

RETURNS WORKING GROUP- IRAQ

- **Meeting Date:** 24 June 2025
- **Meeting Time:** 11:00 am-13:00 pm
- **Location:** IOM Conference Room, Erbil & Remote connection via Teams

Attendance: MSF Swiss, AHC, RWG, IOM, IVY Japan, Peace Winds Japan, WRO, PUI, NPA, UNAMI, REACH, Dorcas Aid International, PAO, IRC, Sunrise NGO, UNOCHA, IID, DRC, UNHCR, British Embassy, Switzerland Embassy, GIZ, and PRM U.S. Embassy

Agenda:

1. **Introduction and adoption of minutes:** Review of May Meeting Minutes
2. **IRC Presentation:** Findings from the Iraq Protection Needs Overview Q4 2024-Q1 2025
3. **IOM DTM Presentation:** Understanding the Needs and Vulnerabilities of Climate-Induced Migrants in Iraq
4. **DS Update**
5. **AOB**

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

- Endorsement of the previous meeting minutes.
- No pending action points from the previous meeting

2. **IRC Presentation: Findings from the Iraq Protection Needs Overview Q4 2024-Q1 2025**

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

Key Protection Findings – Access & Legal Barriers

- 94% report access difficulties (top barrier: cost)
- Priority Needs: Livelihoods (92%), Legal Aid (53%), Healthcare (49%)
- 28% of households lack key documents
- Child labor (45%), early marriage, school dropout
- Gender-based mobility barriers
- 57% face climate stress, 16% displaced
- Rising migration intentions
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Discussion

- **Question (IOM DTM):** Regarding the indicator that 57% of respondents experienced "climate stress", could you elaborate on how this was defined and measured in the assessment? Specifically, were there particular dimensions considered, such as health, livelihoods, or psychological impacts?
- **IRC:** In relation to *climate stress*, 57% of respondents reported being indirectly affected by environmental factors such as drought, poor water quality, and general livelihood loss. These factors were considered collectively under the term "climate stress." Additionally, we observed a notable increase in reported psychological stress due to climate-related pressures, which more than doubled compared to the previous quarter. Respondents particularly cited worsening drought conditions in governorates like Anbar and the South as key contributors to both economic instability and emotional strain.
- **Question (IOM DTM):** On the displacement figures mentioned, could you clarify whether the reported 16% refers to individuals displaced from the assessed locations or to them? And if possible, can you share which geographic areas are most affected by this climate-induced displacement?
- **IRC:** Regarding displacement, the 16% figure refers to households that were displaced both from and to the assessed locations. This includes families who were forced to move due to environmental deterioration, such as drought, relocating to areas like Anbar or parts of the South, as well as those experiencing secondary displacement, households unable to return to their areas of origin and choosing instead to remain in alternative locations.
- **Question (U.S. Embassy):** Could any government measures identified in the findings be briefly highlighted? Specifically, what actions are being taken by the government to address climate-induced displacement, and what are the anticipated developments in the coming years? Any available data on this would be helpful.

- **IRC:** So far, the government has taken some localized steps to support those affected by climate-induced displacement, mainly by facilitating access to legal services and basic needs through governorate offices and relevant directorates. However, a comprehensive national strategy is still lacking. More coordinated, high-level efforts are needed, and we are continuing to engage with authorities and will share any further updates as they arise.
- **IOM DTM:** It was noted that a registration exercise has been launched by MoMD to support individuals displaced by climatic and environmental factors. The exercise is currently limited to the central and southern governorates and has not yet been rolled out in Anbar, Ninewa, or other governorates covered in the assessment. However, it may be extended further north depending on observed trends. Through this registration, access is provided to food and non-food assistance, and support is offered for the regularization of housing through the issuance of documentation. Ongoing discussions are taking place at the local and governorate levels to determine how voluminous arrivals can be accommodated and integrated with access to basic services and safe, dignified housing.
- **RWG:** Collaboration was suggested between DTM and IRC to share findings on climate-affected locations, particularly those designated by the Ministry of Water. It was noted that areas such as Sinjar and Hatra experience significant displacement due to drought, but limited progress has been made in government attention or mitigation efforts. Closer monitoring of these locations was recommended.

DTM: An assessment is being developed to cover governorates not currently included in the climate displacement tracking, focusing on northern and central areas. This will identify locations with recorded or potential climate-induced displacement and include indicators on durable solutions, such as whether climatic factors act as barriers to return for those originally displaced by conflict. Collaboration with other organizations on this topic is welcomed.

- **Question (DRC):** Some differences have been noticed between your findings and the earlier IOM reintegration monitoring presentations, particularly regarding indicators like feeling safe, access to healthcare, and education. Could any insights be shared on what might explain these differences? Could they be due to methodology, or might the broader picture presented by these two monitoring efforts be misunderstood?
- **IRC:** It has been discussed previously that differences in methodology and targeted communities play a key role. Variations in data collected can be caused by the selection criteria and the specific sub-districts in which the assessments are conducted. While some figures may differ slightly, the main trends and topics are generally found to be consistent with previous findings. Differences may also be influenced by whether participants are IDPs or from host communities, which affects the experiences and responses reported.
- **IOM FVM:** although some findings such as access to legal and civil documentation were found to be similar, significantly higher needs in health, education, and basic services were reported among newly returned families, particularly in Sinjar and Ba'aj, during the first month of return. This was attributed to limited service availability and the prolonged period of displacement. It was further suggested that more comparable results might be obtained if future assessments include host communities or families who had returned earlier.
- **Question (IOM):** Could you elaborate on the methodology used to identify the psychological impacts of climate stress, and what were the key findings regarding mental health?
- **IRC:** It was explained that while structured and unstructured psychosocial support (PSS) services were integrated into the tools, much of the information on psychological impacts emerged organically during interviews. Participants often raised these issues themselves, without being asked direct questions, indicating that mental health struggles were a prominent concern. These impacts were largely linked to losses in livelihoods and general well-being, making mental health one of the most difficult aspects participants were dealing with.

3. IOM DTM Climate Vulnerability Assessment: Understanding the Needs and Vulnerabilities of Climate-Induced Migrants in Iraq

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

Key takeaways

- Livelihoods, shelter and infrastructure and services are the top needs.
- Climate-induced migrants are struggling to afford food and other basic items in Al Basrah, Diyala and Baghdad.
- Housing informality is a widespread challenge for climate-induced migrants.
- According to key informants, most migrants will not return, suggesting a need for investment in locations of displacement.

Discussion

- **Question (RWG):** In the slides presented, it appeared that many families are going to Al Najaf, but there was no specific mention of Najaf in the analysis of different governorates. Can you clarify the role of Al Najaf in relation to climate-induced migration and its capacity to absorb vulnerable displaced families?

- **DTM:** While DTM analysis showed that the needs of climate-induced migrants were relatively less in Al Najaf district itself, Al Najaf remains an important destination for many families migrating from other areas, such as Al Diwaniyah. This is due to its religious significance and the ability for migrants to continue engaging in agricultural activities there. Our focus group discussions included findings specific to Al Najaf, which highlight that it has some capacity to absorb vulnerable displaced individuals. This raises an interesting question about how locations like Al Najaf compare to other destinations such as Erbil, which also attract many displaced people. Factors such as local economy, social cohesion, and infrastructure are believed to influence the return index and determine whether an area can maintain low intensity displacement. Plans are being made to expand the assessment to provide more specific findings on this matter.
- **Question (DRC):** The number of families per displacement flow shown in the slide, does that reflect data for 2024 or 2025? What is the time frame?
- **DTM:** The data is cumulative, covering climate-induced displacement flows observed between 2016 and the most recent update. Tracking started in 2018, but figures are backdated to 2016. The assessment aligns with the September–October update, with the latest available update as of March 2025.
- **Question (RWG):** Why does the climate-induced displacement assessment focus primarily on central and southern Iraq? Are other governorates like those in the north also being considered?
- **DTM:** The assessment focuses on central and southern Iraq because these are the locations where climate-induced displacement trends have been documented through the displacement tracking exercise. This focus was not based on a decision to exclude other areas but reflects where the trend has been observed so far. However, there are plans to expand the assessment to other governorates that were not previously covered to explore whether similar trends or risks of future displacement exist. While the strongest climatic impacts have been seen in the southern governorates, concerns in areas like Ninewa are also noted, particularly for populations previously displaced by conflict who may now face additional challenges such as secondary displacement.

4. DSTWG Update

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

Displacement Advocacy Messages: Update of collective advocacy messages

- Aim: To reflect current operational challenges and key thematic advocacy priorities.
- Template for inputs provided to add key thematic advocacy priorities
- Not an exhaustive list of the displacement priorities / cross cutting issues
- New areas included: Camp Consolidation, Blocked Areas and Informal Settlements, Sinjar and the Yezidi IDP File
- Aim to present this during next DSTF meeting (end June)

RWG Safety and Security Workshop: Participants:

- MOMD
- Security actors
- Governorates Officials
- Heads of directorates from various Iraqi ministries
- UN agencies and NGOs

Key Recommendations:

- Policy-Level Engagement: Elevate the workshop outcomes to the Prime Minister's Office to ensure high-level policy consideration and support.
- Thematic Workshops: Convene focused workshops on priority issues, including:
- Compensation and Reconstruction, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance and the Martyrs Foundation.
- DS Technical Workshop addressing the "Tabria" with the participation of the Ministry of Interior, the Supreme Judicial Council, and MOMD
- Security and Access Coordination: Establish a security committee to address barriers in no-return areas and develop tailored plans to facilitate safe and voluntary return.

AOB

- As per schedule, the RWG Meeting will be on 29 July 2025, partners are invited to reach out if you have any presentations to share.