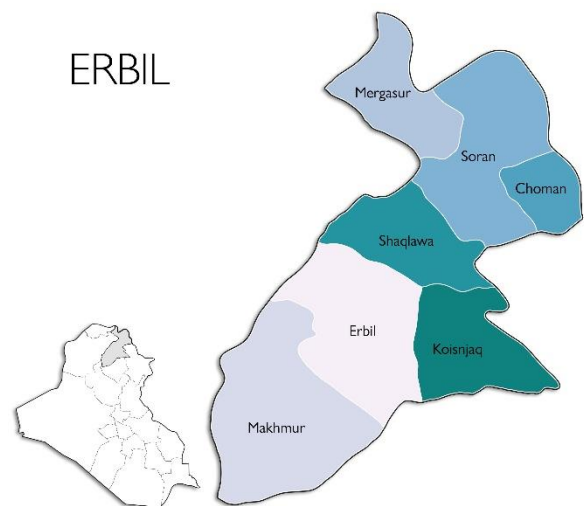# ERBIL RETURN PROCESS MAPPING[1]

INTRODUCTION

The Returns Working Group (RWG) conducts return process mapping (RPM) to outline the general procedures IDPs are expected to follow to return to areas of origin. The mapping involves engagement with IDPs, authority and government counterparts and, where relevant, camp management entities. The mapping intends to increase the awareness of actors involved in returns procedures as well as to engage in a dialogue with authority counterparts to share feedback from those involved in the process, particularly if there are opportunities to ease the procedures for IDPs. This RPM focuses on Erbil, outlining the return process for both in-camp and out of camp IDPs returning to locations in Ninewa governorate and Makhmur district (the most common areas of origin for IDPs in Erbil). All information is relevant at time of writing and may be subject to change. Return process mapping for other areas in Iraq can be found on the following link.

OVERVIEW OF ERBIL

Erbil governorate hosts 236,496 IDP individuals (DTM data, June 2020), of whom 219,252 live in out-of-camp settings and 17,244 live in camps (mainly Hersham, Baharka and Debaga). Ninewa is the main governorate of origin for out of camp IDPs (111,456 individuals) – with Mosul as the main district of origin – followed by Anbar, Baghdad and Salah al- Din. The majority of Erbil in-camp IDPs originate from Ninewa, but a notable number are also from Makhmur district. The majority of IDPs living in Erbil have been displaced for more than four years, with the biggest waves of displacement occurring between June 2014 to July 2017.

ERBIL

In addition to DTM data, data from the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MOMD) also classifies IDPs who are in Hasansham U2, U3 and Khazer M1 camps as IDPs displaced in Erbil. According to MOMD's June data, these three camps host an additional 16,343 IDPs (individuals), the majority of whom are from Ninewa.[2] Following a recent visit and announcement by the Minister of Migration and Displacement, anticipated efforts are underway to address the obstacles faced by many of these IDPs to facilitate the return of those intending to return.

---

[1] This return process mapping was prepared through key informant interviews with local authorities and security actors responsible for facilitating IDP returns, as well as IDPs and returnees who have undergone the process. Information is valid as of August 2020 and will be updated as needed.
[2] According to CCCM data, the current (August 2020) figures for these 3 camps is 15,375 individuals ie Hasansham U2 (4,230), U3 (5,461) and Khazer M1 (5,684).

BEFORE RETURN

The return process varies depending on whether the IDP is returning to locations within KRI or to Ninewa and whether the IDP resides in a camp or a non-camp setting. Broadly, IDPs obtain approval from the area of displacement to facilitate their departure and passage through KRI checkpoints. KRI Asayish does not conduct a security vetting of IDPs prior to their departure. However, IDPs need to obtain security clearance processed by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in the area of origin prior to return. Most IDPs reportedly visit their areas of origin before starting the return process to check the security and economic situation. IDPs generally receive information regarding conditions in their areas of origin from relatives, friends and community members who have returned, in addition to other information sources such as social media.

- ### Obtaining clearance in areas of origin:

The process for obtaining clearance in the area of origin in Ninewa from Erbil is not standardized as it is for IDPs who are in districts such as Mosul. Families in Erbil need to first obtain clearance in their areas of origin and this is done by the head of household who visits the area of origin and through mukhtars and tribal leaders in their areas of origin obtains clearance from the security actors operating in the areas of origin. For families with social cohesion concerns, processes must be initiated with community leaders (Sheikhs) and concluded before security vetting. Without clearance from areas of origin, IDPs will not be permitted to pass through checkpoints that are controlled by security forces and the PMF.[3] It is during these visits that the head of household is also able to obtain documentation (letter) via their local Mukhtar in the area of origin and thereafter through the ISF and police which will allow them to transport their belongings once they obtain the clearance. IDPs who have returned to Ba'aj, for example, have reported that for them this prior clearance from their areas of origin is essential for their return.

IDPs who intend to return to Makhmur (the location of origin for a significant portion of IDPs in Erbil) are required to visit the Mayor of Makhmur's office to request a return permit letter. The Mayor's office forwards the request to the Makhmur police office to process the clearance for the IDPs. After being cleared, the IDP may visit their local Mukhtar to inform them of their return and register their name. The process of obtaining security clearance normally take up to two days, though it is dependent on the availability of staff at the police office.

The lack of a clear standard process has been flagged as a concern by humanitarian actors as this can result in a lack of accountability or clarity in decision making.

- ### In-camp IDPs

In practice, the IDP head of household visits the area of origin to obtain clearance. IDPs in Erbil camps can visit their areas of origin and obtain passes from the camp to facilitate their access through checkpoints. Once they have obtained clearance, IDPs proceed by verbally informing the Mukhtar of their camp sector of their intention

---

[3] Key informants report that in some instances such as death in the family, IDPs will be allowed to pass through checkpoints without return clearance.

to return (there is a Mukhtar for each sector in the camp). The Mukhtar submits the list of IDP names who have expressed their interest to return to the camp management. The camp management prepares a return letter in Arabic, listing each family member's name, to request the passage of the household through KRI and Iraqi federal checkpoints. An MOMD representative, who is based in the camp three days a week, will stamp the return letter. It takes one day for camp management to process the letter but depending on the day of request, the household may need to wait longer for the MOMD stamp and for the availability of transportation if they are depending on MOMD buses for the return journey.

The list of names will be sent by camp management to the responsible partner agency to close their file as IDPs. The deactivation of the IDP file normally occurs on the day of the IDP household's departure. IDPs in humanitarian agency-managed camps receive a card (known as ration or assistance card) that entitles them to in-camp assistance, and upon departing the camps, they may retain the card should they need out-of-camp assistance in their areas of return in the future. The camp management returns the Identity Cards (ID) to the returning IDPs – IDs are kept with camp management for the duration of an IDP household's stay in the camp. The MOMD return letter is used by IDPs as proof of their displacement, which they hand over to their local MOMD branch once they arrive in their areas of origin for the purposes of registering their return. After the implementation of COVID-19 restrictions, checkpoints have not allowed families to pass through checkpoints without the MOMD return letter.

- ### Out of camp IDPs

Like in camp IDPs, IDPs in out-of-camp locations require clearance from areas of origin prior to their return. Once they obtain the clearance, they proceed to inform the Mukhtar of their neighborhood in their area of displacement of their intention to return. The Mukhtar hands them a letter directed to Asayish requesting a permit letter for moving household items.[4] Asayish in turn prepares a permit letter authorizing the movement of the household's belongings through the checkpoints. Asayish does not screen IDPs as they had been screened upon their arrival in Erbil as IDPs. IDPs finally visit the MOMD branch in Erbil to obtain a return letter. The process of obtaining a letter from the Mukthar and Asayish normally takes one day, while the MOMD letter may take one to three days to be issued.

A number of Kurdish IDPs from Makhmur are reportedly reluctant to return to their areas of origin due to a lack of trust in the local authorities and armed groups controlling the area. KIs report that the presence of joint Peshmerga and ISF forces in Makhmur may potentially prompt return.

DAY OF RETURN

- ### Transportation

MOMD transportation is available from Hasansham U2, U3 and Khazer camps but not from the urban camps such as Baharka, Debaga and Hersham, where there are greater availability of transport options and where,

---

[4] The procedure also applies to host community when moving their place of residence to another neighborhood.

therefore, IDPs mostly use private cars and public transport. Even when MOMD buses are provided, IDPs are required to arrange separate transport for their belongings.

MOMD provides buses once a week, depending on the number of IDPs (each bus can carry 25 people) returning. If the IDPs are from different locations of Ninewa, the bus will take them to Mosul, from where IDPs will have to continue to their area of origin using their own means (roughly 60 USD from Mosul). However, if a large group from a specific area are to return collectively, the bus will take them directly to this location. An MOMD official is present in the bus to escort returnees through checkpoints. When the buses are available, IDPs who prefer to return using their private cars may follow MOMD buses for the purpose of being escorted and assisted by MOMD staff, while also having the option to depart separately. The names of the IDPs are checked against the security database at the first checkpoint manned by the ISF. If their names are not on the wanted list, they will proceed to their areas of origin.

The escort can help with most problems that the returnees may face at the checkpoints, especially regarding issues faced with Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) due to perceived affiliation or tribal issues. Returnees are normally required to return their tents to camp management but in cases where they do not have accommodation in their areas of origin, they will be permitted to take the tents with them. It must be noted that since 10th June, MOMD has not provided transportation in the Hasansham and Khazer camps due to a reported lack of resources.

- ▪ <u>Coordination of Movements</u>

For in-camp IDPs (Hasansham and Khazer) returning to Ninewa using MOMD transport, MOMD will coordinate with all the checkpoints under the control of the Iraqi federal government to facilitate the passage of returnees on their way to their areas of origin. Asayish and Zeravani forces are present in the KRI checkpoints, while PMF and Iraqi military forces man the checkpoints that are under the Iraqi federal government's control. Key informants (KIs) report that there are instances where IDPs return on their own and are kept for 3-4 hours at ISF and PMF checkpoints and in some instances, return to camps after being refused at checkpoints, even after having obtained clearance from areas of origin. See next section for more information.

- ▪ <u>Appeal Process and Checkpoint challenges:</u>

According to key informants among authorities in Erbil, there are no reports of return requests being rejected, meaning that KRI normally approves the return of IDPs to their areas of origin. However, there have been cases where IDPs were forced to return to camps after being turned back at checkpoints under federal government control during return trips – primarily due to perceived affiliation, tribal issues and tensions or the PMF's non-recognition of clearance granted in areas of origin. While MOMD may in some instances coordinate with relevant actors to resolve these issues, recently, in the absence of MOMD escort, some IDPs have been forced to return to the camps. IDPs with certain protection concerns who may wish to return will not initiate the process at all. In some instances, IDPs who have similar names to persons who are on wanted lists are reportedly arrested at the checkpoints. In addition, some IDPs who have served prison sentences in KRI may

be reluctant to return in fear of being interrogated by federal security forces and being prosecuted again as federal authorities do not recognize the KRI judicial process. IDPs who fail to obtain clearance in their areas of origin are unable to return until they resolve their legal or tribal issues. Those who have obtained clearance but were prevented from returning by PMF have reportedly raised their concerns with MOMD hoping that high level interventions will facilitate their return.

AFTER RETURN

- ▪ Closure of Displacement File

The process upon return varies between different districts within Ninewa. For instance, IDPs returning to Sinjar are required to inform the Mukhtar of their area of origin of their return, after which the Mukhtar will inform the local police and mayor's office about the return. However, in Mosul and other districts, the returnee is required to directly inform the local police or mayor's office about their return. Registering with an MOMD office is optional for the returnees, though registration with MOMD will entitle returnees to a return grant of 1,500,000 IQD, in addition to other forms of assistance from MOMD.