

RETURNS WORKING GROUP- IRAQ

- **Meeting Date:** 29 August 2023
- **Meeting Time:** 11:00 am-13:00 pm
- **Location:** IOM Conference Room, Erbil & Remote connection via Teams

Attendance: RWG/ IOM, PRM Erbil, REACH, Mercy Corps, UNAMI, UNWFP, NCCI, IVY Japan, Tdh – Swiss, COOPI, Dorcas Aid International, International Medical Corps (IMC), GIZ, UNOCHA, USAID/BHA, DSTWG-IOM, CESVI, IOM, INTERSOS, UNHCR, SDC, SEDO, and MSF Switzerland.

Agenda:

1. **Introduction and adoption of minutes:** Review of July minutes
 2. **Context Update:** DTM Updates: The Arrivals in Sinjar and Al-Ba'aj Districts; and CCCM Update.
 3. **UNHCR Presentation:** Returns from East Mosul Camps to 13 Hassan Sham Villages
 4. **DSTWG Update:** DS Updates
 5. **AOB and MSF briefing note on access to MHPSS in Sinuni**
-
1. **Introduction and adoption of minutes:** Review of previous minutes; Follow up on action points from the previous meeting.
 - No pending action points.
 - Endorsement of the previous meeting minutes.

2. **Context Update: DTM Updates: Climate Emergency Tracking and Sinjar Emergency Tracking; and RWG Field Update**

(Please refer to the full presentation link for further details)

Sinjar and Ba'aj Emergency Tracking

Between 1 April and 7 August 2023, DTM recorded the arrival of 4,161 individuals to Sinjar and Al-Ba'aj districts.

- Ethnoreligious background
 - 92% are Yazidi
- Key reasons for movement
 - Challenges of protracted displacement
 - Hate speeches against Yazidi community.
 - Joining relatives and friends

Discussion

- Question: May and June witnessed the majority of departures. Is there a cause for the drop in returns, such as the summer or transportation difficulties?
 - DTM: Initially, there was a strong surge of motivation among individuals who were keen on returns. DTM will continue to monitor progress in the months ahead. However, this initial enthusiasm is likely to diminish in the near future, primarily due to the reopening of schools. As schools start their academic sessions, people facing the decision to return may find themselves torn between staying put or moving earlier to align with educational schedules. This factor is expected to influence the numbers, making it less likely for a significant increase in return/relocation rates in the immediate future. Efforts were also noted to open and facilitate access to locations with no return option, particularly through initiatives by organizations like UNDP and UN Habitat, could further encourage return movements. Furthermore, the involvement of key informants, like the Mukhtar, in these initiatives was seen as a positive influence in encouraging people to return.
 - IOM FVM: During the recent Sinjar ABC meeting, key factors influencing the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) were discussed, including School Reopening, the availability of schools played a significant role in motivating IDP families to return to Sinjar. Additionally, the Rahman Incident encouraged IDPs, particularly from Duhok camps, to return. Around 1000 families applied for departure, with many successfully returning after approvals from EDMCR Duhok. In the village of Al Jazeera, voluntary movements for IDPs from Dohuk had been facilitated, further incentivized by housing and livelihood support for the host community.
- Question: Could DTM clarify the situation where people are heading back to Markaz Sinjar, emphasizing that they are individuals who have been displaced, rather than returning to the area?
 - DTM: When individuals arrive in Sinjar, it's crucial to clarify that they are not returning to their original places of residence. Most of them come from Qahtania and areas around Sinjar, and their return is specifically to Markaz Sinjar. Therefore, they are not going back to their habitual places of origin where they used to live before displacement. Consequently, they cannot be categorized as returnees in the traditional sense. In line with the DTM methodology, individuals are not considered returnees unless they go back to their specific locations of origin. So, while they are arriving in Sinjar, it's not a return to their original homes or areas. This distinction is essential when analyzing their movements and status.
- Question: Did the return of approximately 4,000 people include 75% (3,194) who were facilitated by the FVM program, while the remainder returned independently?
 - DTM: Yes, indeed, some of the returnees were identified through the FVM lists. DTM typically reaches out to these individuals to determine their current locations. During the period from April to August, DTM ensures that all returnees identified by the FVM programs are included in our emergency tracking efforts. This allows DTM to comprehensively monitor the return movements to their areas of origin during this specific timeframe.

CCCM Updates:

Jeddah 5 HHs post eviction support:

- The 40 HHs who were referred from the IOM TRD team to PRD were targeted by one-off emergency cash equal to 900 IQD, 18 minors received their CASH in coordination and close monitoring from Child Protection Partner.

Informal sites update:

Ninewa Informal Site updates:

- Last week RART team Ninewa reported two planned evictions that came of the backdrop of a directive issued from the Ninewa Mayor to all administrative offices in Ninewa requesting data on informal settlements/encroachments on governmental land and urging them to stop further encroachment and take necessary actions in coordination with security forces.
 - In Baaj; Baaj municipality informed 900 HHs to leave their houses that are allegedly built on government land within 15-day notice and those who will not obey a case will be filed against them in court. According to the team 900 HHs are of mixed profile including IDPs, returnees, and host communities who are allegedly occupying government land. The issue was raised to the DSTWG for advocacy due to the lack of OCHA presence in Baaj.
 - In Qayyarah and Hamam Alil; Planned evictions in Qayyarah and Hamam Alil were reported and the team is trying to verify the number of affected families and their profile.

AAF informal site:

- Yesterday Monday 28 Aug, IOM TRD team successfully facilitated the voluntary return process of 41 HHs/210 individuals who were supported to relocate to Amyriat Al- Fallujah after obtaining necessary security approvals. Some of the families are reportedly from blocked areas including Jurf Al-Sakhar and the rest were from Garma, Habaniya, Heet, Haditha, and Abu Greeb.
- Remaining on the site is 74 HHs/306 individuals.

Kilo 7 informal site:

- IOM CCCM is planning a site phase-out by the end of September due to reduced funding. IOM CCCM has been providing informal site response in Kilo 7 taking over from NRC in November 2021. Kilo 7 is in the Al Ramadi District of Anbar Governorate. The site was originally a residential compound that was constructed by the government and later captured by ISIS in 2016. The compound sustained serious damages during the ISIS battle. About 20 buildings are completely destroyed and around 50 are occupied by IDPs.
- Currently the site is hosting 564 HHs/2,770 individuals' the majority of which are from Anbar.

Governorate	Number of HHs	Number of Individuals
Anbar	557	2,702
Salah A-Din	5	20
Baghdad	1	3
Diyala	1	7

- Displaced persons living in this settlement cannot return home either because their area is still blocked, they have HLP issues, their house was destroyed, or because they do not have the financial means to do so.
- Due to the lack of CCCM capacity, IOM CCCM will hand handover the management of the site to a Central Management appointed from Ramadi.

Discussion

- Comment: In relation to the Informal Site Ba'aj evictions, OCHA pointed out that although they no longer maintain physical offices in Ninewa, they are still actively engaged in remote work. They kindly requested CCCM colleagues to share the list of sites facing eviction threats.
- Question: Concerning J5, please confirm the exact amount of cash for the 40 households mentioned as evicted, are there still people who haven't received assistance?
 - CCCM: The J5 population is higher, at around 135 people. However, CCCM collaborated with the TRD team to identify those who were not registered with the TRD team for the facilitated voluntary program prior to the eviction. These individuals received support after facing eviction. It's important to note that out of these 40 households, 18 of them consisted of minors, making them a vulnerable group. As a response to their needs, emergency cash assistance was provided, with each family receiving 900,000 IQD, which was roughly equivalent to the support previously provided by the +TRD Team.
- Question: What are the typical CM services offered on K7 in the past, and based on your knowledge, what potential challenges might the newly formed committee encounter as they take over CCCM services?
 - CCCM: On K7, CCCM role primarily involved coordinating services within the site, including protection, health, wash, and site infrastructure maintenance. This encompassed tasks like maintaining manholes, ensuring sustainable electricity and wash access, and rehabilitating shelters. We also conducted Community engagement and women's support activities, managed feedback and complaints through CCCM CWC and complaint desk, and established referral pathways in collaboration with other partners on the ground. Additionally, CCCM provided capacity-building support to site committees in collaboration with sector partners, focusing on areas such as protection, mental health support, and legal assistance, all aimed at enhancing their self-management skills. Looking ahead, we anticipate challenges for the Committee, particularly related to funding. Given the limited availability of partners due to funding constraints, we have doubts about the Committee's capacity to take over. CM has been actively working with these committees, building their capabilities for self-management, but the lack of resources could pose challenges to their transition.

3. UNHCR Presentation: Returns from East Mosul Camps to 13 Hassan Sham Villages

(Please refer to the full presentation link for further details)

Announcement by the Minister of MOI on 24 July 2023

- To allow displaced families/individuals to voluntarily return to the villages of origin in Hassan sham area.

Government-led process

- Registration in EMCs started on 6 August by the camp management.
- KRG: Security clearance for EMC camp residents
- EDMCR/JCCC: preparation of procedure/timeframe - CwC messages

- Gol: resumption of public services

Discussion

- Question: Do we have insights into families who, in the past, resided in camps but may have moved to areas like Mosul because they lost hope in their villages reopening for access? Could you elaborate on the approval process for these families to return, especially those currently in informal sites or renting? Have there been any recent developments in addressing this issue?
 - UNHCR: UNHCR currently lacks information on this matter. It's worth noting that this issue is on the agenda for today's meeting. The discussions will focus on the fact that the KRG will be responsible for areas within their jurisdiction, while the displacement to Mosul and the subsequent returns will fall under the purview of the governorate in that region and the federal Iraq government. UNHCR hopes to receive updates and news from the ongoing meeting regarding this issue.
- Question: Considering the various factors that may deter people from returning to their areas of origin, such as the fear of prosecution after spending time in detention, it's positive to hear that some individuals are leaving the camps. Do you have any knowledge of advocacy efforts or initiatives aimed at addressing these complex issues and facilitating the return of displaced individuals to their home areas?
 - UNHCR: UNHCR has been collectively grappling with this issue for the past one to two years, and advocacy efforts are being led primarily by the ICRC, with support from the Human Rights Office and other organizations. The focus of these advocacy initiatives is to create processes that would allow individuals, especially those with fewer legal complications, to return to their places of origin. The concern lies in cases where individuals have served sentences in Kurdistan, only to face retrial and potentially harsher sentences upon returning to federal Iraq, which acts as a significant deterrent. As a humanitarian organization, we are not directly responsible for handling this matter, but we work closely with ICRC colleagues who are actively engaged in these efforts.
- Question: It's evident that one of the most crucial forms of assistance required to facilitate families' return is shelter rehabilitation, along with the broader rehabilitation of infrastructure. In this context, does the Iraqi Government have any plans or intentions to register families for shelter grants? Additionally, is IOM and other agencies contemplating assistance for these families through facilitated return programs?
 - IOM: While IOM doesn't have concrete plans at the moment, IOM has requested support from Ninewa Governor's Office to conduct assessments in these villages. The Hamdaniya municipality has confirmed its intention to initiate this assessment once conditions are clear. While IOM is considering, there may be opportunities for collaboration with other agencies.
Regarding the registration process for FVM, IOM has initiated registration in U2 for some families, and there may be ongoing efforts to conduct field visits to these villages. UNHCR has also reached out, and the objective is for the government to first assess its capacity to provide services in these villages before proceeding further.

4. DSTWG and ABC Updates

(Please refer to the full presentation link for further details)

Compact/National Plan Implementation Roadmap Update July-August 2023

- UN agencies have initiated a process of engagement with the line ministries on the compact action plan and there are bi-weekly meetings between agencies.
- Key messages are available on engagement with line ministries.
- Costing exercise (government budget planning exercise) with the support of the Office of the Special Advisor---the costing to be validated in September 2023.

#NB It is a budget planning exercise, not a project appeal tool, and dependent on several assumptions on the use of overseas aid, loads, and collaboration with the private sector.

Discussion

- Question: There has been some discussion about the Kurdistan Region and whether it should have three separate JCFs or a unified one. Has there been any decision made by the DS Task Force regarding this matter?
 - DSTWG: Initially, when discussions about the development of the JCFs began, there were talks with Kurdish authorities about establishing these joint coordination forums, and they were supportive of the initiative. They indicated their willingness to provide feedback on, similar to what COMSEC was supposed to do for federal Iraq. However, they have not yet provided this feedback. The initial understanding was that there could either be one unified JCF operating out of Erbil, covering all three governorates in the Kurdistan Region, or three separate ones. Currently, the discussion revolves around a phased process for implementing JCFs when the Diwani order is issued for these five governorates. COMSEC is expected to have more authority in discussions concerning federal Iraq.

5. MSF briefing note on access to MHPSS in Sinuni

(Please refer to the link for further details)

- MSF Switzerland has been actively involved in supporting the Department of Health (DoH) at the Senior General Hospital in Sinuni for the past five years, specifically focusing on mental health cases within the hospital, primary healthcare centers, and the community. However, MSF withdrawal is scheduled for the end of October 2023. MSF wants to draw RWG partners' attention to the remaining needs and gaps in Sinuni, primarily attributed to diminishing funding and decreasing capacity among actors. Additionally, the complex situation in Sinjar, classified as a disputed territory, poses challenges for the local population.
- The ongoing IDP returns will inevitably increase the strain on already hard-to-access services. MSF recently finalized a briefing paper on this matter and intends to distribute it to RWG Partners. Please feel free to share it with your mental health and psychosocial support colleagues, as well as any organizations interested in this field operating in or planning to work in Sinuni.

6. AOB

- The JCC authorities have given the green light to conduct an interagency assessment in the 13 Hassan sham villages. It's important to note that it will be a deliberate effort aimed at informing programming initiatives. If any of the RWG Partners are interested and have the capacity to work within the Hamdaniya area, particularly in these 13 villages, please get in touch with prmoyo@iom.int, and david.videira@undp.org. Provide us with the names of your organization and the individuals who will participate in this interagency assessment.
- Next RWG meeting is scheduled for **September 26, 2023**.