

RETURNS WORKING GROUP- IRAQ

- **Meeting Date:** 27 February 2024
- **Meeting Time:** 11:00 am-13:00 pm
- **Location:** IOM Conference Room, Erbil & Remote connection via Teams

Attendance: USAID/Iraq; PRM Office at the U.S. Consulate General-Erbil, CRS shared future project manager, COOPI, UNOCHA, UNWFP, UNOCHA, forum ZFD ,Save the Children (SCI), Blumont, UNAMI, Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid, Dorcas Aid International, Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid, IVY Japan, IOM, Peace Winds, MSF Switzerland, GIZ, and Baghdad for Woman and Child Care.

Agenda:

1. **Introduction and adoption of minutes:** Introduction and Review of January minutes
2. **Context Update:** DTM Update: Master list
3. **RWG Presentation:** Babylon Bzibiz FGD Advocacy Report
4. **IOM FVM Presentation:** Facilitated Voluntary Movement Update.
5. **DSTWG Update:** DS updates
6. **AOB**

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

- Endorsement of the previous meeting minutes.
- **Action Point:** Following up on the recent notification from the Ministry of Education regarding the potential closure of representative offices, particularly impacting IDP schools, RWG will engage with UNICEF to seek clarification and gather further information on the implications of this decision. This includes understanding whether the directive extends to all schools, both in and out of camp locations. Additionally, RWG will monitor updates regarding the formation of the committee responsible for camp closure decisions, which includes representatives from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health. Updates and findings will be shared at the next meeting.
- **Action Point:** IOM to advocate for MOMD to implement a process similar to FVM, ensuring better decision-making for IDPs regarding return or relocation from the camps. This includes informing IDPs and providing help desks in camps to facilitate informed decision-making.

2. **Context Update: DTM Update: Master.**

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

Latest displacement data (September – December 2023)

- Decrease in IDPs reflects new returns and internal movements; and it is driven by:
 - High cost of living
 - Lack of job opportunities in the displacement area of securing a job in the return area
 - Obtaining security clearance
- In general, the highest decrease in IDPs is in Erbil Gov (Erbil), followed by Dahuk Gov (Sumil & Zakho), and SAD Gov. (Tikrit)
- Overall returns is 81%; the slow return in this round can be explained by:
 - Lack of livelihoods
 - Lack of housing
- The highest increase is in Baiji (SAD), Sinjar, and Al-Ba'aj
 - Improvement in the security situation encouraged IDPs to:
 1. Renovate their houses
 2. Look for jobs
- Lack of financial means in AoD
- Challenges related to protracted displacement and emotional connections to AoO

Discussion

- Question: How are the new IDPs to Sulaymaniyah primarily accommodated? In official camps or informal settlements?
 - DTM: According to available data, the majority of the new IDPs in Sulaymaniyah are residing outside the official camps. Instead, they predominantly inhabit stable housing arrangements, such as rented apartments within urban or rural areas. While some IDPs may

indeed be found in informal settlements, particularly within Sulaymaniyah, these instances are relatively rare compared to those residing in more stable housing arrangements.

- Question: Why is there a discrepancy between the decrease in the number of IDPs and the increase in the number of returnees in the data?
 - DTM: The observed difference between the decrease in the number of IDPs and the increase in the number of returnees, despite being close in magnitude, raises questions about the whereabouts of the remaining individuals. While it could be assumed that the variance represents those in secondary displacement, the exact reason for this gap remains uncertain. Government officials, from whom the data was collected, have suggested that this gap may indeed include individuals who have undergone secondary displacement.
- Question: Could the discrepancy between the decrease in IDPs and the increase in returnees be attributed to reverse returns or secondary displacements?
 - DTM: It's possible that the variance between the decrease in IDPs and the increase in returnees could be due to reverse returns or secondary displacements. This phenomenon, as noted by colleagues and possibly shared with organizations like the IOM, involves families returning from camps but subsequently facing challenges and re-displacing. Such instances, though not widely reported, reflect the complex realities of displacement dynamics and could contribute to the observed gap in the data.

3. RWG Presentation: Babylon Bzibiz FGD Advocacy Report

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

Key Findings and Advocacy Points

- No IDPs have returned since their first displacement in 2014 and 2015 as the area is blocked.
- IDPs generally have a strong preference to return to their areas of origin but recognize the political nature of the facilitation of their return and request temporary measures to improve their conditions while their efforts are made to facilitate their return.
- The land of Bzibiz informal site is private property in which some land plots were given to the IDPs to be used temporarily.
- Security of tenure through allocation of government land until they can return to their area of origin.
- Support with small government grants or loans to construct dignified shelter.

4. IOM FVM Presentation: Facilitated Voluntary Movement Update.

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

Facilitated movements in 2023

- During 2023 IOM has facilitated the return/relocation of 1,520 households displaced in camps, informal sites, and urban areas in Ninewa, Dohuk, Anbar, and Diyala.

December 2023 to the end of February 2024

- In Duhok IOM has registered total of 4,498 households for facilitated voluntary movement programme.
- In the East Mosul Camps, IOM has registered 616 households.

Discussion

- Question: Are there any former detainees registered for the FVM in the East Mosul camp?
 - FVM: FVM did not register former detainees specifically for the FVM. However, there are some families in the camp who have former detainees in their households. These families can make informed decisions about whether they want to depart without this person. Unfortunately, FVM cannot provide support for the formal returnees at the moment.
- What does MOMD think of the IOM FVM program?
 - Based on our experience and coordination with MOMD, they have been cooperative. Despite the decision to close the camp, we haven't faced any issues or obstacles from MOMD. They are supportive, and households supported through the FVM program will not be prevented from receiving other assistance from MOMD.
- Has IOM urged MOMD to replicate the FVM program to aid returns? Is there any discussion within MOMD about aligning their processes with those of IOM to facilitate better-informed decision-making for IDPs?

- FVM and RWG: Discussions about replicating the FVM program are happening at a higher level, with ongoing communication between our senior management and MOMD in Baghdad. There have been discussions about potentially aligning MOMD's processes with those of IOM to support better-informed decision-making for IDPs. This could involve implementing similar steps to inform IDPs and provide help desks in camps.
- What instructions have been provided to other MOMD branches following CoM's decision?
 - Currently, no specific instructions have been given to other MOMD branches beyond the decision itself. There are ongoing discussions about how decisions from the Prime Minister's Office might impact services, returns, and security clearances in the camps. MOMD is currently uncertain about the implications of these decisions but may gain clarity in the coming weeks.
- How does IOM ensure the sustainability of its return facilitation program, especially regarding IDPs who might return to displacement areas after initially resettling? Has FVM encountered instances where families return to their original areas or other locations solely to receive grants, and later attempt to relocate elsewhere?
 - FVM: IOM utilizes a comprehensive monitoring system to track the sustainability of its return facilitation program. This includes protection calls and reintegration monitoring conducted at one month, three months, and nine months post-return. Any issues identified during these assessments are addressed promptly, and coordination with service providers is facilitated to meet the needs of returning IDPs. While some IDPs may choose to return to displacement areas, IOM's experience indicates that this occurrence is relatively infrequent. Coordination with relevant authorities, such as DMCR, helps address transitional issues faced by returning families.
 - Yes, there have been some cases where families return to areas to receive grants but later decide to relocate due to various reasons. However, the percentage of such cases is very low according to FVM data.
- How does FVM ensure that families have all the necessary information to make informed decisions before their departure from the camps?
 - FVM conducts various activities to ensure families have sufficient information before making decisions. These activities include information sessions where authorities discuss services, housing issues, and other relevant topics. Additionally, families able to travel are provided opportunities to visit their areas of origin or desired relocation to assess conditions firsthand. Despite minor cases of families returning and finding housing situations uncomfortable, FVM closely monitors and supports these families to ensure successful resettlement.
- Are registrations still ongoing in the East Mosul camps, or are they currently awaiting clearances?
 - Registrations have been completed in the east Mosul camps, and the process is now awaiting clearances. There are no upcoming registrations scheduled until at least one or two departures occur from each location. This approach ensures that registrations are opened based on demand and successful departures, avoiding frequent openings without significant progress.

5. DSTWG Update: DS updates

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

DSTWG (14 February 2024)

- Action points
- IOM DTM progress toward Durable Solutions in Iraq
- DSTWG strategic planning retreat

AOB

- For the upcoming meeting next month, there is a tentative plan to have MOMD present. Due to potential translation challenges, the meeting setup might be adjusted. RWG Partners are hereby informed that the forthcoming meeting will be centered around engagement with MOMD ; therefore, updates on DTM or RWG won't be provided during the meeting. To facilitate this interaction, an email will soon be circulated, providing a form for submitting your questions in advance. While confirmation from MOMD is awaited, it is anticipated that the MOMD will be connecting online.
- Next RWG meeting is scheduled for **March 10, 2024**.