

RETURNS WORKING GROUP- IRAQ

- **Meeting Date:** 30 January 2024
- **Meeting Time:** 11:00 am-13:00 pm
- **Location:** IOM Conference Room, Erbil & Remote connection via Teams

Attendance: Peace Winds, ICRI-Ta'afi, AHC, MSF Holland, Success Horizon Organization for Development (ASO), REACH Initiatives, MSF Switzerland, Justice center, IVY-Japan, MSF Belgium, UN-Habitat, RWG, International Medical Corps Iraq, IOM, Blumont, MSF Switzerland, Danish Refugee Council, Geneva Call, NRC-DSTWG Co-chair, Malteser International, Acted, PRM Office at the US Consulate General-Erbil, OCHA, SEDO

Agenda:

1. **Introduction and adoption of minutes:** Introduction and adoption of December 2023 minutes
 2. **IOM DTM Presentation:** Findings of progress towards durable solutions Report in Salah al-Din governorate.
 3. **Context Update:** RWG Filed Update
 4. **DSTWG Update:** DS updates
 5. **RWG 2023 Review Survey Results & AOB**
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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. **IOM DTM Presentation: Findings of progress towards durable solutions Report in Salah al-Din governorate.**
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(Please refer to the full presentation link for further details)

What Did We Find Out?

Sectors For Programming

- **Access to livelihoods** was the most problematic domain for all three groups, especially IDPs.
- **Restoration of HLP and compensation** contributed to the biggest gap between IDP, returnee and stayee households. IDPs faced greater challenges with possessing legally recognized housing documentation, fear of eviction, and home damage/destruction.
- Returnees also performed poorly, although comparatively less than IDPs, and also had the largest gap with stayees in this domain, especially concerning property loss and successful compensation claims.
- IDPs faced significant challenges in achieving **adequate living standards**, particularly regarding access to clean drinking water, sanitation facilities and healthcare services.

Area-Based Programming

- In terms of geographic trends, IDP progress scores are significantly lower in Markaz Samarra (Samarra) and Markaz Tikrit (Tikrit).
- For returnees, the lowest scores are in Markaz Al-Shirqat (Shirqat), Al-Moatassem (Samarra) and Yathreb (Balad).
- A high percentage of IDPs report housing destruction in districts such as Tuz Khurmatu, Tikrit and Balad, indicating the severity of this issue in these locations.
- The many challenges and context-specific issues observed in Samarra highlight the complexity of the displacement situation there.

Discussion

- Question: What are the potential factors contributing to the livelihood challenges experienced by vulnerable groups like IDPs, returnees, and host communities, as identified by the IASC survey?
 - DTM: The livelihood difficulties encountered by these groups transcend the immediate aftermath of the ISIL crisis. They are not solely linked to displacement but rather have wider ramifications that impact the entirety of Iraqi society. The repercussions of the crisis are observable not just among displaced individuals but also extend to encompass broader societal dynamics.
- Question: Could you provide insight into the significance of multiple displacement and the prevalence of female-headed households among those categorized in the low progress group in SAD, particularly in light of similarities with findings from the Ninewa survey?
 - DTM: Certainly. The correlation between progress and stability concerning displacement is noteworthy. Individuals who experience a single displacement and return relatively quickly tend to fall into the high progress group. Conversely, those who undergo multiple

displacements, changing locations two or three times, often end up in the low progress group. This indicates challenges in finding suitable accommodation and employment, as well as a search for better living conditions hindered by frequent moves. Similarly, female-headed households are disproportionately represented in the low progress group, both in Ninewa and in SAD. This trend likely stems from difficulties in securing employment, societal stigma, and other gender-related barriers that impact their ability to progress economically.

- Question: Does the survey include both in-camp and out-of-camp populations when referring to IDPs? Additionally, does the survey consider employment challenges for seasonal or irregular labor, such as agricultural workers, or does it focus solely on regular employment?
 - DTM: In Salahaddin, the survey focuses solely on the out-of-camp population, as there are no camps in the region. However, in Ninewa, both in-camp and out-of-camp populations are included. Regarding employment, the survey captures various employment statuses, including public and private sector, daily wages, and agriculture. These categories are then grouped into stable and unstable employment for analysis. Additionally, respondents are asked about their main source of income, which may include sources other than employment.

3. Context Update: RWG Filed Update

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

MoMD Key Updates- KRG Camp Closure

- CoM decides in its regular weekly meeting on January 2nd to end displacement file by end of June.
- On 23 January CoM approved the MoMD plan during its regular meeting and extended the date to 31 July.
- CoM assigns supportive tasks to various ministries and authorities according to MoMD plan.

4. DSTWG Update: DS updates

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

Hasansham Interagency Mission Report

- Report completed and shared with the DSTWG.
- Key recommendations:
 - Clarity on government capacity to restore services in the villages.
 - Agencies/NGOs to indicate capacity to implement activities, opportunities for joint programming.
 - Advocacy on clearance for IDPs who remain in displacement in both East Mosul camps and in Mosul.
- Next Steps:
 - Agencies/NGOs who have capacity to commence activities.

Discussion

- Question: Will there be a budget allocated for individuals who choose to return to their governorate but not to their area of origin, considering that many of these areas lack basic services and may be uninhabitable? Additionally, what plans, or budget allocations are in place for those who decide to integrate locally rather than return to their areas of origin? Finally, what is the KRG's stance on this decision and what coordination efforts are planned between the federal government and the KRG?
 - RWG: According to the Prime Minister, allocations will indeed be made for those who opt to return to their governorate but not necessarily to their specific area of origin. This support will be twofold: general support aimed at rehabilitating infrastructure and specific support tailored to individual needs identified through surveys. These needs could range from housing rehabilitation to business restoration, with allocations distributed across different ministries accordingly. Regarding individuals who choose to integrate locally instead of returning to their areas of origin, support may primarily focus on the federal region, with job opportunities, grants, and other assistance likely prioritized there. While the KRG was reportedly not extensively consulted on this decision, plans for coordination between federal and regional authorities are anticipated, although the specifics remain unclear.

- Question: How is the government encouraging IDPs to return to work, and how are job opportunities being provided to them, particularly for those who were previously employed by the government but remained in displacement?
 - RWG: The government's strategy to encourage IDPs to return involves implementing a fingerprint system in government offices to ensure accountability and attendance. This system aims to address issues where government employees, such as teachers or municipal workers, were not reporting to work in their designated areas of employment due to displacement. By requiring IDPs to physically clock in at their workplaces, the government aims to ensure that those who were previously employed but remained in displacement return to work. Additionally, some IDPs are returning to their agricultural lands to resume their work as agricultural workers.
- Question: Regarding the return grant increase to 4,000,000 IQD and the preference for check payments over key cards, is there a clear mechanism outlined in the MOMD plan for this change?
 - RWG: The MOMD plan may not have provided a detailed mechanism for the increased return grant and the shift to check payments, as this may revert to an older system before the adoption of key cards. While the specifics of the payment mechanism are unclear, it's possible that the government has existing procedures and regulations for checking payments that they will revisit and utilize for this purpose.
- Question: Has the MOMD plan addressed the costs associated with closing IDP camps, especially given the decrease in international support and services in many camps in the KRI?
 - RWG: The MOMD plan may not have explicitly addressed the financial implications of closing IDP camps, nor has it specified whether the federal government or the KRG would bear the responsibility for these costs. Clarification on this matter may require further communication with relevant officials or additional documentation from the MOMD.
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- Question: Are the cases currently under review by the compensation committee in Baghdad from 2018 and 2019, and have these applicants received responses to their cases?
 - RWG: The timeline for the cases being reviewed remains uncertain. While, it's unclear whether applicants from 2018 and 2019 have received answers to their cases. This underscores the challenges faced by early applicants, who have experienced significant delays in receiving compensation. Despite the historical implementation of a first-come-first-served policy for granting return funds by the MOMD, delays persist for families who applied as early as 2019, indicating procedural uncertainties. Furthermore, the recent decision to suspend grants for the general population in favor of prioritizing a specific grant amount may disrupt the established process.
- Question: Are security checks for IDPs in east Mosul who wish to return still suspended, or have they been resumed by the KRG authorities?
RWG: According to recent updates, there haven't been any new requests received by the authorities, despite some families indicating they've submitted security clearances. Although approvals for returns from camps to Ninewa are anticipated within two weeks, security clearance for families from Hasan Sham Village remains pending, posing a significant challenge. Additional advocacy efforts are sought to address this issue effectively.
- Question: Could you provide clarity on the application process timeline for the MoMD returnee plan?
 - DSTWG: The timeline for the MoMD returnee plan's application process hinges on the completion of surveys across the 24 camps. The speed at which the government can gather necessary information and implement various programs, including grant distribution and housing compensation, is crucial. Additionally, the IDPs to make informed decisions within this framework is vital. However, without specific data and input from MoMD officials, it's difficult to determine a precise timeline for the application process although they have stated that the closure date is 30 July 2024.

AOB

- The RWG 2023 Review Survey, which was launched in early January, highlighted positive feedback on information sharing, particularly regarding partner work and updates on returnees. Participants expressed satisfaction with the quality of field updates and MOMD return grant updates. General satisfaction was expressed with the meeting duration and content. The main recommendation was for more training sessions, which RWG organizers plan to incorporate throughout the year. Overall, participants appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback and expressed gratitude for the collaboration.
- Next RWG meeting is scheduled for **February 27, 2024**.