard no reports of land disputes getting out of control, land rights around relocation sites may well become a problem at some point, especially if return and resettlement intensify. Seeds are costly, and dry fertilisers are banned because some can be used to make explosives. Grazing herds may destroy crops by night because farmers cannot keep watch over their fields after curfew. In some places, IDPs report that military officers engage in fishing or commercial farming themselves, using their power to secure access to scarce land or fishing sites and their capital to hire resettled IDPs as hands; they are also seen as failing to fairly share the profits they make from these endeavours, and they sell the produce outside the relocation site, where people are often too cash-strapped to buy it.⁶⁶ For these and other reasons, in the majority of newly resettled localities, the price of foodstuffs is higher than in Maiduguri, even though much of the food should be produced locally and therefore should be cheaper.⁶⁷

Fifthly, NGOs have to struggle to deliver aid to relocated IDPs. Governor Zulum has made it a rule that these IDPs are ineligible for continued assistance from international NGOs, whether they have moved to a place newly opened for resettlement or to a town where humanitarian groups are already operating.⁶⁸ The Borno authorities say they want IDPs to stop relying on humanitarian aid and to develop sustainable livelihoods. NGO operations have not been shut down entirely. In towns like Bama or Monguno, where international NGOs and UN agencies had been working before Zulum rolled out his new return policy, they are still working. They are assisting the established IDPs and quietly finding ways to help the displaced who are newly resettled or in transit, as well.⁶⁹ Both localities are already packed full, however, and services there are seriously overstretched.

But at newly opened sites closer to ISWAP-controlled areas, the picture is different. Even if they were allowed to deliver assistance, many NGOs would find it enormously difficult to do so. ISWAP is quite aggressive toward humanitarian workers, whom it

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, IDP from Cross Kauwa, 20 July 2022.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, IDP from Baga, Maiduguri, 18 July 2022.

⁶⁶ One man reported that fishermen were getting 20 per cent of their catch's value from the military, which had given them a motor-powered canoe. Crisis Group interviews, IDP from Soye, Maiduguri, 17 July 2022; IDP from Baga, Maiduguri, 18 July 2022; IDP from Cross Kauwa, 20 July 2022.

⁶⁷ Part of the explanation for the limited agricultural production may be that resettlement is still recent, but even people living in the bush are "importing" food from Maiduguri. Crisis Group telephone interview, IDP from Baga, 24 January 2022.

⁶⁸ Letter from the Executive Governor, Borno State, 6 December 2021.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group telephone interview, former UN humanitarian worker, 12 October 2022.

describes as “crusaders”, and the Nigerian authorities bar international NGOs from testing whether they can engage insurgents to secure agreements to let them operate.⁷⁰ Months before ISWAP overran the town, an NGO official already said he did not “see anyone ready to go to Mallam Fatori now”.⁷¹ Still, other humanitarian workers say a few NGOs might explore working at some of the new sites if the Borno authorities allowed it.⁷²

Finally, IDPs’ sense of vulnerability is often compounded by the difficulty they have in communicating concerns to authorities. Some IDPs have organised themselves to lobby traditional rulers and Borno state officials, at considerable cost and trouble to themselves, as travelling to Maiduguri is expensive and difficult. They report mixed success: one IDP Crisis Group interviewee spoke of obtaining an extension of the curfew as well as access to farming and fishing opportunities, while another reported no improvement.⁷³ Some interviewees said the absence of international NGOs from particular sites reduces the population’s leverage. International NGOs have often relayed local concerns to the authorities, as Médecins sans Frontières did in 2016, when it highlighted a food crisis in garrison towns.⁷⁴ “Before, with the NGOs, they [the authorities] would listen to us”, said an IDP.⁷⁵ Because relocation has become politically sensitive, discussions of the subject can be tense. In November 2022, Borno state authorities fired the Baga village head after he complained about his locality’s situation on a radio program.⁷⁶

V. Recognising and Mitigating the Risks of Relocation

The process of relocating IDPs in Nigeria’s Borno state has moved too far, too fast. While military pressure on ISWAP has had some effect on its tactics – curbing its large-scale attacks – the group continues to be a destabilising force on the shores and islands of Lake Chad, and across much of the countryside in northern and central Borno. JAS still contributes to the climate of insecurity as well. Against this backdrop, the effort to close camps, bring refugees home from abroad and relocate the displaced to dangerous areas of Nigeria’s troubled north east – in apparent contravention of international legal rules and norms – needs to be redirected.⁷⁷ At the very least, state and federal authorities should stop closing camps until the security situation has suf-

⁷⁰ “A Declaration of Global Intent? The Relevance of Islamic State’s Al-Naba Editorial on 13 August”, International NGO Safety Organisation, 6 October 2020.

⁷¹ Crisis Group telephone interview, 9 August 2022. Crisis Group interviews, Abuja and Maiduguri, February 2022.

⁷² Crisis Group telephone interview, 9 August 2022. Crisis Group interviews, Abuja and Maiduguri, February 2022.

⁷³ Crisis Group interviews, IDP from Baga, 1 February 2022; IDP from Kukawa, 2 February 2022.

⁷⁴ Vincent Foucher and Fabrice Weissman, “La fabrique d’une ‘crise humanitaire’: Le cas du conflit entre Boko Haram et le gouvernement nigérian (2010-2018)”, *Politique africaine*, no. 156 (2019).

⁷⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, IDP from Marte, 24 January 2022.

⁷⁶ Letter on file with Crisis Group, 21 November 2022.

⁷⁷ On this situation, and particularly on its legal dimensions, see “Nigeria: Plans to Close IDP Camps in Maiduguri Could Endanger Lives”, op. cit.; “‘Those Who Returned are Suffering’: Impact of Camp Shutdowns on People Displaced by Boko Haram Conflict in Nigeria”, Human Rights Watch, October 2022.

ficiently improved and there are safe relocation sites for all. They should allow relocated IDPs to move to locales where they are safer and have better prospects. They should also increase access to humanitarian assistance for those IDPs who require it.

A. *The Case for Suspension*

Persuading Governor Zulum and his advisers to shift course on their camp closure agenda will be challenging, given the political and economic considerations that inform today's policy, but Nigeria's international partners – including bilateral donors and multilateral development organisations – should nevertheless press them to do so. If normative and legal arguments concerning the protection of civilians fail to carry the day, they can make a number of practical points about the risks of continuing the current course of action.

First and foremost is the risk that the hardships of living in insecure resettlement sites could push the people relocated there into accommodations with ISWAP that provide financial and other benefits to the same insurgents the government is trying to defeat. ISWAP will not find it easy to win over relocated IDPs, of course. Many say they are suspicious of the jihadists.⁷⁸ Most were displaced before the 2016 split within Boko Haram, and their understanding of the militants is based on their early, often terrifying experience with Shekau's JAS.⁷⁹ Many believe that ISWAP is cut from the same cloth.

Yet ISWAP has some cards to play. Ever since it broke with Shekau in 2016, it has tried to persuade civilians – at least the Muslims among them – that it is moderate by comparison. ISWAP does not shy away from murdering people who dodge its taxes or associate with the state, for instance by forming militias aligned with the army, but as noted above its rule does bring certain benefits for civilians in the areas it controls. These include the modicum of rough justice it enforces, which brings some order to these areas, and its encouragement of commerce, which it offers with a view to developing its fiscal base as well as trade.⁸⁰ ISWAP also has a history of advertising the living conditions in the areas it controls via propaganda videos that show well-stocked markets, bountiful crops and vast, healthy herds.⁸¹

Particularly if ISWAP sticks to its less brutal approach and works with local Muslim civilians, relocated IDPs may be tempted to alleviate their plight by gaining access to the fields, ponds, pastures and markets that the group controls. "People want to go to the islands", said a resettled inhabitant of Kukawa, speaking of the Lake Chad islands known to be good fishing grounds.⁸² There is some evidence, for example in the case of the Kukawa market discussed above, that relocated individuals are already

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, IDP from Baga, Maiduguri, 1 February 2022. Crisis Group telephone interviews, IDPs from Marte and Shuwari, 24 January 2022.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Crisis Group Report, *Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province*, op. cit.

⁸¹ One such video is "ISWAP – Tribulations and Blessings – July 11, 2018", available at the Unmasking Boko Haram website maintained by researcher Jacob Zenn.

⁸² Crisis Group interview, IDP from Kukawa, Maiduguri, 2 February 2022.

interacting with ISWAP, and there are also reports of resettled IDPs going to Lake Chad to fish, paying ISWAP the taxes it demands.⁸³

Secondly, while little evidence suggests that resettled IDPs are in any way inclined to join ISWAP – indeed, many have suffered at the hands of militants and want nothing to do with them – the risk remains that growing grievance and the search for protection and survival opportunities could make some susceptible to doing so in the future.⁸⁴ On at least some occasions, security forces have stamped out signs of engagement between residents and the group – as when they burnt down the market in Kukawa or when the air force attacked fishermen casting their nets around Lake Chad in the spring of 2022 (notwithstanding international legal prohibitions of indiscriminate attacks on civilians).⁸⁵ Such incidents could backfire, fuelling anger at the military and turning relocated IDPs against the state.

A third risk is that if resettled IDPs try to resist ISWAP's control or even fight the group, the jihadists could answer with brutal attacks, as they have already done in some such cases.⁸⁶ Beyond such attacks' human costs, they also risk emboldening the insurgents and highlighting the state's lack of capacity to address regional security threats – precisely the impression that Governor Zulum and others are trying to counter.

Finally, in addition to creating new poorly defended resettlement sites, the relocation effort is taking its toll on larger, long-established garrison towns such as Bama and Monguno, where many resettled IDPs end up. New arrivals put the limited public services and resources in those localities under extra stress, which is acutely felt because the same towns are being required to host many graduates of state-run rehabilitation programs. The first such program, Operation Safe Corridor, has graduated about 2,000 ostensibly low-level rebels since 2018, and a new program to deal with thousands of former JAS members is now online.⁸⁷ The programs play an important role but struggle with weak screening procedures and difficulties helping alumni find their footing in society. As a diplomat told Crisis Group, “mixing resettled IDPs with returning former [Boko Haram militants] is going to be a problem”, not least because the former may perceive themselves to be victims of the latter.⁸⁸ Some tensions are inevitable, but to minimise them, the state should avoid bringing people to these locales if they are already safe elsewhere.

⁸³ Crisis Group interviews, IDPs from Baga, Maiduguri, 1 February 2022 and 18 July 2022; IDP from Cross Kauwa, 1 February 2022.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interview, IDP from Kukawa, Maiduguri, 2 February 2022.

⁸⁵ Ibid. See also “Nigerian air force bombardments have in its wake civilian casualties: Is there an end in sight?”, Humangle, 3 May 2022.

⁸⁶ “Sources: Boko Haram kill 19 Nigeria herders in clashes”, Associated Press, 15 December 2019; “ISWAP terrorists kill 45 farmers in fresh attack on northeast Nigeria village”, Humangle, 24 May 2022; “Over 20 killed in Dikwa, Borno while scavenging for scrap metals”, *Daily Post*, 10 June 2022.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°170, *An Exit from Boko Haram? Assessing Nigeria's Operation Safe Corridor*, 19 March 2021.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group telephone interview, diplomat, 10 October 2022.

B. *Recommendations*

In presenting these risks, and arguing for a suspension of Borno state's camp closure policy, Nigeria's international partners should throw their weight behind the following specific recommendations:

- ❑ **Suspend IDP camp closures.** Absent a relocation plan that keeps faith with the principles set out in the Borno Safe Return Strategy, it would be premature to proceed with camp closures, particularly given the risks identified above. Consistent with the Strategy, camps should remain open until there are plans to return or resettle their inhabitants in a manner that is safe, dignified, informed and voluntary, in compliance with international norms.
- ❑ **Rescind restrictions on NGO assistance and facilitate NGO access to communities in need.** The government should immediately rescind restrictions on NGO assistance to IDPs, whether or not they recently relocated, and wherever they now reside. Rather than cutting off avenues of support, the authorities should work with NGOs to find ways to channel assistance to those who need it the most, especially IDPs who have been relocated to dangerous areas where they lack access to livelihoods and state services.

In some cases, NGOs may be reluctant to send personnel into these areas because of the security risks. Addressing concerns and improving access will require a coordinated effort among government and non-government actors. A variety of such mechanisms already exist at the state and federal levels. But the forums seem to convene infrequently and function largely as venues for the authorities to brief outside parties.⁸⁹ The relevant actors need to meet more often and with a greater focus on addressing specific challenges for relocated IDPs. To the extent that NGOs wish to address security concerns by negotiating access arrangements with local insurgents, state and federal authorities should remain open to that possibility, and civil society organisations with channels to the relevant actors should offer their good offices.

- ❑ **Bolster state support and economic opportunities for relocated IDPs.** The government and its partners should assist relocated IDPs in a coherent, sustained manner, with standardised aid packages in food and cash distributed more systematically. One-off support of the sort that authorities have offered, especially when distributed unevenly, can leave IDPs highly vulnerable. A full year of support so that relocated IDPs can establish themselves, plant crops and harvest them would have a more enduring impact. This support should extend to all those who have been resettled or returned after having been displaced – including persons who relocated voluntarily from outside formal camps.

Relatedly, to encourage economic self-sufficiency among relocated IDPs, the military should ensure that its officers do not compete with them by using their power to secure access to fishing sites, farmland or other scarce resources for personal benefit. Borno state should also roll out cash-for-work and credit schemes to help IDPs develop livelihoods.

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian workers, Maiduguri, February and July 2022.

- ❑ **Rescind movement restrictions on relocated IDPs.** IDPs should be able to move away from relocation sites with their relatives and belongings should they wish to do so – for economic, security or other reasons. The authorities should uphold the right of free movement on general principle – and doing so can also keep them informed of relocation sites that may not be viable.
- ❑ **Create or improve channels for relocated IDPs to convey their concerns to the Borno state authorities.** IDPs should have several means of communicating the challenges they are facing to Borno state authorities. Local officials and traditional rulers are a natural channel and should not be punished for conveying their constituents' concerns. International NGOs play or have played this role in some places and should be encouraged to take it up at relocation sites; Zulum's administration should not block resumption of their operations if they do so. Reporting by national and international media from or about the conditions at relocation sites is another way for IDP voices to be heard, and should be encouraged, including by civil society organisations active in those areas.
- ❑ **Develop and strengthen security and public services in the larger settlements of Bama and Monguno.** Towns like Bama and Monguno are larger and safer than settlements closer to the ISWAP heartlands, though by no means immune to jihadist infiltration, killings and kidnappings. They are already hubs for relocated IDPs and would be the primary fallback sites if the people resettled elsewhere were to be uprooted again – even though the increasing numbers of ISWAP and JAS defectors makes that solution less than ideal. To help manage overcrowding and possible tensions, the federal government and Borno state should widen the security perimeter around these towns and deploy more troops to guard them. While authorities should guide volunteers for relocation to these safer, larger towns in the absence of better alternatives, they can help preserve capacity there by suspending the camp closure policy as recommended, so that IDPs have other options. International NGOs should step up the services they provide in these towns.

VI. Conclusion

The Borno state government is understandably working to turn the page on a long-running conflict so that its constituents can enjoy the benefits of stability and economic development. But an accelerated closure of IDP camps and the return and resettlement of their inhabitants to areas that are unready to receive them will not help accomplish that objective. In fact, it could well prove counterproductive. Relocation to sites close to the war front – where residents have little access to the rest of the country, few if any public services and virtually no economic opportunities – risks embittering the people whose lives are put in peril and creating opportunities for the insurgents that the government is fighting. The best course for the government from both a human and state security perspective is to suspend premature camp closures and focus on getting conflict-displaced persons access to the resources and services that they will require to safely rebuild their lives, livelihoods and communities.

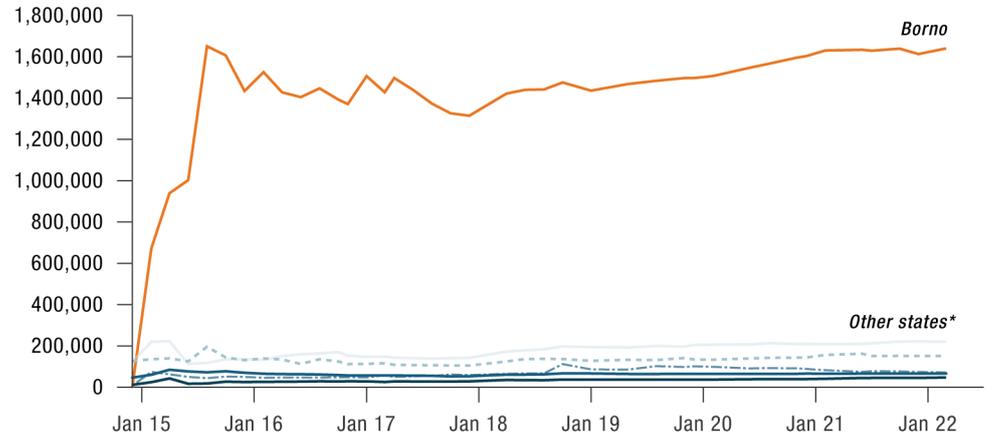
Abuja/Maiduguri/Brussels, 16 January 2023

Appendix A: Map of Borno



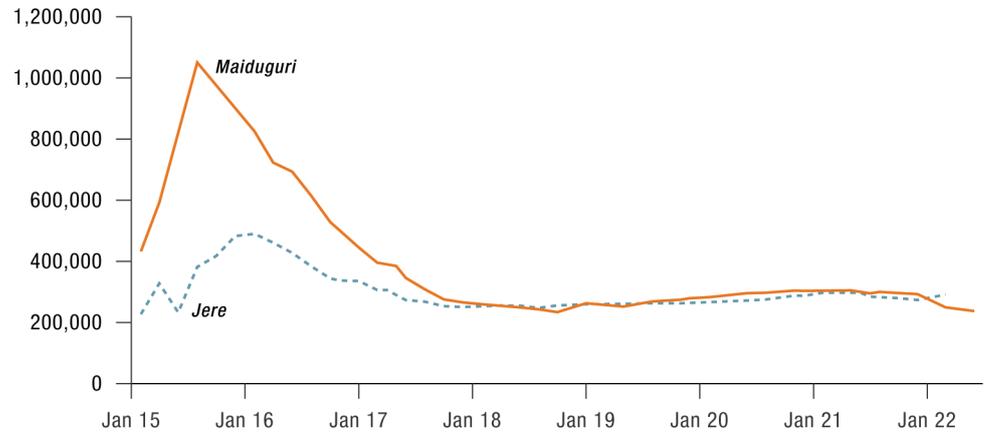
Appendix B: Numbers of Internally Displaced Persons

Figure 1: Numbers of IDPs in Nigeria's North East



Source: Estimates from the Displacement Tracking Matrix of the International Organization for Migration.
*Adamawa, Yobe, Taraba, Bauchi, Gombe.

Figure 2: Numbers of IDPs in Maiduguri (Maiduguri Metropolitan Council and Jere LGA)



Source: Estimates from the Displacement Tracking Matrix of the International Organization for Migration.

Appendix C: Official IDP Camps in Maiduguri

Camp name	# of individuals	Main areas of origin	Status	Areas of relocation
Stadium	12,000	Baga, Konduga	Closed (January 2021)	Maiduguri, Kukawa
Mogcolis	4,290	Abadam, Mobbar	Closed (May 2021)	Damasak, Auno, Maiduguri
NYSC	15,100	Konduga, Bama	Closed (June 2021)	Ajiri, Auno, Maiduguri, Konduga
Dalori 1	23,895 7,478 upon closure	Bama, Konduga	Closed (July 2022)	Bama, Jere, Konduga, Maiduguri, Gwoza
Farm Center	25,000	Mafa	Closed (August 2021)	Ngala, Bama, Konduga
Bakassi	41,852	Marte, Gwoza	Closed (November 2021)	Marte, Gwoza, Maiduguri
Teachers Village	41,466	Baga, Gamboru Ngala	Closed (January 2022)	Baga, Ngala, Maiduguri
Dalori 2	11,573 13,157 upon closure	Bama, Konduga, Gwoza	Closed (August 2022)	Soye, Konduga, Gwoza, Maiduguri, Bama, Banki
Gubio	22,846	Baga, Marte, Abadam, Gwoza, Kala Balge, Gubio, Bama	Closed (December 2022)	Not known
Muna Badawi	51,134	Mafa	Open	Not applicable

Source: Estimates provided by the Nigerian INGO Forum.

Appendix D: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

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Comfort Ero was appointed Crisis Group's President & CEO in December 2021. She first joined Crisis Group as West Africa Project Director in 2001 and later rose to become Africa Program Director in 2011 and then Interim Vice President. In between her two tenures at Crisis Group, she worked for the International Centre for Transitional Justice and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Liberia.

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