

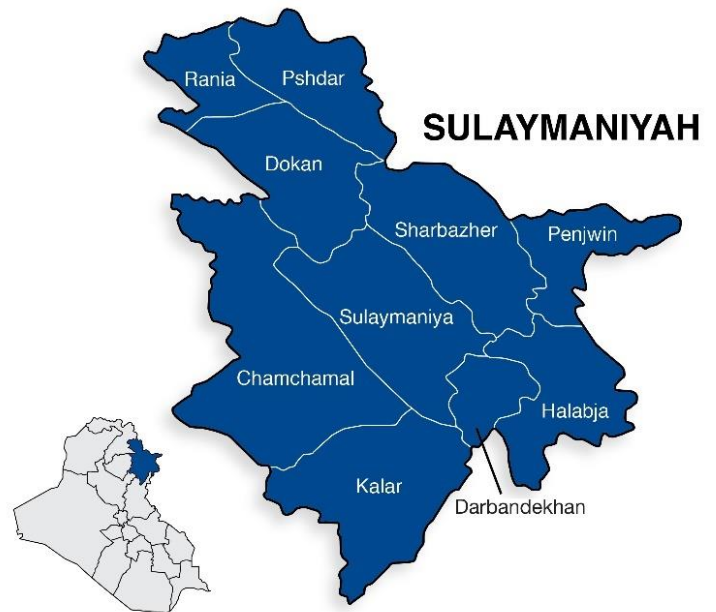
SULAYMANIYAH RETURN PROCESS¹

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 Sulaymaniyah, outlining the return process for both in-camp and out of camp IDPs returning to locations mostly in Salah al-Din (the most common area of origin for IDPs in Sulaymaniyah). 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 Sulaymaniyah

Sulaymaniyah Governorate hosts 139,860 IDPs (DTM June 2020), the majority of whom live in Sulaymaniyah district. Over 120,000 IDPs live in out-of-camp settings, while over 15,000 IDPs live in camps. Salah al-Din (SAD) is the main governorate of origin for IDPs in Sulaymaniyah (36,162 individuals), followed by Diyala, Baghdad and Anbar. The majority of IDPs in Sulaymaniyah (nearly 70%) have been displaced for more than 3 years and are thus considered to be at risk of protracted displacement. Between April and June 2020, more than 124 families returned to SAD governorate (mostly Yathrib), necessitating an understanding of the return process that IDPs must follow to return to SAD.



General remarks

The return process from Sulaymaniyah varies slightly for in-camp IDPs compared with those who reside outside of camps. The entire process is split between

¹ Information for the Sulaymaniyah to SAD return process is collected through key informant interviews with security actors, local authorities, humanitarian workers, mukhtars, IDPs and returnees who have undergone the process. Information is valid as of 20 July 2020 and will be updated periodically as needed.

procedures that are managed by authorities in the area of displacement and procedures managed by authorities in areas of return in SAD.

Before Return

Generally, IDPs planning to return must obtain letters either from camp management or local mukhtars (out of camp). The IDPs must also notify the local Asayish of their intention to return, eventually handing over their residency cards and obtaining a permission letter from the mayor or governor's office, which will facilitate the return trip and access through KRI checkpoints.

- In-camp IDPs:

Camp departure formalities

In-camp IDPs normally start the return process by verbally informing camp management of their intention to return. Camp management will then issue a letter for the IDP on the same day, noting the IDP's interest to leave the camp and return to their area of origin (AoO).

The IDPs must fill in a clearance form with the help of a camp management mobilizer to hand over returnable items (e.g. trash cans and kitchen sinks) that they received in the camp to the camp management. The IDPs must also provide proof of payment for electricity generator bills. IDPs are allowed to take their tents with them to their areas of origin when they leave the camp. In addition, IDPs are required to sign a letter of agreement with camp management declaring that their return is voluntary.

IDPs must also visit the Asayish office based in the camp to hand over their residency card and Asayish code. The IDPs will not undergo security checks or interviews in the Asayish offices as they had already been checked and cleared upon their initial arrival to the camp.

Permission Letter (Non-exposure permit)

The camp management then requests a permission letter (Non-exposure permit letter) on behalf of the IDP from the mayor or governorate's office in Sulaymaniyah to facilitate the return trip and access through KRI checkpoints during the trip. The time frame for obtaining the non-exposure permit depends on the time it takes for the IDP to finalize the required papers such as the agreement letter, the camp clearance form and proof of electricity bill payments, in addition to the Asayish formalities. These procedures can be completed in less than a day. The governorate office may issue the non-exposure permit letter within the same day, with a maximum duration of two days.

The permission letter is active for only seven days inside KRI, meaning that IDPs must leave Sulaymaniyah within this time limit. A copy of the permission letter will be sent to JCC and MOMD to close the displacement file of the IDPs. IDPs are required to register their return in their AoO to ensure they are eligible for receiving the MOMD returnee grant and other assistance provided by MOMD. In addition to facilitating access through

checkpoints, the permission letter is also used as proof that the returning IDPs were living in Sulaymaniyah. Letters and approvals are issued for free to all in-camp IDPs. Protection partners have reported receiving reports of instances IDPs being asked to pay fees/ bribes at certain checkpoints in Kirkuk.

- Out of camp IDPs:

IDPs living in out-of-camp settings must visit the Mukhtar in their area of displacement to obtain a support letter addressed to the Asayish to facilitate the security clearance process (the letter costs 3,000 IQD).² Unlike with in-camp IDPs, the non-exposure letter can be issued by either Asayish, the mayor's office or governor's office (internal affairs unit). Like in-camp IDPs, out of camp IDPs are required to return their KRI residency cards and Asayish code. The Asayish code is similar to a security identity card and confirms that an individual has performed all the security-related procedures in their area of residence. The non-exposure permit can be obtained in the same day, but may also take up to two days.

The non-exposure permit letter is required at the checkpoints for Arab IDPs returning to their areas of origin (AoO) in the federal Iraq government. However, Kurdish IDPs who return to Kurdish majority areas such as Jalawla and Tooz Khormato are permitted to move between their AoO and Sulaymaniyah without requiring any displacement-related documents such as residency or Asayish codes. According to key informants, once an IDP closes their displacement profile, they lose their IDP entitlements in Sulaymaniyah. Furthermore, IDPs who had resided in camps cannot return to camps, except in special cases. However, should an IDP re-displace to Sulaymaniyah, they would have to undergo formal screening procedures once again with Asayish, and may only return to out of camp locations once their IDP status is reinstated.

- The Vetting Process:

Though IDPs must notify the local Asayish office of their intention to return, no security screening process is conducted prior to return. IDPs in Sulaymaniyah are only screened prior to their initial entry into Sulaymaniyah camps. A commissioner from Asayish is based in both Ashti and Arbat camps to collect residency cards and Asayish codes from the IDPs who will return to their AoO.

The authorities in Sulaymaniyah (JCC) require the IDP's Asayish code as the main document for issuing the non-exposure permit letter. Therefore, even if Iraqi identity documents (e.g. national ID) are missing, IDPs will not face any challenges in obtaining a return letter in the area of displacement.

Key informants mentioned that as of the reporting date, no IDP has been denied the non-exposure permit from Sulaymaniyah, but IDPs from certain locations in SAD, such as Saadiyah and Muqdadiyah, are required to undergo security clearance processes in their AoO. In such locations, IDPs must obtain security clearance prior to their return.

² The 3,000 IQD is the amount paid by all Iraqis for official processes.

Salah Al-Din security clearance

The vetting process is different depending on the exact location of origin, but the general process is as follows:

- The IDP head of household must travel from Sulaymaniyah to SAD and will be checked at all the federal government checkpoints until he/she arrives in SAD. KIs report that IDPs may spend up to 3 hours at certain checkpoints.
- At the entrance checkpoint to the IDP's area of origin, local ISF and PMF officers will check their name against their databases.
- Once cleared, the IDP will inform the mayor's office about their intention to return.
- The mayor's office issues a form containing the name of the head of household and the accompanying family members. The mayor's office will also issue a facilitation letter for households that will need to transport assets and furniture. It may take one day to prepare these support documents.

The above process is applied in the more sensitive areas (in terms of security) of SAD such as Baiji, Siniya and Tuz. Security clearance in SAD is managed by multiple security actors, while return to the centre and southern areas of SAD is managed by the Samarra Operations Command.

For more secure areas in Salah al-din such as Al-Daur, this more stringent security clearance process is no longer applied, meaning that IDPs may return directly after completing the required procedures in Sulaymaniyah and confirming their return with the AoO's local mukhtar, local police and national security office (in addition to PMF if present).

It is important to note that in certain locations in SAD, there are additional tribal requirements that are prerequisites for return. For example, some IDP families facing tribal conflict are required to pay a reconciliation fee or "blood" compensation of 500,000 IQD per family before returning to their AoO. However, there is no guarantee that such payments will allow for the safe return of these families. Many IDPs are unable to pay this amount and may not contemplate returning with such tribal requirements in place. Families with perceived ISIL affiliation are required to undergo the process of denunciation (*tabrea*).

- Appeals:

Key informants report that since no IDPs have been refused the non-exposure letter, it remains unclear how the appeal process would be in the event where an IDP is refused this letter. Cases of false accusations or matching of names can be addressed through legal procedures and repeated security checks.

The Return Process

- Transportation:

IDPs normally use private vehicles, taxis or buses to return to their areas of origin. MOMD in some instances may provide buses for returning families. It is understood that local authorities in areas of origin may also hire trucks to carry the personal belongings of IDPs to accompany the MOMD buses.

- **Return information:**

IDPs rely on return information from relatives in areas of origin, community members and friends. Recent returns from Sulaymaniyah to SAD included families that had family members working for the state in areas of origin and had firsthand information about conditions in areas of origin.

After Return

- **In the area of origin:**

Once IDPs return to their areas of origin in SAD, the head of household is required to confirm the return with the local Mukhtar, local police and mayor's office to ensure access to government services and to facilitate registration with MOMD. For returnees in Samarra, Balad and Dujail, IDPs must also obtain an endorsement of their residency from the local mukhtar, in addition to confirming their return with the relevant authorities.

- **MOMD registration:**

Registration with the MOMD office will ensure the returnee household's eligibility for the MOMD return grant of 1,500,000 IQD, which is distributed on a first come first serve basis. The distribution of the grant has been slow, with only 39,936 returnee families from almost 800,000 having received the grant countrywide. In addition to the returnee grant, IDPs may receive food baskets and non-food items that MOMD distributes on an ad hoc basis.

- **Closure of displacement file:**

Once IDPs register their return with their local MOMD office, their displacement file is closed. The documents that IDPs must present to close their files are their national identity document, public distribution system (PDS), citizenship, residence card, a residence support letter stamped by the police, local authority or mukhtar, and the displacement closure letter, which in the case of IDPs returning from Sulaymaniyah would be the non-exposure letter received from the mayor or governor.

- **Conditions in areas of return**

Recent returns from Sulaymaniyah have been mostly to Yathrib sub-district. Balad district, where Yathrib is located, has severe return conditions. According to return data at the time of reporting, Yathrib has 35,082 returnees, all of whom live in conditions of high severity. The main driver of severity is housing destruction, although there are some concerns around safety, security and social cohesion.³ Though housing reconstruction is ongoing, the living conditions in the sub-district raise concerns about the sustainability of these returns.

³ See IOM Return Index, Salah Al-Din, June 2020.