A home away from home

Photo: UNHCR/Sebastian Rich
The world we are living in

- 59.5 million persons across the world – equivalent to the entire population of Italy – have been forcibly displaced from their homes
- 19.5 million persons are defined as refugees (5.1 million Palestinian refugees are registered by UNRWA, while 14.4 million persons are under the UNHCR mandate)
- 38.2 million persons are currently internally displaced within the borders of their own country
- 1.8 million persons are seeking asylum
- Every day, 42,500 persons are forced to leave their homes due to conflict and persecution
- More than 1 million refugees and migrants arrived in Europe alone in 2015

(Figures relate to 2014 & 2015)

The language of displacement

**Refugees** – persons who have fled their home and country because of “a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion”, according to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention. Many refugees are in exile to escape the effects of disasters, either natural or human-made; the number of climate refugees is set to increase as climate change causes more and more droughts, hurricanes and other events affecting large numbers of people.

Developing countries host 80% of the world’s refugees. The 48 countries officially classified as “least developed” provide asylum to some 2.3 million refugees.

**Asylum seekers** – persons who describe themselves as refugees and who have fled their homes, but whose claim refugee status has not yet been definitively evaluated in the country to which they have fled. The asylum application process may take years; national asylum systems exist to decide which asylum-seekers actually qualify for international protection. Those judged through proper procedures not to be refugees, nor to be in need of any other form of international protection, may be sent back to their home countries.

**Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)** – persons who have not crossed an international border but have fled their home and moved to a different region within their own country. For example the years of conflict between armed groups and government forces have resulted in an Iraqi IDP population of 3.3 million by end of 2015.

**Stateless Persons** – persons who do not have a recognised nationality. Statelessness is usually caused by discrimination against particular groups. Stateless people’s lack of identification — a certificate of their citizenship — can exclude them from access to important government services and rights including health care, education or employment. The Rohingya people, for example, are viewed by the government of Myanmar as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, despite having lived in Myanmar for generations. The Rohingya have been stateless since their nationality was removed by the Myanmar government in 1982 on grounds of ethnicity.

**Returnees** – former refugees who return to their own country or region of origin after spending time in exile. Returnees need continuous support and assistance with reintegration to ensure they can rebuild their lives back home. During 2014, 126,800 refugees returned to their countries of origin, the lowest number of returns since 1983.

Sources

Better Shelter is a social enterprise, which develops and provides temporary homes for persons displaced by armed conflict and/or natural disasters.

Our mission, achieved through continuous innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration, is to improve the lives of persons displaced by armed conflict and natural disasters. By developing innovative, cost-effective shelter solutions for the millions of people who have lost their own homes, we enable our partners to change their temporary living situation for the better. The Better Shelter was developed in collaboration with the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR and the IKEA Foundation.
The simple fact of having a home, a right so fundamental most of us take it for granted, can dramatically improve the physical and psychological situation of refugees.

The Better Shelter meets the basic needs for the activities of basic living, for privacy, security and familiarity. It is a safe base offering a sense of peace, identity and dignity. And though it may be humble, it is somewhere even the most vulnerable people on earth can call a home away from home.

Tents, most common form or shelter used in emergency relief, are good as a rapid response: with tents relief actors can provide a roof over people’s heads very quickly in the aftermath of a disaster. But while even the strongest tent will only last a matter of months, refugees often spend several years – even generations – in camps.

The Better Shelter is designed to last for at least three years, and is suitable for situations where local materials or construction workers are in short supply. The Better Shelter does not cause deforestation, as may be the case when using local materials for shelter in large settlements or when the supply of materials is scarce.

The Better Shelter minimises overhead costs, as everything required to build it is included. Assembly is much quicker than constructing traditional houses using local methods – and it is easy to scale.

For many million refugees living in camps or temporary settlements, a tent is the only home they have. Imagine existing in a never-ending world of insecurity and chaos where your life is on hold. You have had to leave your own home, your routines and your everyday life behind. Now, all around are 25,000 other people just like you, packed so tightly you can hear every conversation, every argument, and every crying child. Sanitary conditions are poor. Disease is rife. You and your family are hungry and have very little opportunity to find work or to earn money. As a woman you feel unsafe and you have no way of knowing if this misery will last days, weeks or years. Add to this your traumatic memories of violence and war, which will haunt you forever.

For the millions of people living in refugee camps around the world, this is reality. This is life.
# Product

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Specification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Floor area</strong></td>
<td>175 m² / 188.4 ft²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minimum ceiling height</strong></td>
<td>1,840 mm / 72.4 in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sphere compliant</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Windows</strong></td>
<td>4 pieces (640 cm² each) / 99.2 in²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ventilation</strong></td>
<td>2 pieces (620 cm² each) / 96.1 in²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Door</strong></td>
<td>1 piece (740x1690 mm) / 29.1x66.5 in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expected lifespan</strong></td>
<td>3 years with basic maintenance in moderate climates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Resistance to UV load**
- 2,700h UVA – 100% functionality

**Wind speed [EN 1991 EC1]**
- 18 m/s  
  - 40.3 mph

**Snow loads [EN 1991 EC1]**
- 10 kg/ m²  
  - 2 lb/ft²

**Modular**
- Yes

**PV system**
- 4h light/day and USB power

**Package weight / volume**
- ~169 kg/113 m³ / ~372 lb/39.9 ft³

- **Box A**
  - 1990x1090x240 mm
  - (~89.5 kg)  
  - 6.52x3.57x0.79 ft (~197 lb)

- **Box B**
  - 1990x1090x280 mm
  - (~79.5 kg)  
  - 6.52x3.57x0.91 ft (~175 lb)

**Pallet dimensions**
- 1990x1120x170 mm
  - (~39.5 kg) (may vary)  
  - 6.52x3.7x0.55 ft (~88 lb) (may vary)

**Container 40 feet HC**
- 48 shelters

**Container 40 feet DC**
- 36 shelters

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*Photo: Jonas Nyström*
Safe and dignified

Better Shelter is designed to help the millions of people worldwide who have fled armed conflicts, persecution or natural disasters, who have often been through traumatic experiences, and who face an uncertain and extremely vulnerable future.

The Better Shelter becomes their home away from home in temporary settlements, transitory sites and camps – a place where they can close the door and get a little privacy and calm.

The shelter resembles a house, with semi-hard, non-transparent walls. It has four windows and a high ceiling, enabling residents to stand upright inside. The door, lockable both from the inside and the outside, lets everyone – women and children especially – feel safer when they are at home. A solar powered lamp provides light during the hours of darkness. The shelter allows residents a higher level of safety, security and dignity than a tent.

Sustainable

The Better Shelter’s lightweight yet robust frame is made from strong galvanised steel. It can be anchored to the ground and will withstand rain, snow and winds. The roof and walls are made of polyolefin panels treated with UV protection to reduce deterioration caused by strong sunlight. The steel frame is modular, and many of the structure’s components are interchangeable. The shelter can easily be dismantled, moved and reassembled. Unlike tents, which may require the entire structure to be changed if any part is damaged, components on Better Shelter units can be replaced individually. The expected lifespan of the structure is three years in moderate climates.

The roof and wall panels are made from plastic polymer and can be incinerated or recycled in the same way as plastic bottles and other plastic waste.
Cost efficient

Better Shelter is safer, more dignified, longer lasting and more cost-efficient than the tents traditionally used in disaster relief. Its design is optimised for high volume production and flat pack logistics, which makes it even more efficient and affordable.

Modular and adaptable

The modular design of the Better Shelter makes it adaptable for different uses and locations, as can be seen from the real world applications our partners and end users are creating for themselves.

The windows and door can be placed in a number of configurations to suit location, use and preference, allowing the layout to be adapted to personal needs. The vertical walls and high ceiling allow beds, tables, shelves and medical equipment to be housed in the shelter, while sections can be added and removed to create shorter or longer structures. The frame can be clad with local materials as desired and available, and damaged components can be replaced without having to dismantle or replace the entire structure.
Easy to assemble and disassemble

Assembling a 17.5 m² Better Shelter requires a team of four people and takes around four hours depending on experience, conditions and location. The shelter is delivered in two cardboard boxes which have been packed to reflect the order in which components will be used in construction. The two boxes can be lifted by four people and also contain all necessary tools and instruction manuals.

The shelter is constructed in three stages:

1) Steel foundation
2) Roof with ventilation and solar panel
3) Walls with windows and door.
Capacity Building

Better Shelter offers training and support to ensure safe and effective assembly of our shelters both before and during implementation. We support our partners in increasing their capacity and optimize their available resources, in order to ensure as many people as possible get the shelter they need, as quickly as possible.

Working side by side with our partners around the world also gives us the valuable opportunity to monitor quality, understand our partners’ shelter requirements in their humanitarian programs and to both gather and offer feedback on the assembly and use of our shelters.

The importance of quality

Assembling a Better Shelter is not difficult, but it does have to be done correctly. Components are standardised throughout the structure and users will quickly become familiar with them. All necessary tools and manuals are included.

It is however vital to remember that our product is a shelter: a temporary home that will have to stand for several years, enduring the changing seasons as well as its residents’ everyday use. For this reason it is of the utmost importance that the shelter is well built: for instance that the foundation is correctly assembled and anchored to the ground, that wind bearing structures have been properly thought through and built, and that the panels are adequately fitted and inspected to protect its residents from the elements.

Assembly of one shelter requires minimum 4 persons for a safe and correct completed assembly. Experienced teams can find efficient ways of building multiple shelters at once, for example by assembling the foundations and roofs simultaneously, and by visually inspecting the foundation and panel alignments during assembly.

By supporting our partners in quickly, efficiently and correctly setting up our shelters, we help the humanitarian community maximise its potential to offer shelter to displaced people fleeing conflict and natural disasters.
According to UNHCR data, more than 800,000 refugees and other migrants arrived in Greece in 2015, many travelling to Lesvos from Turkey in overcrowded inflatable boats. UNHCR ordered 1520 Better Shelter units for its operations in Greece during the autumn of 2015.

Better Shelter supported UNHCR with training and supervising shelter assembly at the Kara Tepe site, where up to 2000 mostly Syrian refugees would stay while they waited to take the ferry to Athens. The team worked with UNHCR’s camp manager and a local team of construction workers, building shelters through September and the first half of October.

As well as being used for housing, Better Shelter units were also deployed as healthcare clinics for examination and treatment. A row of shelters built with open sides allowed administrators to process and register new arrivals, while other staff carried out administrative work indoors. By mid October 2015, over 200 shelters had been raised in the Kara Tepe and Moria sites.

Six months after they were first assembled, the shelters have proven themselves to be able to withstand intensive use over a harsh winter, enduring heavy rain and winds reaching over 20m/s.

“Case
Better Shelter in Kara Tepe, Lesvos 2015/2016

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Bilar, 11 years old, from Syria

“There’s a huge difference. This shelter withstands wind, humidity and rain. The tents however are made of nylon, and we and all our things were about to blow away [the first night]”
Lava from Syria

“We’d like to see refugees given access to permanent homes as soon as possible after arriving in Europe. But as the current situation leads to many having to stay in transit camps during several stages of their arduous journeys, we are pleased to be able to provide families with a moment of calm and safety inside a Better Shelter”
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On 25 April 2015, several districts of Nepal were damaged after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, followed by numerous after-shocks. This event killed over 8,000 people and destroyed 300,000 homes, leaving thousands of people without shelter, access to basic services and medical care.

On 29 April, medical teams from the independent humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) began to reach people trapped in isolated villages in remote areas of the country. The organisation ordered 50 Better Shelter units for their operations in Nepal, which were delivered during the early recovery work.

The organisation primarily used the Better Shelter units as temporary health care facilities in the district, helping ensure the continuation of basic primary health care until more permanent buildings could be constructed.

MSF made use of Better Shelter’s modular design, with both smaller and larger constructions being assembled to accommodate specific needs. An X-ray facility required a larger building, while Médecins du Monde’s (MdM) staff accommodation was built smaller to improve heating efficiency during the cold season.

“We are pleased to have provided Better Shelter units to MSF, enabling them to provide medical assistance to people in villages affected by this terrible earthquake” says John Tzanos, Head of Service at Better Shelter.
Our story

Better Shelter began in 2010 as a small design and innovation project based in Hallefors, Sweden, driven by the belief that sustainable design can make a difference to humanitarian relief.

Forging ground-breaking partnerships with UNHCR and the IKEA Foundation, Better Shelter began to develop ideas and designs for new shelter solutions. Working with designers, engineers, companies and institutions it created prototypes which were tested and further developed using the insights and experiences of refugees in Ethiopia and Iraq.

Better Shelter aims to be the leader in emergency and temporary shelter innovation, and continues to develop its products together with its partners, customers and, most importantly, the people who live in our shelters, collecting invaluable feedback that will make future models even better.

UNHCR signed an initial frame agreement of 30,000 shelters in late 2014. Today, thousands of Better Shelters are acting as temporary homes, registration centres, medical facilities and food distribution points in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

Better Shelter provides assembly training and support to help its partners use their resources efficiently to provide displaced people with shelter as quickly as possible during or after a humanitarian emergency.

As a social enterprise, Better Shelter strives to create a safer, more dignified home away from home for millions of displaced people across the world through smart design, innovation and modern technology. With and for refugees.
“The place, where my wife and children are, and where we all eat together and sleep, is my home. There is a door to open, no need to bend, and you can open a window like in a real house.”

Hussein
Syrian Refugee in Kawergosk Refugee camp, Erbil, Iraq

“If you compare life in the tents and now life in these shelters, it’s a thousand times better; there is no comparison.”

Saffa
Iraqi IDP in Al Jame’a’a Camp, Baghdad, Iraq

“It is safer for us women and children. This wall you cannot see through. However, when we change our clothes inside a tent, people can see in from the outside. And that is not acceptable.”

Lava
Syrian Refugee in Kara Tepe transit site, Lesvos, Greece