



Iraq. Around 1.8 million people remain internally displaced across Northern Iraq. In Essyan Camp, families are supported with water, garbage collection and awareness raising sessions on hygiene.  
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# Iraq Data Collection and Analysis to Inform Efforts to End Protracted Displacement

## 1. Context

In 2019, Iraq recorded its lowest levels of internal displacement in decades, after multiple waves of displacement linked to armed conflict, ethnic and religious violence, foreign interventions, and political instability.<sup>1</sup> The latest of these waves was linked to the conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which displaced six million people between 2014-2017.<sup>2</sup> Large-scale

IDP returns had already started before the official end of the conflict. However, after a first peak in returns following the campaign to retake the areas from the ISIL group, returns subsequently slowed from 2018, leaving some 1.3 Iraqis internally displaced as of August 2020.<sup>3</sup> Most IDPs live in urban areas rather than in camps, but approximately 450,000 people remain in formal camps or informal settlements and collective centres.<sup>4</sup> Since July 2019, the Government of Iraq has repeatedly stated its intention to close

all the remaining IDP camps, although no official policy on camp closures has been issued publicly.<sup>5</sup> Continued social unrest and violence, as well as disasters associated with drought and floods, have further exacerbated the situation and prompted additional displacement.

The Government of Iraq has long recognized displacement as a critical issue. In 2003, it established the Ministry for Displacement and Migration, which adopted the National Policy on Displacement in 2008.<sup>6</sup> In 2016, the growing number of returns reflected the increase in territory retaken. In response, the international humanitarian community expanded its focus from emergency protection and assistance, which continues to date, to include assistance for durable solutions. Thus, UN and NGO humanitarian partners established the Returns Working Group, a multi-stakeholder platform intended to strengthen coordination and advocacy on issues related to IDP returns, as set out in the 2016 Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan.<sup>7</sup> At sub-national level, Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Clusters worked with governorate authorities to address IDP camp closures through Governorate Returns Committees.

Despite the substantial work done on reconstruction and stabilization, the scale of needs of returning IDPs has continued to rise. Many of the almost five million returnees have faced overlapping challenges on their return, including inadequate housing, uncleared rubble, limited livelihood opportunities, insufficient infrastructure, social cohesion issues and hostility from community members. Consequently, a significant number of IDPs have moved back to camps or other locations.<sup>8</sup> Most of the remaining IDPs have been displaced for more than four years. Thus, with displacement becoming protracted, it became clear that finding durable solutions required engaging development, peacebuilding and stabilization actors to address the security, infrastructure and social cohesion issues, including community readiness for reintegration, that

were blocking sustainable returns. It was also evident that not all IDPs were going to return, necessitating other options to advance to a durable solution beyond return.

## 2. Description of the practice

Various data collection and analysis tools have been developed in Iraq to gain an understanding of the barriers that impede durable solutions for IDPs returning home as well as for the other 1.3 million IDPs living away from their places of origin. The Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement maintains an overall list of IDPs who are receiving assistance in camps, as well as IDPs who have registered as returning to their places of origin, although there is a backlog in entering this information in the database. Information on IDPs' locations, movements and multi-sectoral needs, both inside and outside camps, has also been gathered monthly since April 2014 (and every two months since November 2018) using IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix,<sup>9</sup> alongside other humanitarian sectoral needs assessments.

Over the years, humanitarian, development and peace actors have built on and expanded this operational information base to inform their programmatic work on durable solutions. While some studies and data collection tools cover wide geographical areas, others look at specific regions within Iraq to understand their unique context and dynamics. As will be described below, these diverse data sets and analysis were eventually brought together to capture a fuller picture of why displacement in Iraq had become protracted. Collectively, this knowledge has subsequently informed national efforts to develop a common strategic approach and joint programming for durable solutions.

## Longitudinal study of IDPs living outside camp settings

Prior to 2016, most data collection and analysis in Iraq focused on IDPs living in camp settings, despite the fact that the majority of IDPs lived in urban areas.<sup>10</sup> To address this gap, IOM and Georgetown University conducted a panel study between 2016 and 2020<sup>11</sup> that followed 4,000 families who had been internally displaced by ISIL between January 2014 and December 2015. The panel study's research was based on a survey of families living outside camp settings in four different governorates of Iraq, complemented by qualitative semi-structured interviews with IDPs, members of host communities and service providers. It repeatedly measured and analysed the same indicators over time to identify trends. The study serves to evaluate IDPs' situation with respect to eight criteria from the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internal Displacement and to measure IDPs' progress towards achieving durable solutions over time. The longitudinal study contributes to both Iraq-specific programs as well as broader efforts to understand and conceptualize displacement and durable solutions, particularly by capturing IDPs' own efforts to adapt to displacement and craft solutions. IOM Iraq and Georgetown University have collected five rounds of data since 2015, producing multiple general and thematic reports, including on the experience of IDPs in applying for compensation,<sup>12</sup> movements after initial displacement,<sup>13</sup> and the experiences of displaced female-headed households.<sup>14</sup> The sixth round of data will be collected in 2020-2021.<sup>15</sup>

Data from the panel study identified housing, employment and security as the primary factors influencing IDPs' decision to stay or return. For instance, the study highlighted the fact that most returnees working in agriculture had not found employment in that sector, despite an average of 85 per cent of displaced people having been able to return to their previous jobs.<sup>16</sup> The challenges

faced by agricultural workers related to money for necessary repairs, irrigation, and the presence of unexploded ordinances.<sup>17</sup> Finally, IDPs consistently ranked housing, both in terms of access and physical living conditions, as among the top challenges impeding return and one of the greatest expenses during displacement, revealing the importance of facilitating IDPs' access to the Iraqi Government's compensation mechanism.

## Urban profiling exercises in the Kurdistan region of Iraq

In 2015-2016, urban profiling exercises were undertaken in the three governorates of Erbil, Duhok and Sulaymaniyah in the ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Because of its relative stability during the conflict with ISIL, the Kurdistan Region received a large number of IDPs from other regions, as well as refugees from Syria. The displaced people were initially welcomed. However, over time, the influx of displaced persons had substantially increased the Governorates' populations straining the Governorates' already reduced revenue streams. For example, by 2016 the Duhok Governorate's population had increased by 31 per cent.<sup>18</sup>

The urban profiling exercises, conducted by Governorate authorities, UN partners and NGOs with the support of JIPS, used comparative analysis between population groups and geographic zones in urban areas<sup>19</sup> to reveal the needs of the most vulnerable IDP and refugee community members as well as those of non-displaced community members. For instance, key housing challenges related to an inability to pay rent, evictions and overcrowding.<sup>20</sup> Community cohesion issues related to strained public services, such as education and health,<sup>21</sup> and increased distrust and tensions, particularly as some non-displaced residents saw IDPs as having privileged access to basic services and assistance.<sup>22</sup> However, many host community members

also recognized the economic benefits of having IDPs as customers and the difficult situation faced by displaced people in their community.<sup>23</sup>

### **IDPs living in camp settings: Intentions for durable solutions**

In the post-conflict period, the Government of Iraq increasingly encouraged IDP populations to return to their areas of origin and began closing camps in June 2019. Given concerns that IDPs may not be ready to return, a group of international actors, led by the REACH Initiative<sup>24</sup> and the CCCM Cluster, began conducting four rounds of household assessments of IDPs living in formal camps. The process sought to understand IDPs' short and long-term intentions with respect to moving out of the camps and to determine whether these intentions changed over time. Two rounds also looked at IDPs in non-formal and non-camp settings. The findings confirmed that the vast majority of IDP families in camps — more than 90 per cent — did not intend to return in the following year.<sup>25</sup> IDPs' primary concerns related to destroyed shelter, safety and security, insufficient livelihoods, lack of basic services and, overall, insufficient assistance to support durable solutions in the return area.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Returns Index: Understanding conditions in return areas**

While the intentions surveys helped international actors understand IDPs' perceptions about their places of origin, the Returns Index was developed in 2018 by IOM, the Returns Working Group, and the Iraq-based research organization Social Inquiry to assess conditions in return areas. The Returns Index captures information related two thematic areas: social cohesion and available services.<sup>27</sup> Data collection was carried out in 1,800 return locations in

eight governorates on a continuous basis with reporting every two months. IOM's Rapid Assessment and Response Teams collected information through structured interviews using a large, well-established network of over 9,500 key informants that included community leaders, mukhtars, local authorities and security forces. This process allows actors to assess how conditions evolved over time, as well as which locations had limited or failed returns, and why. Although it does not provide household-level data, international actors have used this information to determine whether or not to support returns to specific areas. For example, some donors and partners use the Return Index to support decision making and prioritization of interventions in support of returnees.

There is a common understanding that supporting IDP returns is crucial to stabilizing liberated territories and, thus, an integral component of the wider Government of Iraq-led stabilization effort. Thus, the tools and studies presented above represent only a few of the numerous ways in which the Government and international actors have sought to understand the challenges of addressing protracted internal displacement in Iraq. Other measures include, for example, IOM's Integrated Location Assessment that draws on information from the DTM baseline data to monitor conditions and needs in displacement and return areas.<sup>28</sup> GIZ and IMPACT also regularly assess community and political tensions and aid provision in return areas linked to a wider GIZ peacebuilding project in Ninewa.<sup>29</sup> UNDP's Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS)<sup>30</sup> uses a rapid assessment mechanism to identify the most immediate needs in liberated areas with respect to rehabilitating basic public infrastructure and housing, generating immediate livelihood opportunities, providing capacity support to municipalities and undertaking targeted community level social cohesion interventions. This information is complemented by information received from local peace mechanisms, perception



Iraq. An interview in Shringa Bulag village, Kirkuk Governorate, for a study about access to durable solutions among IDPs. © IOM Anjam Rasool | 2019

surveys, social cohesion assessments and conflict analysis to assess IDPs' needs and challenges in return areas. Similarly, since February 2018, the US Institute of Peace and Social Inquiry have developed the Conflict and Stabilization Monitoring Framework to regularly collect household data in the culturally diverse Ninewa Governorate.<sup>31</sup> The tool assesses conflict and stabilization dynamics with respect to safety, governance, rule of law, reconciliation and justice, as well as social wellbeing and livelihoods with the aim of informing and supporting sustainable return and wider peacebuilding efforts. Finally, a 2019 study by IOM, the Returns Working Group and Social Inquiry explores how economic decisions impact IDPs' decisions in relation to durable solutions.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. Results for internally displaced persons and others

Although the Government of Iraq continues to prioritize returns, the findings of the various studies provide actors, such as the Returns

Working Group, with evidence to advocate for a more cautious approach to return and the need for additional support to address security, housing, livelihoods and social cohesion issues. For example, the urban profiling process established an evidence base shared by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and international actors to address the challenges related to housing, employment, and community cohesion given that in reality many IDPs and refugees were not likely to leave in the near future. It also included elements for building the technical capacities of the Governorates' respective Statistics Offices to conduct the profiling process.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to informing individual programmes, the conclusions also emphasized the critical importance of collaborative approaches to durable solutions that extended beyond humanitarian action. At the end of 2019, an informal 'Durable Solutions Network', comprising UN and NGO representatives, was created to focus on joint humanitarian and development programming for IDPs living in camps. In May 2020, the office of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General

also formed a strategic Durable Solutions Task Force, bringing together UN and NGO representatives working in the areas of humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and stabilization. The Task Force, co-led by IOM and UNDP with the support of the Senior Advisor on Durable Solutions in the DSRSG's Office, provides a national-level platform for "information-sharing, strategic coherences and ... collective action and advocacy for international engagement on durable solutions in Iraq."<sup>34</sup> The Task Force also led the drafting of a national IDP durable solutions strategy, which is, in turn, used to support joint government-international durable solutions planning. Technical-level working groups are foreseen to encompass and continue the work of the Returns Working Group and the Durable Solutions Network.

## 4. IDP participation

The concerns raised by IDPs and displacement-affected communities, bolstered by objective findings from the Returns Index, the longitudinal study, profiling exercises and additional assessments, have underscored the need to widen the conversation around durable solutions to include the possibility for local integration or relocation to another area. The feedback also contributed to identifying the need for in-depth research on some of the obstacles IDPs were facing that impeded their ability to find durable solutions in return areas, including restoration of their housing, land and property rights.<sup>35</sup> Consultations with displacement-affected community members were particularly crucial to better understanding the more abstract social cohesion issues that have hindered durable solutions in Iraq.<sup>36</sup>

## 5. Challenges

There is often an assumption that once the initial reason for displacement has ceased, IDPs

can return home. For instance, when fighting ends or flooding recedes, displaced people can go back home. However, as the example of protracted internal displacement<sup>37</sup> in Iraq shows, the end to the military conflict does not mean that IDPs can immediately return home to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. It also shows that those who do return face different struggles and vulnerabilities. Understanding the underlying reasons why IDPs still face specific needs related to their displacement, even after many years, requires closely assessing each context to identify the social, political and economic realities that may be negatively impacting IDPs and the broader displacement-affected community.<sup>38</sup> This demands a different form of analysis not typically undertaken as part of humanitarian operations.

Recognising the need to understand the underlying causes that have led to protracted displacement in Iraq, in 2018, IOM, the Returns Working Group and Social Inquiry set out to analyse pre-existing large-scale datasets on internal displacement, as well as geographically targeted surveys and qualitative studies, to better understand which groups of IDPs were still displaced by conflict in Iraq and why.<sup>39</sup> While the datasets were not completely comparable, the resulting report sheds light on the underlying reasons why displacement has become protracted for some IDPs and what circumstances could lead to protracted situations for others. For example, the analysis highlighted how insufficient provision of basic services in some return areas may be related to a larger pattern of development disparities that pre-existed the conflict with ISIL.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, challenges associated with social cohesion pointed to a desire for a formal reconciliation process or justice proceedings to address underlying discrimination, marginalization, or retaliatory attacks in return areas.<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, actors are implementing multi-faceted projects that recognize the multiple factors that contribute to safe and sustainable voluntary returns. For instance, in Ninewa, GIZ's "Stabilizing Livelihoods in

Ninewa” project seeks to create livelihood opportunities for youth that contribute to social cohesion and peacebuilding.<sup>42</sup> The project also includes monitoring local level peace agreements and social cohesion more generally and coordinating international peacebuilding projects in the area through the Peace and Reconciliation Working Group, established in October 2018. Likewise, UNDP’s Funding Facility for Stabilization programmes targeting the repair of public infrastructure, the provision of essential services and livelihood support<sup>43</sup> are complemented by social cohesion activities that facilitate dialogue and peace agreements through local peace mechanisms that include youth, women’s groups, media and religious leaders.

Perhaps one of the most challenging impediments to addressing protracted internal displacement in Iraq has been a policy preference for the return of IDPs in a context where not all IDPs can or want to do so. Consequently, there is insufficient data or analysis on local integration or relocation, even though a significant number of IDPs are, in fact, in the process of locally integrating. To address this data gap with respect to local integration, IOM Iraq, the Returns Working Group and Social Inquiry developed a research framework based on eight of the IASC Durable Solutions Framework criteria to assess what specific factors make a locality “conductive” to integration from the perspective of IDPs, the wider community and local authorities in the Sulaymaniyah and Baghdad Governates.<sup>44</sup> The pilot study report<sup>45</sup> was used to form the basis of advocacy work with the Government in discussions on local integration as a durable solution.

## 6. Lessons learned

As the emergency operations shifted to durable solutions, humanitarian actors found that they needed to adapt their data collection and analysis tools to increasingly incorporate

information required by development, peacebuilding and stabilization actors. In particular, research highlighted the fact that the IASC Framework for Durable Solutions did not adequately capture indicators related to social cohesion, personal aspirations or subjective feelings about belonging, for all that these are critical for ultimately achieving durable solutions. For example, the study collectively analysing large-scale data sets to understand protracted displacement in Iraq complemented the IASC Durable Solutions Framework with additional indicators from migration and refugee integration frameworks and social cohesion and fragility frameworks.<sup>46</sup> GIZ and IMPACT, which monitor social cohesion in return areas through monthly key informant interviews, have concluded that measuring perceptions is an effective method for gauging social cohesion.<sup>47</sup>

IDPs in Iraq comprise heterogeneous groups facing unique contexts, and all solutions will ultimately have to be local. As part of its strategic planning, the Durable Solutions Task Force plans to develop a common set of indicators adapted to the Iraq context, drawn for example from the Interagency Durable Solutions Indicators Library or a national framework, to assess whether IDPs have found durable solutions. These indicators can then be monitored by multiple actors at the individual level, such as through long-term studies that include household surveys to assess progress. Progress can also be analysed at institutional level to ascertain, for example, whether compensation mechanisms effectively meet IDPs’ needs, and at local or area level to assess IDPs’ access to basic services, the existence of livelihood opportunities and community cohesion issues. Government census data also plays a key role in providing baseline population data.<sup>48</sup> For example, the tools included in this example only focus on the most recent waves of displacement related to the conflict with ISIL. Because prior displacement was not included in official statistics, humanitarian agencies have the only information on stock data. There are also no official figures on disaster

displacement. International organizations are working with government authorities, in particular statistics offices,<sup>49</sup> to implement the International Recommendations on IDP Statistics<sup>50</sup> to increase national capacity to maintain official statistics on displacement. Such information can help the State, donors and other actors to identify IDP and displacement-affected communities' priority needs as they change over time.

In the end, there are limits to what data and evidence can achieve. Too much information can be overwhelming and complicate efforts to prioritize the most important actions needed to help IDPs improve their lives. Data systems also need to evolve and adapt to changing contexts. For instance, the Return Index was created to prioritize which return locations needed the most assistance, while research on local integration arose when returns slowed and actors needed to understand the needs of IDPs at risk of protracted displacement. Ultimately, action to address protracted internal displacement requires political will. The Durable Solutions Task Force, bolstered by solid evidence, provides a platform for building concerted political will amongst government officials and the international community as a whole to address protracted internal displacement in Iraq.

## 7. Why this is a good example to share

Ending displacement cannot be equated with physical return to a place of origin. Displacement often severs the social contract with the State, which can take years to rebuild. IDPs need to regain access to their rights without discrimination and in safety and dignity. Addressing protracted displacement situations requires identifying the underlying causes that block IDPs' ability to gradually improve their lives. Comprehensive and longitudinal data collection and analysis can help government authorities and other stakeholders to identify the potential barriers that lead to protracted displacement. The example of Iraq shows how specific frameworks and tools may need to be developed to address the needs of specific contexts and be expanded to address the information needs required by a full range of actors to inform a national durable solutions strategy that effectively spans humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and stabilization action.



Iraq. Ali, 34, sits with his two year-old daughter, Yara, outside their tent in Bardarash camp.  
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# Endnotes

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