

Advancing Durable Solutions for Iraq's Displaced Population

A Framework for Government-United Nations Engagement

1. The Current Status of Internal Displacement in Iraq

According to the most recent round of the International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix, dated 31 December 2025, 997,334 individuals remain internally displaced in Iraq, distributed across eighteen governorates, one hundred districts, and over 2,300 locations. The caseload is heavily concentrated in the northern governorates: Ninewa, Duhok, and Erbil together host approximately sixty-two per cent of all internally displaced persons, with each of these governorates hosting between 202,000 and 208,000 individuals. Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk are the next largest concentrations, with approximately 100,000 displaced persons each. Ninewa is also the dominant governorate of origin, accounting for more than fifty-five per cent of total displacement nationwide.

Of the 997,334 internally displaced persons, approximately 99,800 reside in the eighteen remaining formal IDP camps, with the substantial majority, around 80,000 individuals, concentrated in camps in Duhok governorate, and smaller populations in Al-Shikhan and Hamdaniya districts of Ninewa and in two camps in Erbil. The remaining 891,000 live outside the formal camp system, with many in critical shelter conditions,.

The conditions faced by the displaced population vary substantially across these settings. For camp residents, inadequate shelter, prolonged dependency, irregular provision of food, hygiene, and fuel due to funding constraints, and uncertainty about the future of the camps themselves continue to define daily life. For those in critical shelter outside the camps, substandard housing and limited access to basic services compound their vulnerability. Across both settings, unresolved legal barriers, including missing or incomplete civil documentation and outstanding housing, land and property claims, further entrench displacement and obstruct access to services and solutions. The diversity within this caseload calls for a granular, vulnerability-based analysis to identify with precision which families continue to carry unresolved displacement-related needs and which have effectively resolved their displacement.

The Yazidi population represents a particular case within the broader picture. The great majority of camp residents in Iraq are Yazidi families originating from Sinjar district, concentrated overwhelmingly in camps in Duhok governorate. Substantial Yazidi populations also reside in informal settlements, rented accommodation, and host arrangements in Dohuk and surrounding areas. Recent assessments indicate that over forty per cent of Sinjar district's pre-conflict population remains displaced. The combination of legal, security, reconstruction, and political barriers that continue to prevent return for the Yazidi caseload requires distinct attention within any national strategy on durable solutions.

Within the camp-based caseload, a further group of families faces a distinct and more complex set of barriers to a solution. Concentrated in a small number of camps, these families remain unable to move freely or to return to their areas of origin, owing to a combination of missing or incomplete civil documentation, outstanding administrative and security clearance requirements, For these families, restrictions on freedom of movement compound every other dimension of vulnerability, limiting access to livelihoods, services, and the legal and administrative processes on which a durable solution depends. Their situation will not be resolved by general return and reintegration measures alone. It calls for a deliberate and carefully sequenced approach, built on case-by-case review, the restoration of civil documentation, and structured engagement between federal and regional authorities and the communities concerned.

A separate and emerging displacement dynamic affects the southern and central governorates. As of early 2025, an estimated 172,000 individuals across twelve governorates had been displaced by drought, water scarcity, and related environmental factors. This climate-induced caseload, concentrated in Thi-Qar, Missan, and adjacent areas, is not captured in the displacement framework that has historically tracked conflict-related displacement, and presents distinct policy challenges. As climate pressures intensify across central and southern Iraq, this caseload is expected to grow.

2. The Framework for Addressing Internal Displacement in Iraq

The Government of Iraq has made remarkable progress in addressing one of the largest internal displacement situations of the past two decades. From a peak of over six million displaced persons following the conflict with ISIL, more than five million had returned to their areas of origin or settled elsewhere by the end of 2025. This represents one of the largest movements of populations to areas of origin in the contemporary period and reflects sustained Government commitment, with substantial public and international investment in reconstruction, return, and reintegration. The remaining caseload, while significantly reduced in absolute terms, requires a different approach than the one that has carried the response to date. Three considerations shape the framework within which this engagement is proposed.

First, the remaining displacement caseload in Iraq is no longer primarily a humanitarian problem. The acute emergency needs that defined the early years of the response have, in large part, been resolved. What remains is a governance, services, and development challenge. The residual displaced population, consisting of approximately 181,000 individuals living in formal camps (99,800) and in critical shelter conditions (81,200), alongside the displaced population living outside camps, those who rent accommodation or live with host families, face barriers that are political, legal, economic, and institutional rather than humanitarian. Addressing the issues affecting this caseload requires government led solutions built on well-designed national systems anchored in development planning, not externally-driven emergency operations.

Second, the United Nations' operational footprint in Iraq has contracted significantly since 2024. The drawdown of humanitarian operations and the closure of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq by the end of 2025 mean that the UN system in Iraq no longer functions as a parallel service provider or backstop for government delivery. The appropriate role of the United Nations at this juncture is to support the Government of Iraq to deliver on key priorities, by providing analytical and policy support, facilitating dialogue between federal and regional authorities, and contributing to a solid evidence base on which government decisions on the displacement file can rest. This role, while more limited in operational terms, may prove more durable in political terms if it is grounded in clear government ownership.

Third, the framework for action is anchored to the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2025-2029, where the United Nations' analytical, advisory, and convening role is framed within the Government's developmental commitment to its displaced citizens.

3. A National Agenda for Durable Solutions

The remaining displacement caseload in Iraq, while significantly reduced in absolute terms, is structurally complex and highly protracted. Its resolution requires a coordinated whole-of-government approach addressing the practical, legal, fiscal, and institutional barriers that continue to prevent durable solutions. The following recommendations are offered as a coherent set of priorities for the coming period.

3.1 Establishing the national data foundation

- Lead the consolidation of a vulnerability-based national dataset on internal displacement, disaggregated by location, shelter type, demographic profile, and barrier category.
- Designate the Central Statistical Organization and the Kurdistan Region Statistical office, in coordination with the Ministry of Migration and Displacement and the Ministry of Planning, as the institutional home for this work.
- Establish clear criteria for entry into and exit from the national displacement dataset, applicable consistently across camp, informal, and urban caseloads with the exit criterion anchored in the achievement of durable solutions and the reduction of vulnerability rather than shelter classification or status alone. The criteria, including the point at which displacement is considered resolved, would be agreed jointly by Government and partners and informed by conditions in areas of return, so that recorded exits reflect sustainable outcomes.
- Design the dataset to track progress on resolution of residual displacement. Given the diversity of the caseload, this agenda is best pursued through a phased and parallel approach, advancing the most straightforward caseloads without delay while developing tailored solutions for more complex situations.

3.2 Extending access to social protection

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- Ensure adequate budget allocation to support access to social protection mechanisms for all eligible households in Iraq, regardless of geographic location
- Resume Social Safety Net enrollments for vulnerable populations, including displaced families, ensuring access to required documentation to support enrollment.
- Designate a share of recently announced SSN registration places specifically for vulnerable displaced households.
- Ensure entitlement portability across governorates during movement, return, or relocation.
- Progressively include eligible displaced families in pension, health insurance, and unemployment benefit schemes in line with the UNSDCF 2025-2029.

3.3 Accelerating compensation and housing recovery

- Clear the existing backlog of approved compensation claims, addressing both stages of the blockage: converting recommendation letters into payment cheques without further delay, and releasing funds to holders of cheques already issued where access is constrained by bank liquidity.
- Standardize compensation procedures across governorates and sub-committees, reducing procedural variation and the reliance on legal intermediaries.
- Operationalize the digital compensation platform under the Compensation System Reform Strategy already endorsed across parliamentary, judicial, and council of ministers levels.
- Establish predictable multi-year budgetary allocations from the Ministry of Finance for compensation disbursements.
- Extend eligibility for return and resettlement grants to families in informal displacement settings, with transparent criteria covering both camp residents and informal settlement families.
- Build on the progress achieved on housing, land, and property documentation in Sinjar and Baaj to address remaining issues of inheritance, secondary occupation, and post-2014 informal tenure arrangements.

3.4 Improving conditions for return and community stability

- Prioritise the visible execution of announced reconstruction investments in areas of return.
- Ensure adequate provision of essential services in areas of return, including water, electricity, health, education, and municipal infrastructure.
- Strengthen inter-ministerial coordination, anchored in the Ministry of Planning, to link federal allocations with governorate-level planning and community-level outcomes.
- Develop, jointly between the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, a principled framework for the closing of remaining camps, with voluntary and informed solutions calibrated to conditions in areas of origin and to the preferences of the families concerned.

3.5 Addressing legal barriers and unresolved status

- Consolidate the recent progress on judicial coordination between Kurdish and federal courts, anchored in the principle of systematic case-by-case review of legal status.
- Ensure adequate access to the unified ID card for displaced families, supporting flexible documentation requirements to minimize barriers, including support to those without current documentation, and children born during displacement.
- Support structured engagement between federal and regional authorities and affected communities on caseloads facing area-specific return restrictions, to differentiate between cases where return can be facilitated and those where alternative solutions need to be explored.

3.6 Connecting displacement to the development financing architecture

- Develop a costed, multi-year plan for the resolution of residual displacement, bringing together the financing dimensions of housing recovery, compensation, social protection extension, and reconstruction in areas of return.
- Undertake a domestic public financing analysis to map existing budget instruments, identify fiscal space, and locate where displacement-related spending is already embedded in sectoral budgets but not tracked as such.
- Engage international financial institutions, in particular the World Bank Group and the Islamic Development Bank, on their potential role in financing housing recovery, infrastructure in return areas, and social protection system reforms, approached as a scoping and de-risking exercise rather than an assumption of new external resources. As grant-based financing contracts, concessional development finance and domestic public resources, alongside the domestic public financing analysis, become the principal basis for sustaining solutions over time.
- Develop a structured approach to private sector investment in areas of return, building on work underway in Ninewa and other governorates, as a complement to public investment and an indicator of normalisation.

4. Coordination and the United Nations' Offer of Support

In order to proceed along the path set out in this paper, the United Nations believes that a different structured interface with the Government will be needed, one that is more apt for the prevailing developmental context. The coordination architecture previously active on the displacement file was designed in a substantially different period, when humanitarian operations were the dominant feature of the response. With that operational posture now behind us, and with the substantive workstreams set out above cutting across multiple federal ministries, the Kurdistan Regional Government,

governorate authorities, and specialised institutions, a successor structure is needed to sequence, monitor, and adjust progress across these workstreams. Such a whole-of-government mechanism would need to bring together the Ministry of Migration and Displacement, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Planning, the Central Compensation Committee, the Kurdistan Regional Government, and the governorates most concerned around this file.

4.1 An inter-governmental coordination framework

The United Nations proposes the establishment of a dedicated inter-governmental coordination framework on durable solutions, anchored at the level of the Council of Ministers. The framework should be light by design. It does not require a new body with permanent staffing; it requires a designated focal point at Council of Ministers level with the authority to convene the relevant ministries, a regular but time-bound meeting cadence, a clear and limited agenda focused on removing systemic obstacles rather than managing operational detail, and agreement on a small number of priority workstreams for the first phase of engagement.

- Establish a dedicated inter-governmental coordination framework on durable solutions, anchored at the Council of Ministers.
- Designate a focal point at Council of Ministers level with the authority to convene the relevant federal ministries.
- Adopt a regular but time-bound meeting cadence, with a clear and limited agenda focused on systemic obstacles, and a small number of priority workstreams for an initial phase.
- Include the relevant federal ministries, the Kurdistan Regional Government, and the governorates most concerned.

4.2 The United Nations' offer of support

The United Nations system in Iraq stands ready to support the Government of Iraq across the priorities set out in this paper, in line with the directions established under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2025-2029. This support can take the form of technical assistance, policy advice, analytical work, facilitation of dialogue between federal and regional authorities, and convening across the actors most directly engaged on the file. The United Nations Resident Coordinator is available to discuss specific arrangements at the convenience of the Office of the Prime Minister and to propose a first meeting with the relevant counterparts. All items set out in this paper are supported by more detailed technical documentation and agency-level analysis that can be shared through the designated interlocutor.