

RETURNS WORKING GROUP- IRAQ

- ❖ **Meeting Date:** 27 October 2020
- ❖ **Meeting Time:** 11:00 am-12:30 pm
- ❖ **Location:** Webex connection

In Attendance: WFP, Solidarites International, SWEDO, US Embassy/ PRM, GIZ, NRC, Mercy Corps, Protection Cluster, ACTED, COOPI, DRC, UNDP, ASB, SDC, REACH, INTERSOS, JICA, Save the Children, NAHRI, German Embassy, HI, CIVIC, MASC, HRW, CCI, HLP Sub-cluster, IMPACT, PUI, PWJ, Social Inquiry, World Vision, UNICEF, ASAAD, OCHA, CCCM Cluster, IOM

Agenda Items:

- 1) **Introduction and adoption of minutes:** Review of previous minutes; Follow up on action points from previous meeting
- 2) **DTM Update, Camp closures and Return Updates-CCCM, Protection, DTM:** Update on latest camp closures, emergency tracking and protection concerns
- 3) **RWG updates:** Context updates, return grants and DS planning
- 4) **Local integration:** Messaging from authorities and reality from evidence on the ground
- 5) **AOB**

Action Points to follow up by next meeting:

Action	By who
RWG to share information on upcoming training	RWG
DTM to share information on upcoming training	DTM (through RWG)
CCCM/NPC to confirm whether able to share summary of latest camp closures	CCCM/NPC
RWG to prepare update on Return grants	RWG

Key Discussion Points/ Action:

- 1) **Introduction and adoption of minutes:** Review of previous minutes; Follow up on action points from previous meeting

- The chair gave an overview of the previous meeting after the introductions, as well as a review of the agenda items. Confirmed that factsheets on 'home in cities' were shared as promised for feedback by November 5th. In addition, Protection were due to share a report on Sinjar and Ba'aj but this is still under internal review and will be shared soon.

- 2) **DTM Update, Camp closures and Return Updates-CCCM, Protection:** Update on latest camp closures, emergency tracking and protection concerns

(Presentation attached for more details)

i) DTM updates

- No new data since last meeting- in the process of finalizing latest round of data collection
- Total no. of IDPs as of August 2020: 1,299,987 individuals
- Total no. of returnees as of Aug 2020: 4,744,050 individuals
- 8% of IDPs and 3% of returnees live in critical shelter
- As of July 2020, 92% of all IDPs have been displaced for 3 years or more

- Between July 2019 and August 2020, an estimated total of 2,784 individuals (464 families) were reported as having re-displaced after return.
- Four situations that can be considered as secondary displacement (highlighted in the presentation slides)
 - Anbar (Rutba) and Ninewa were the 2 main governorates where this happened. A few instances were also reported in Erbil (Makhmur), Kirkuk and Salah Al-Din (Balad).
 - 91% of them re-displaced to out-of-camp locations, while the remaining 3% sought shelter in camps (5% unknown).
 - Lack of public services was the most commonly cited reason, along with security issues, lack of job opportunities/financial means and house destruction.
 - When combined, negative push factors represent around 34% of reasons to return (evictions, security in location of displacement, threats for authorities, lack of financial means to remain in displacement, worsening of livelihood/services, etc)
 - The share of returnees returning to their habitual residence is the same as in 2019- 98%, and the proportion of those whose residence is heavily damaged or destroyed is also the same -3% (affecting nearly 26,000 returnees).
 - The new Integrated Location Assessment (ILA) by DTM covered 767 informal sites: 699 IDP sites, 68 returnee sites.
 - 15% of return locations reported forced returns, compared with 9% in the last ILA. 20% of IDP locations reported instances of families being blocked from returning.
 - 59% of remaining IDPs come from Ninewa, mainly Mosul and Sinjar districts which each account for about 20% of all IDPs.
 - Out of the 2,013 return locations assessed in May-June 2020, 487 present severe conditions hosting 14% of the returnee population (659,082 individuals). The largest increases in number of returnees living in severe conditions were recorded in Ninewa, Anbar and Diyala.
 - As of October 16, 30,706 individuals have returned to Sinjar and Al-Ba'aj districts since 8 June. The average number of daily returns is 217.
 - To better understand the scale of these returns, note that for the reporting period of May-Aug 2019, DTM had recorded 2,280 individuals having returned to Sinjar (1,824 as returnees and 456 as IDPs) and 702 to Baaj (402 as returnees and 300 as IDPs).
 - DTM, in collaboration with the CCCM Cluster, has been tracking recent departures from camps/informal sites which have recently been closed in Baghdad and Kerbala, as well as arrivals of IDPs in their areas of origin or to their new out-of-camp displacement locations. While not possible to capture all, majority have been tracked.
 - DTM will be conducting training sessions on DTM data on **4 November 2020 at 14:00** and the second session will be **on 9 November at 11:00**. Anyone interested can register on [this link](#) but please contact DTM or Rose for further information.
- ii) CCCM updates – *please reach out to CCCM for full details on camp closures and figures*
 - Indications in September of a pending decision around camp closure, with MOMD conducting an intention survey in camps. National three-step plan for camp closure agreed on, starting with the imminent closure of camps in Baghdad and Karbala; second step will be the closure of the remaining federal camps; and third step: KRI camps
 - The announcements were sudden, with most residents given 2-8 days' notice to return.

- Lack of coordination seen on governorate level
- Three camps in Baghdad closed: Shams, Nabi Younis and Ahel. Residents transferred to AoOs in Anbar and Ninewa or relocated to other camps.
- Some returns and failed returns seen. For instance, HHs have returned to HTC camp after failing to complete security clearance procedures. So far, there has been no communication from authorities on where the families will be moved after HTC closes.
- Worry and anxiety within families in HTC, especially those who cannot return.
- East Ninewa: closure of Khazer camps announced last week by MOMD. Yet to hear from Erbil authorities on those camps as no imminent timeline given
- Ongoing advocacy on UN level to try and make this a more planned process
- Tracking movements have proven to be difficult

iii) Protection concerns, National Protection Cluster

- Notification of closure came from higher levels of government, presumably the PM office
- Maximum of two weeks reportedly given for these closures
- Even counterparts in the civil government level were not aware of the plan
- What ISF were saying in Baghdad not necessarily what will happen in Ninewa
- All families in the Bagdad camps possessed clearances, but returnees faced long delays at the checkpoints because HHs had to undergo new clearances or their clearances were not recognized by the security actors at the checkpoints. Families were held for hours before entering their areas.
- Critical needs remain, particularly in terms of shelter, services, livelihoods and social cohesion
- IDPs report that they were forced, do not places to go.
- The closure of Saad camp in Diyala is ongoing
- Beginning of returns from HTC: HHs who returned were considered to be the first cohort to receive a grant from the governor of Anbar. The remaining HHs still face issues of perceived affiliation and are reportedly required to undergo tabri'a process.
- Zayouna camp: Christian members of parliament visited the camp and have advocated for the camp not to be closed.
- No indication of Karama camp in Salah al-Din being closed. There has been closure of informal sites such as Al-Salama caravans in Salah al-Din
- Moving forward, concerns with functionality of GRCs been noted, especially as decisions made regardless of efforts in Diyala, Baghdad and Anbar GRCs to form agreements – referred to Humanitarian Coordinator (HC)

Discussion:

- An inquiry was made on what the reasons were behind the re-displacement and secondary displacement aside from the fact that the government decided for camps to be closed.
 - The main reasons were due to earlier Sinjar returns as well as Ninewa camp closures. As mentioned in the last RWG meeting, there has been a high level of secondary displacement due to COVID. People have been moving from rented facilities to find cheaper ones, as can be seen in KRI especially.
- It was asked whether a report can be shared on exact details/numbers of camp closures
 - CCCM and NPC to confirm whether it's feasible to share

- UNHCR asked whether disaggregated information is available on the number of forced returns vis-a-vis those who were denied return
 - DTM explained that they do not collect information on a HH level, but rather on a location level. Normally, they ask IDP or returnee representatives. No figures are available, but the percentage of locations where these instances have been seen are available. A higher number of forced returns have been seen in Telafar, Sinjar, Baiji, Shirqat and Makhmur, with a longer list available in the Integrated Location Assessment (ILA) protection dashboard. Training will be provided in November on where DTM data is available/how to use the dashboard
- An inquiry was made on Jurf al Sakhr which is blocked: after closure of camps, it is assumed they will be encouraged to integrate into their current communities. From humanitarian perspective, will these people be considered IDPs or other categories?
 - NPC: HHs in HTC camp who originate from Jurf al-Sakhr will be moved to AAF, which also may be eventually closed. However, they do not want to move to AAF so other solutions are being considered but nothing is certain. There have been recorded incidents of authorities not allowing humanitarian actors to monitor and interview IDPs in camps.
- It was added that in Chamishko and Laylan camps, it was observed that some families who have moved out and found livelihoods elsewhere are asking to return to camps or are returning to camps because of loss of livelihoods and loss of ability to pay rent.
- UNHCR: hopefully more information will be obtained on how the processes in Ninewa will take place as they are meeting with the governor and hope to have clarity over plans soon
- RWG chair:
 - Overall, situation is very fluid. Of course, these are not the circumstances of closures that are preferred by anyone. Authorities will claim that they have waited for years and tried to engage in dialogue but that there hasn't been sufficient action, however, leadership among UN have been engaging, as CCCM referenced, to strive for a more organized process – awaiting discussions on potential platforms for dialogue with MOMD to organize processes, including official list of planned closures and dates and possibilities to intervene.

3) RWG updates: Context updates, return grants and Durable Solutions planning

(Presentation attached for more details)

i) MoMD Return grant updates

- Total amount disbursed: for 2020, MOMD has disbursed IQD 19,119,750,000. This is less than the IQD 44,599,500,000 which was disbursed in 2019. The total amount since 2019 however stands at IQD 63,719,250,000 to date.
- No. of targeted families reached: In 2020, 12,800 returnee families have received the grants, compared with 29,736 families in 2019. In total since its inception in 2019, 42,536 families have received the grant out of 570,367 families who have returned and applied for registration of their return with MOMD.
- Distribution per Governorate: Ninewa remains the governorate with the highest number of returnees who have received the return grant (12,994 families), followed by Anbar (7,822 families) and Diyala (7,008 families). Kirkuk has the lowest number of beneficiaries who have received the grant, at 3,284 families.
- Reach: Low disbursement rate.

- 'First come first serve' criterion was initially used to persuade more families to return but overlooks need and other vulnerability criteria amidst the slow disbursement and limited funds.
- Distribution via the Q-card, all 8 rounds have been disbursed using the Q-card. About 721,200 IDP HH have the Q-card. About 130,546 IDP HH do not have it.
- MOMD is aware these 'IDP returnees' and are still working to resolve the challenge of disbursing the grant to the HH who do not have the Q-card.

Discussion:

- A question was asked on what the reasons were for the variation in percentage of disbursement between governorates.
 - RWG explained that it is not clear what the MoMD rationale is on how may returnees receive the grant in each governorate (they do not share their methodology), but they do appear to look at the raw numbers, i.e. governorates with the highest rate of returnees such as Ninewa and Anbar have the highest number of returnees who have received the grant. However, while we can try to follow up with MOMD to understand more, in the past this has not led to clarity.
- Question: Are these grants also available for IDP families who are outside camps? Is it only for families who will return to their places of origin or also for families who cannot return to places of origin but wish to settle in another location for safety and security and practical reasons?
 - RWG mentioned the grant is available to all returnees who register their return with MOMD whether they resided in camps or in out of camps during their displacement. On whether the grant is available to IDPs who cannot return; this has been a point with MOMD on the possibility of disbursing the grant to those integrating locally. It is yet to be taken up by the MOMD. For now, it is only eligible for families who have returned to their AoOs.
 - SCI flagged that many Yazidis cannot return to their AoOs and therefore more advocacy needed to have them receive grants.
- UNHCR mentioned that MOMD are reportedly registering Yazidis for grants even if they are not returning to their actual location of origin. There are a number of Arab IDPs who cannot return to Sinjar and will need to receive their grants elsewhere, there have been some efforts by authorities to consider giving grants in camps/before departures. The camp closures are a new development, but it is not known when the disbursement will start. MOMD and MOLSA have started working together and there has been some distribution of social safety grants.
- RWG added that an update on the MOMD grant will be shared

ii) Durable Solutions (DS) planning

- Discussion under way with DS Task Force to finalise structure:
 - ToRs for the RWG and DSTWG are under review
 - Membership
 - Governorate level coordination
 - Area level projects
- Deep dive: fundamental conclusions are that the humanitarian space will remain the same. Recognition that there will be overlaps, but DS activities should be in the DS space
- National plan: drafted and prepared but with full intention to have a joint approach with the government. Gov't working on their own plan but not yet drafted. MoP more focused on areas rather

than people, with MOMD focused vice versa. Government definitely want international actors' involvement.

4) Local integration: Messaging from authorities and reality from evidence on the ground

(Presentation attached for more details)

Key points:

- Overview of durable solutions as per the [IASC framework](#) and [Guiding principles on internal displacement](#) included in the presentation - clarifying it is one of three pathways and that it is not considered durable until certain criteria are met, even if it is occurring. Specifically, key issue raised that measuring achievement towards durable solutions often involves comparing the situation of IDPs vs other members of the community – as a person is considered to have achieved a durable solution if they do not need specific protection or assistance due to their displacement status, and can enjoy equal rights e.g. if IDPs are struggling to find jobs but are struggling just as much as any other member of the community, this does not, in itself, suggest that the solution is not durable – they are not facing distinct discrimination as IDPs per se (although we know it's more complicated). Important distinction to go back to later in presentation.
- General confusion over whether local integration is accepted in Iraq due to public rhetoric which focuses heavily on returns. While it's true it is rarely formally acknowledged, especially due to a fear this will undermine the 'return objective', it's happening widely across the country and has been for many decades with people living in areas other than their origin after many instances of historic displacement.
- Government position is typically that returnees are preferable for all, including IDPs – but usually referring to camps which are seen as unsavory environments which corruption, illegality, etc – not typically referring to the many people already residing outside of camps. Will also reiterate that the Iraqi constitution allows IDPs to live wherever they want in the country – usually the main issue is relating to whether they are dependent on assistance and have specific needs – very much in line with their interpretation of the definition of when a durable solution is achieved – as far as the government is concerned, many IDPs out of camps don't need assistance, aren't eligible for grants and are not people of concern i.e. they would not even classify them as IDPs
- Looking at evidence, the picture is more complicated. Three examples given:
 - Research on “Understanding Belonging and Acceptance Among IDPs and Host Communities in Iraq”, study (link [here](#)) by RWG, IOM and Social Inquiry:
 - Integration happening to varying degrees, with limited objection from HC
 - Support for IDPs lower when low trust in authorities, more socio-economic challenges, higher proportion of IDPs relative to community, IDPs living in enclaves or perceived as a security threat i.e. like in many cases of migrants, when there is a greater sense of competition due to generally unfavourable socio-economic circumstances for the wider community
 - Regulations that apply to out-of-camp IDPs are generally those applied to any individual seeking to reside in a location outside of their gov of origin – any migrant
 - However, major issue is security clearance – cannot be understated, as directly linked to ability to move around, purchase property, get residency.
 - There are also significant differences by area (see presentation) showing the inconsistencies in applying policy when it does exist

- RWG research on Challenges and Durable Solutions for Minorities – Shabak, Turkmen, Yazidis. Main findings:
 - Overall, high degree of host community solidarity and support reported, as noted before
 - Even policies to support integration e.g. offices opened to help replace documentation, support to vocational training, shelter in some areas, such as Kerbala – even if this is not the official position and national rhetoric differs.
 - Intra-group differences suggesting it's less to do with IDP status e.g. wealthier IDPs moving into urban areas have fared better than IDPs from rural areas in urban centres.
 - Even seen as an opportunity by some – Yazid's report of higher access to education, career opportunities etc
 - Elsewhere more obstructive – e.g. disparities in ability to purchase housing in Baghdad, additional sponsorship requirements for residency in Kirkuk – normally linked to political factors
 - Sustainability – for many it's a compromise following the inability to return which has shifted preferences BUT potentially precarious e.g. in Kirkuk, reports that people fear that 'will be asked to return eventually'
 - In addition, talking about integration seen as disappointing for many, suggests return has become hopeless, remaining in displacement becomes a 'threat to culture and heritage, longing for customs and traditions

Conclusion: Need to be very considered understanding the exact reasons for negative outcomes for IDPs, to have more tailored interventions and advocacy:

- Regulatory factors distinct to IDPs e.g. security clearances
- Regulatory factors which affect all groups from outside a governorate
- Unequal application of regulation depending on profile and/or relationships
- Host community/local acceptance/discrimination regardless of policy (can be, but not strictly limited to whether there is cultural, religious or social affinity in locations of displacement)
- Political factors e.g. disputed territories
- Intra-Group Differences/Match between area of origin and displacement e.g. rural IDPs in urban areas
- Hardship/poverty indicators which lead to worse off outcomes, combined with above e.g. negative coping mechanisms

Discussion:

- SCI mentioned that most of the factors mentioned are true of the populations SCI are working with – mainly out-of-camp IDPs in Baquba, Muqdadia, Mosul and Shirqat and in the past, in Tikrit and Khanaqin. In these areas, families were seen living in unfinished buildings or occupied houses and most of the times, the living/ shelter conditions were not ideal. WASH and protection are key issues, especially concerning children. Livelihoods is a key challenge, especially when families move from a rural to an urban setting and their skills might not be so transferable– leading to cases of early marriage and child labor. Children cannot easily access schools due to lack of documentation. In terms of community acceptance, the levels of acceptance vary depending on the locations. In Baquba and Muqdadia, families tend to move to locations where they will be accepted (same ethnicity as IDPs). In Mosul, this has been a bigger challenge, especially for families who have perceived affiliation or had left camps due to camp closures over the last year. What helps in integration are school campaigns and relaxing

documentation requirements, which help children build relationships and form better acceptance in the community. SCI have been supporting children centers, where children have been able to find new friends. SCI's WASH programming in Hawiga, Baiji, Shirqat, Qayyarah, Mosul, included water treatment plants and networks, which helped them understand better how people view DS and returns. Having access to clean and safe water is a factor that makes families either feel safe to return or feel safe where they are. SCI continue to work with these communities in these areas. Complication seen in Sinjar: many people occupying houses of other people (mostly Arab). In the future, these people may need to find other shelter should the Arab IDPs return.

- UNICEF asked if the locations can be shared for those children that need legal support to be able to re-join school. SCI mentioned that no reports have been developed but can share relevant information.
- SCI added that in Dohuk, many mukhtars and leaders are being approached by Yazidi families who were not affected much by ISIL. Anecdotal reports have been received that women have said that they were affected when that was not the case. However, we need to make sure that our reach is wider and understand the different challenges faced.
- Protection cluster: how much do the ethnic characteristics/elements/origin influence the sense of acceptance by host communities (of particular groups), if at all? Is it a determinant factor or not?
 - Social Inquiry explained that in the integration report, it was found that identity was a determinant factor for acceptance. When the host community had a stronger identification to their ethno-religious group than national identity, acceptance was lower (this tended to happen in most assessed locations in KRI). When perceived cultural distance between IDPs and HC was higher, acceptance was also lower (also found in KRI but also Baghdad and Kirkuk especially).
 - RWG noted that it matter a lot more in earlier phases of displacement in report on minorities but, over time, increasing solidarity and interactions with host communities who may be different reduced the weight of this factor
- Protection cluster mentioned that over the last six months, a deterioration in the conditions of out of camp IDPs has been observed, in light of the COVID pandemic, which has led to protection risks. This information has been included in a report by the Protection cluster. There is a need to look at pre-existing vulnerabilities in out of camp IDPs, the socio-economic impact of the pandemic and the effect of camp closures.
- Protection cluster mentioned that HLP partners have established a Sinjar Taskforce to address some of the issues raised regarding HLP. Advocacy is ongoing with authorities in Baghdad, compensation committees etc.
- It was noted that HLP Sub-cluster partners are meeting with authorities this week.
- RWG:
 - Agree that it would be useful to pull together details on integration and prepare messaging on this based on wider perspectives
 - Only able to briefly cover topic now but will require more discussion and if Save has any more inputs they can share, or NPC colleagues, can support to put together a clearer picture.



5) AOB

- RWG will be offering training on Durable Solutions. Details to be shared soon.