

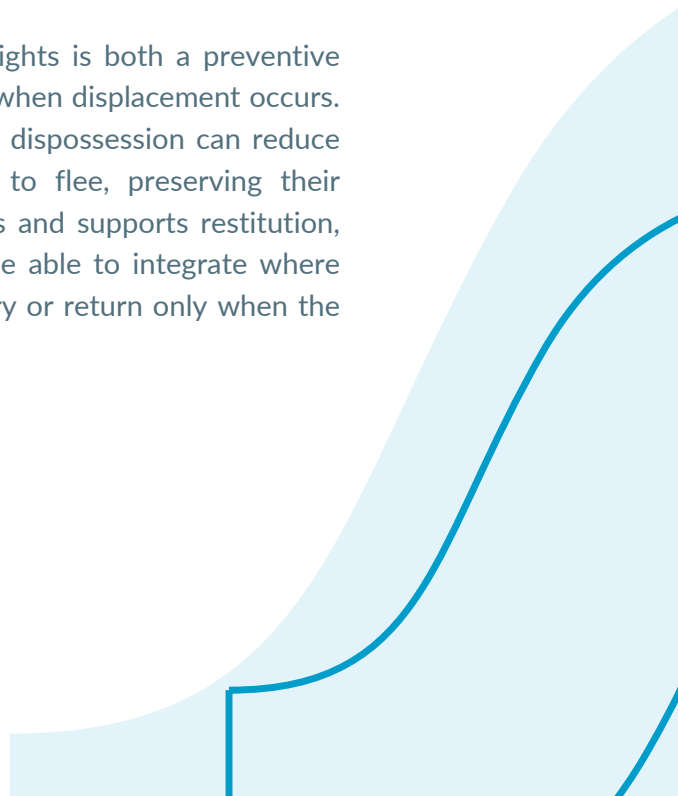


Honduras: Land Rights for Lasting Solutions

An Integrated Approach to Property Protection and Displacement Prevention.

In Honduras, protecting housing, land and property rights is both a preventive measure against forced displacement and a safeguard when displacement occurs. Secure tenure, reliable records and protection against dispossession can reduce the risk of displacement; when people are forced to flee, preserving their ownership and possession rights prevents further loss and supports restitution, recovery or another effective remedy. People must be able to integrate where they have found safety, settle elsewhere in the country or return only when the decision is voluntary, informed, safe and dignified.

Case study





At a glance

Country	Honduras.
Displacement context	Violence-related displacement in urban and rural areas. According to the 2024 national study by the National Institute of Statistics (INE), an estimated 423,845 people (4.5% of Honduras’s population) have experienced internal displacement due to violence at least once in their lifetime. The study also found that 38.5% of people displaced by violence had additionally experienced displacement due to disasters.
Government partners	Property Institute; Human Rights Secretariat and the Inter-institutional Commission for the Protection of Forcibly Displaced Persons.
Solution pathway	Strengthen tenure security, land registration and safeguards against dispossession to prevent forced displacement, while supporting local integration or settlement elsewhere, while preserving the possibility of voluntary, safe return and future recovery of property rights.
Main challenge	Homes and land were left unprotected; property and land rights were often unregistered; fear of reprisals discouraged reporting to authorities.
United Nations contribution	The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) supported legal analysis, community documentation, government tools, capacity building, participation and lesson learned from Colombia.
Results	The initiative translated Honduras’ legal protections in housing, land and property into operational measures through the Abandoned Property Registry, improved institutional coordination and new land-administration tools. It measured and georeferenced 437 plots, provided specialized legal guidance to 358 people, conducted 10 information fairs and engaged more than 150 community members, strengthening security of tenure, preventing dispossession and preserving access to restitution, local integration or safe and voluntary return.



1. Why losing a home became a barrier to rebuilding

In Honduras, the loss of housing, land and property (HLP) has prevented many internally displaced people from rebuilding their lives. An estimated 423,845 people -approximately 4.5 per cent of the population- have experienced internal displacement because of violence, and 68 per cent of those displaced report losing homes, land or other assets. With less than 30 per cent of properties formally registered in the country, families often lack the documentation needed to prove possession, recover abandoned property or protect themselves against fraudulent transactions, occupation and forced eviction. This legal uncertainty can lead to prolonged disputes and further violence, while also limiting access to public services, housing investment and sustainable livelihoods. The problem is particularly acute in urban areas affected by criminal control and in communities exposed to floods, landslides and drought.

2. Government action created an opening

In 2022, Honduras adopted the Law for the Prevention, Assistance and Protection of Internally Displaced Persons. The law recognized HLP protection as part of the national displacement response and mandated the creation of the Abandoned Property Registry (RBA). Its subsequent integration into the Unified Registration System of properties established an auditable process for registering, digitizing, assessing and protecting abandoned or dispossessed properties.

How the partnership worked

Since 2018, UNHCR and the National Property Institute have combined complementary capacities: UNHCR has built trust with and facilitated safe access to communities affected by violence, while the Property Institute has provided the legal authority and technical systems required for land surveying, cadastral identification and property registration. Early community-based work identified more than 300 abandoned properties in Tegucigalpa between 2018 and 2021, generating evidence for the development of the national protection mechanism of the Abandoned Property Registry. The partnership later piloted a community-based cadastral exercise in an informal settlement of more than 2,000 residents, originally established after Hurricane Mitch, where 437 plots were measured and georeferenced. This process enabled more than 1,000 families to obtain certificates of possession as a first step towards formal registration.



The partnership also supported access to property registration through specialized legal counselling for 358 people, organized 10 national information fairs in cities affected by displacement and engaged more than 150 participants through four community meetings. At the institutional level, it developed referral procedures between the Secretariat of Human Rights and the Property Institute, an interactive geographic viewer, abandoned property identification forms, operational manuals and a proposed expansion of the Land Survey Regulation from approximately 56 to more than 150 articles to add a conflict-sensitivity and protection approach to land surveying. Together, these interventions show how legislation, government leadership, trusted community engagement and practical registration tools can convert HLP rights into tangible area-based protection measures that reduce dispossession risks, strengthen security of tenure and support durable solutions to internal displacement.

A human moment: being heard before being asked for details

Before asking families for documents, parcel boundaries or details about abandoned property, UNHCR first listened to their experiences and concerns. In communities affected by violence, criminal control and climate-related hazards, discussions about land can expose people to further risks and revive the distress of displacement. Building trust through community meetings allowed residents to explain how they had occupied and organized the settlement, why formal documentation was missing and what barriers prevented them from approaching public institutions to formalize their property registration. This people-centred engagement enabled more than 150 residents to participate in four community meetings and laid the groundwork for the safe measurement and georeferencing of 437 plots. By treating residents as partners rather than data sources, UNHCR and the National Property Institute transformed a technical land survey into a protection process that could help more than 1,000 families take a first step towards secure tenure.

What remains unresolved

Despite important progress, the gap between the scale of housing, land and property needs and the reach of existing mechanisms remains substantial. Fewer than 30 per cent of properties in Honduras are formally registered, while 68 per cent of internally displaced people report losses involving their homes, land or assets.



Structural and emerging risks remain unresolved as well. Overlapping claims, outdated cadastral information, informal tenure and limited access to land-administration services continue to expose displaced and at-risk families to dispossession, eviction and violence.

These challenges are not merely operational constraints but reflect deeper structural weaknesses in land governance. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) has repeatedly found that land conflicts in Honduras are rooted in longstanding deficiencies in territorial administration, including the failure to delimit, demarcate and protect land rights, the coexistence of overlapping claims and titles, inadequate territorial regularization processes, and weaknesses in cadastral and property registration systems. In the 2015 case of *Garífuna Community of Triunfo de la Cruz and its Members v. Honduras*, the Court concluded that the lack of effective delimitation and demarcation creates a permanent climate of legal uncertainty regarding the extent of collective property rights and undermines the peaceful use and enjoyment of land.¹

Security constraints make it difficult for institutions to verify claims and deliver services in areas controlled by criminal groups. At the same time, limited interoperability between displacement information systems, cadastral database land administration platforms and property-registries reduce the State's capacity to identify risks, prevent dispossession and provide timely protection measures. Notably, the Inter-American Court has ordered Honduras to strengthen mechanisms regulating its property registration system as a measure to prevent the recurrence of territorial conflicts.²

Further safeguards are also needed for women and for Indigenous, Afro-Honduran and *campesino* communities whose collective or ancestral rights may not fit conventional individual property registration models. In addition, concerns associated with the 2026 Agro-Industrial Law and climate-related displacement underscore the need to ensure that legal reforms do not create new dispossession risks.

The central unresolved challenge is therefore moving from successful tools and pilot projects to a sustained, accessible and nationwide system capable of preventing loss of property, restoring rights and supporting durable solutions. This requires the establishment of an integrated national land administration and governance system that brings together cadastral institutions, municipal cadastres, property registries, territorial planning authorities, dispute-resolution mechanisms and systems for the protection of displaced populations. Such a system would strengthen legal certainty, address overlapping claims, improve institutional coordination, protect collective and ancestral land rights, reduce violence and conflict, while contributing to durable solutions, social cohesion and sustainable solutions.

¹ Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR). (2015a). *Garífuna Community of Triunfo de la Cruz and its Members v. Honduras*. Judgment of October 8, 2015 (Merits, Reparations and Costs). San José, Costa Rica. https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_305_esp.pdf

² Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, *Comunidad Garífuna Triunfo de la Cruz y sus Miembros vs. Honduras*, Sentencia de 8 de octubre de 2015 (Fondo, Reparaciones y Costas), párrs. de reparaciones y garantías de no repetición. La Corte ordenó al Estado crear mecanismos adecuados para regular su sistema de Registro de la Propiedad. Disponible en: https://corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/resumen_305_esp.pdf%20